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Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism

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This chapter adopts an affirmative stance and provides cartography of the intersections between feminism and the posthuman predicament by arguing the following theses: that feminism is *not* a humanism; that *Anthropos* has been decentered and so is the emphasis on *bios*; and that, as a result, nonhuman life, *zoe*, is now the ruling concept. Last, but not least, the chapter works out the implications of these shifts of perspective for feminist theory and practice, arguing that sexuality is a force beyond, beneath, and after gender.

FEMINISM IS NOT A HUMANISM

There is no underestimating the ties that bind Western feminism, in its liberal as well as socialist variables, to Enlightenment-based humanism. From Mary Wollstonecraft to Simone de Beauvoir, the political case for women's and other minorities' emancipation has been argued along the lines of a notion of equality that assumes an unproblematic belonging to the same category of humanity. This position tended to view the natural order as servitude, violence, and brutality: nature as the naturalization of inequalities. The extent of that sense of belonging to a common idea of the human, however, has come under severe scrutiny from several quarters, especially in the last thirty years.

While the philosophical poststructuralist generation developed its own brand of antihumanism, a radical feminist wave, antiracist critical theory, environmental activists, disability rights advocates, and LGBT theorists have questioned the scope, the founding principles, and the achievements of European humanism and its role in the project of Western modernity. These social and theoretical movements questioned the idea of the human that is implicit in the humanist ideal of "Man" as the alleged "measure of all things." This ideal skillfully combines high standards of physical perfection with intellectual and moral values, turning into a civilizational standard. Michel Foucault—a master of high antihumanism—linked this humanist ideal to a sovereign notion of "reason" that, since the eighteenth century, has provided the basic unit of reference for what counts as human and for everything European culture holds dear.¹ The humanist "Man" claims exclusive access to self-reflexive reason for the human species, thus making it uniquely capable of self-regulating rational judgment. These qualities allegedly qualify our species for the pursuit of both individual and collective self-improvement following scientific and moral criteria of perfectibility. The boundless faith in reason as the motor of human evolution ties in with the teleological prospect of the rational progress of humanity through science and technology.²

The "death of Man," announced by Foucault, formalized the epistemological and political crisis of the humanistic habit of placing "Man" at the center of world history.³ Even Marxism, under the cover of a theory of historical materialism, continued to define the subject of European thought as unitary and hegemonic and to assign him (the gender is no coincidence) a royal place as the motor of social and cultural evolution. Philosophical antihumanism consists in delinking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on his concrete actions. Different and sharper analyses of power relations become possible once the obstacle of the dominant subject's delusions of grandeur has been removed. Feminist politics of location, re-elaborated through the standpoint of feminist theory and the analysis of the racialized economy of science, produced situated knowledges as the method for grounding micropolitical analyses of power.⁴ A more adequate self-understanding emerges once it has become clear that nobody is actually in charge of the course of historical progress.⁵ Thanks to feminist and postcolonial analyses, we have come to regard the human

standard that was posited in the universal mode of "Man of reason" as inadequate precisely because of its partiality.⁶

This allegedly universal ideal is brought back to his historically contingent roots and exposed as very much a male of the species: it is a *he*.⁷ Class, race, and gender never being too far apart from each other, in the intersectional mode pioneered by feminist race theory, *this* particular male is moreover assumed to be white, European, head of a heterosexual family and its children, and able-bodied.⁸ In other words, the dominant subject is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit, and a full citizen of a recognized polity.⁹

Such rational self-assurance has historically played a major role in the construction of a civilizational model that equated Europe with the universalizing powers of reason and progress. This hegemonic cultural model was instrumental to the colonial ideology of European expansion: "white Man's burden" as a tool of imperialist governance assumed that Europe is not just a geopolitical location but also a universal attribute of the human mind that can lend its quality to any suitable objects, provided they comply with the required discipline. Europe as universal consciousness posits the power of reason as its distinctive characteristic and humanistic universalism as its particularity. This makes Eurocentrism into a qualitatively more pervasive trait than a matter of attitude: it is rather a structural element of Europe's self-representation, implemented in both theoretical and institutional practices.

In response to this normative model, feminist, antiracist, and other social movements, notably the environmental and peace movements since the 1970s, developed their own variations of activist antihumanism or radical neohumanism. On this point, the intersections between feminism and race or postcolonial theory are intense and mutually enriching, though not deprived of tensions. Their criticism is focused on two interrelated ideas: the Self–Other dialectics, on one hand, and the notion of difference as pejoration, on the other. They both rest on the assumption that subjectivity as a discursive and material practice is equated with rational, universal consciousness and self-regulating moral behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative opposite. Dialectically redefined as "other than," difference is inscribed on a hierarchical scale that spells inferiority and means "to be worth less than." Such epistemic violence acquires ruthless connotations for real-life

people who happen to coincide with categories of negative difference: women, native, and earthly Others. They are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized “Others” whose social and symbolic existence is disposable and unprotected. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these “Others” raise crucial issues of power, domination, and exclusion. As Donna Haraway put it, some differences are playful, but others are poles of world-historical systems of domination.¹⁰ Feminist epistemology is about knowing the difference. The antihumanist feminist generation embraced the concept of difference with the explicit aim of making it function differently. Irigaray’s provocative question “equal to whom?” is emblematic of this switch away from homologation or reduction to a masculine standard of Sameness.¹¹

Feminist critiques of abstract masculinity, triumphant whiteness, and hegemonic able-bodiedness added further criticism on different political grounds.¹² They advocated the need to destabilize this unitary vision of the subject and open it up to the multiple and complex reconfigurations of diversity and multiple belongings, so as to challenge the dominant vision of the “others within” that so far had just confirmed the European subject’s self-representation.¹³ They also argued that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about any category, including women, natives, and other marginal subjects. The emphasis falls instead on the internal fractures within each subject-position, or the “difference within.” The death of Man paved the way for the deconstruction of Woman and all other categories, in terms of their internal complexities.

Another current of thought that left a significant mark on the humanism–antihumanism debate can be traced back genealogically to the anticolonial phenomenology of Frantz Fanon and of his teacher Aimé Césaire.¹⁴ They take humanism as an unfulfilled project, betrayed by Eurocentric violence, and aim to develop its antiracist and inclusive potential. They are committed to exploring new understandings of humanity after colonialism. Contemporary postcolonial and race theorists continue to pursue this project. They argue the fundamental point that Enlightenment-based ideals of reason, secular tolerance, equality under the Law, and democratic rule need not be, and historically have not been, mutually exclusive with European practices of violent domination, exclusion, and instrumental use of terror. Acknowledging that reason and barbarism are not self-contradictory, nor are Enlightenment and

horror, need not result in cultural relativism, or in nihilism, but rather in a radical critique of Western humanism. Edward Said taught us that it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and to draw from non-Western sources the inspiration to fulfill the potential of the humanist project.¹⁵ Paul Gilroy’s planetary cosmopolitanism pursues this tradition of thinking today and takes critical distance from the posthuman predicament by reiterating that we are simply not all human in the same way or to the same extent.¹⁶

Another relevant strand of neohumanist discourse emerges within environmental activism, and it combines the critique of the epistemic and physical violence of modernity with that of European colonialism. The ecofeminist and environmental “green politics” asserts the need for both bio- and anthropodiversity.¹⁷ Other examples of this ecological and situated cosmopolitan humanism are Avtar Brah’s diasporic ethics and Vandana Shiva’s antiglobal neohumanism, and African humanism, or Ubuntu, is receiving more attention, from Patricia Hill Collins to Drucilla Cornell.¹⁸ In a more nomadic vein, Édouard Glissant’s poetics of relations inscribed multilingual hybridity and the poetics of relation at the heart of the contemporary posthuman condition.¹⁹

Thus feminism is resolutely antihumanist to the extent that it rejects Eurocentric humanism in the light of its “methodological nationalism.”²⁰ Contemporary European subjects of knowledge must meet the ethical obligation to be accountable for their past history and the long shadow it casts on their present-day politics, as Edgar Morin, Luisa Passerini, Etienne Balibar, and Zygmunt Bauman have also argued.²¹ This postnationalist approach expresses the decline of Eurocentrism as a historical event and calls for a qualitative shift of perspective in our collective sense of identity.²² Posthuman feminism needs to criticize narrow-minded self-interests, intolerance, and xenophobic rejection of Otherness. Symbolic of the closure of the European mind is the fate of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, who bear the brunt of racism in contemporary Europe. A primary task for posthumanist feminist theory therefore is to steer Europe toward a posthumanist project of “becoming-minoritarian” or becoming-nomad, which entails resistance against nationalism, xenophobia, and racism—bad habits of the old imperial Europe, currently replicated in “Fortress Europe.”²³

ANTHROPOS IS OFF-CENTER

The debate on and against humanism, pioneered by feminist, post-colonial, and race theorists, despite its multiple internal fractures and unresolved contradictions, appears as a simpler task than displacing anthropocentrism itself. The Anthropocene entails not only the critique of species supremacy—the rule of *Anthropos*—but also the parameters that used to define it.²⁴ “Man” is now called to task as the representative of a hierarchical and violent species whose centrality is challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns. Neither “Man” as the universal humanistic measure of all things nor *Anthropos* as the emblem of an exceptional species can claim the central position in contemporary, technologically mediated knowledge production systems. Brian Massumi refers to this phenomenon as “Ex-Man”: “a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human” and as such undergoing significant mutations.²⁵ This shift marks a sort of “anthropological exodus” from the dominant configurations of the human—a colossal hybridization of the species.²⁶ The decentering of *Anthropos* challenges also the separation of *bios*, as exclusively human life, from *zoe*, the life of animals and nonhuman entities. What comes to the fore instead is a human–nonhuman continuum, which is consolidated by pervasive technological mediation.

The political implications of this shift are significant. If the revisions of humanism advanced by feminist, queer, antiracist, ecological, and postcolonial critiques empowered the sexualized and racialized—but still human—“Others,” the crisis of *Anthropos* enlists the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants, cells, bacteria, in fact the planet and the cosmos, are turned into a political arena.²⁷ The social constructivist habit of thought that reduces nature to the source of inequalities is revised, in the light of methodological naturalism and neomaterialism. There is, consequently, a meta-discursive level of difficulty in the post-anthropocentric turn, due to the fact that antihumanism is essentially a philosophical, historical, and cultural movement and that the bulk of feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories are based in the humanities and the social sciences, whereas the Anthropocene is in dialogue with the life sciences and information technologies.

There are two interlocked problems: the first is that the humanities

are marked by constitutive anthropocentrism, which has historically entailed a complicated relationship to science and technology, as shown by the debate about the “two cultures.”²⁸ The second is a central issue of scale, both temporal and spatial: how can the humanities disciplines—history, literature, philosophy—develop planetary and very long term perspectives in a geocentered and not anthropocentric frame? How will the humanities react to “destroying the artificial but time-honored distinction between natural and human histories”?²⁹ Is it feasible to contemplate—in a secular and rigorous manner—the idea of human extinction without losing academic credibility?

But things get even more complicated: over the last thirty years, a cluster of radical interdisciplinary fields of enquiry emerged institutionally around the edges of the classical humanities and called themselves “studies.” Gender, feminist, queer, race, postcolonial, and subaltern studies, alongside cultural, film, television, and media studies, are the prototypes of the radical epistemologies that have provided a range of new methods and innovative concepts since the 1970s. Institutionally less well funded than the classical disciplines, they have provided new concepts, methods, and insights and have proved to be major sources of inspiration for both the academic world and society. These “studies” areas have targeted the major flaws at the core of the humanities, based on the critiques of humanism I outlined in the previous section, namely, its Eurocentrism, sexism, racism, and methodological nationalism. The point of consensus among the different “studies” areas is that humanist ideals of reason, secularism, tolerance, equality, and democratic rule need to be balanced against the historical reality of European imperialist practices.³⁰ Acknowledging the compatibility of rationality and violence, however, does not mean that the critical “studies” areas uniformly oppose humanism. It is rather the case, especially for postcolonial studies, that they create alternative visions of the human and of society.

The current postanthropocentric, or posthuman, turn cannot fail to affect the very “studies” areas that, contrary to the field of science and technology studies, may have perfected the critique of humanism but not necessarily relinquished anthropocentrism. A widespread suspicion of the social effects of science and technology seems to pertain to the classical feminist tradition and its Marxist roots. Shulamith Firestone’s 1970s technological utopia strikes a rather lonely note in sharp contrast with a rather technophobic attitude in left-wing feminism.³¹ The

towering work of Donna Haraway in the mid-1980s—in the “Manifesto for Cyborgs”—set an entirely new agenda and established a feminist tradition of politicized science and technology studies integrated with feminist body politics, which changed the rules of the game. Haraway replaced anthropocentrism with a set of relational links to human and nonhuman others, including technological artifacts. She challenged specifically the historical association of females/non-Europeans with nature, stressing the need for feminist and antiracist critiques that rest on a technologically mediated vision of the nature–culture continuum.³² Donna Haraway offers figurations like the cyborg, onco-mouse, companion-species, the modest witness, and other hybrids as figures of radical interspecies relationality.³³ They blur categorical distinctions (human–nonhuman, nature–culture, male–female, oedipal–nonoedipal, European–non-European) in attempting to redefine a program of feminist social justice.

From there on, the collective feminist exit from *Anthropos* began to gather momentum, and explicit references to the posthuman appear in feminist texts from the 1990s.³⁴ The postanthropocentric turn takes off as two major issues converge: the first is climate change, which, as Naomi Klein claims, changes everything, including the analytic strategies of feminist and postcolonial studies.³⁵ The second is information technologies and the high degree of global mediation they entail. These challenges open up new global, ecosophical, posthumanist, and postanthropocentric dimensions of thought. They are expressed by a second generation of critical “studies” areas that are the direct descendants of the first generation of the 1970s critical “studies” areas and pursue the work of critique into new discursive spaces, for instance, cultural studies of science and society, religion studies, disability studies, fat studies, success studies, celebrity studies, and globalization studies, all of which are significant voices of what I have labeled posthuman critical theory. New media is a planet of its own and has spawned several subsections: software studies, Internet studies, game studies, and more. The inhuman(e) aspects of our historical condition—namely, mass migration, wars, terrorism, evictions and expulsions—are addressed by conflict studies and peace research; human rights studies; humanitarian management; human rights-oriented medicine; trauma, memory, and reconciliation studies; security studies; death studies; and suicide studies. And the list is still growing.

Feminist theory is right in the middle of this reconfiguration of knowledge production. The vitality is especially strong in cultural studies and in media and film theory.³⁶ Building on Haraway’s remarkable legacy, feminist science studies goes planetary and displaces the centrality of the human through sophisticated analyses of molecular biology and computational systems.³⁷ Ecofeminists, who always advocated geocentered perspectives, now expand into animal studies and radical veganism.³⁸ Feminist theories of non- and posthuman subjectivity embrace nonanthropomorphic animal or technological Others, prompting a posthuman ethical turn.³⁹ Even feminist interest in Darwin, which had been rare, grows by the end of the millennium.⁴⁰

It follows therefore that, both institutionally and theoretically, the “studies” areas, which historically have been the motor of both critique and creativity, innovative and challenging in equal measure, have an inspirational role to play also in relation to the posthuman context we inhabit. There is a clear intergenerational transition at work within the radical epistemologies expressed by the “studies” areas. Contemporary feminist, gender, queer, postcolonial, and antiracist studies are all the more effective and creative as they have allowed themselves to be affected by the posthuman condition. This turn toward the critical posthumanities marks the end of what Shiva called “monocultures of the mind,” and it leads feminist theory to pursue the radical politics of location and the analysis of social forms of exclusion in the current world order of biopiracy, necropolitics, and worldwide dispossession.⁴¹ The posthuman feminist knowing subject is a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking. But she remains committed to social justice and, while acknowledging the fatal attraction of global mediation, is not likely to forget that one-third of the world population has no access to electricity.

Taking critical distance from anthropocentrism, however, raises also a number of affective difficulties: how one reacts to the practice of disloyalty to one’s species depends to a large extent on the terms of one’s engagement with it, as well as one’s assessment of and relationship to contemporary technological developments. In my work, I have always stressed the technophilic dimension and the liberating and even transgressive potential of these technologies against those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile or

a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates hyperconsumeristic possessive individualism.⁴²

The practice of defamiliarization is a key methodological tool to support the postanthropocentric turn. That is a sobering process of disidentification from anthropocentric values, to evolve toward a new frame of reference, which in this case entails becoming relational in a complex and multidirectional manner. Disengagement from dominant models of subject formation has been pioneered in a critical and creative manner by feminist theory in its attempt to disengage from the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, also known as the gender system.⁴³ Postcolonial and race discourse similarly disrupt white privilege and other racialized assumptions about accepted views of what constitutes a human subject.⁴⁴

These disidentifications, however, occur along the axes of difference I outlined earlier—becoming-woman (sexualization) and becoming-other (racialization)—and hence remain within the confines of anthropomorphism. The postanthropocentric turn goes a step further: by challenging the anthropocentric habits of thought, it foregrounds the politics of the “naturalized” nonhuman others and thus requires a more radical break from the assumption of human uniqueness. As a way forward, I have argued for an activist embrace of *zoe*: nonhuman life. Becoming-earth (geocentered) or becoming-imperceptible (*zoe*-centered) entails a radical break from established patterns of thought (naturalization) and introduces a radically immanent relational dimension.⁴⁵ This break, however, is emotionally demanding at the level of identity, and it can involve a sense of loss and pain. Moreover, disidentification from century-old anthropocentric habits and new relationships to nonhuman others is likely to test the flexibility of the humanities as an established disciplinary field. The “life” sciences, of course, are accomplishing this move away from anthropocentrism with relative ease. It may be worth taking seriously the critical charge that the humanities’ development toward complexity is hampered by the anthropocentrism that underscores their institutional practice. In this respect, feminist theory can be relied on to provide original new instruments and concepts, which cannot be dissociated from an ethics of inquiry that demands respect for the complexities of the real-life world we are living in.

Posthuman feminist theory applies a new vision of subjectivity also to the figure of the scientist, which is still caught in the classical and

outmoded model of the humanistic “Man of reason” as the quintessential European citizen.⁴⁶ Feminism offers an antidote to such androcentric, as well as anthropocentric, attitudes. We need to overcome this “image of thought” and move toward a transdisciplinary approach that affects the very structure of thinking.⁴⁷ I would argue strongly for a rhizomatic embrace of conceptual diversity in scholarship, of higher degrees of transdisciplinary hybridization—also at the methodological level—and distance from the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason. *Zoe*-based methodologies can inspire critical theory in the humanities to become the social and cultural branch of complexity theory.

ZOE IS THE RULING PRINCIPLE

All these transformations are not, of course, happening in a vacuum. Advanced capitalism is operating its own opportunistic and exploitative decentering of anthropocentrism, through extensive technoscientific networks. The convergence between different and previously differentiated branches of technology—notably, nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive sciences—has placed traditional understandings of the human under extreme pressure. The biogenetic structure of contemporary capitalism involves investments in “life” as an informational system; stem cell research and biotechnological intervention upon humans, animals, seeds, cells, and plants pave the way for scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives. This context produces a paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of postanthropocentrism on the part of market forces that trade on “life itself.”⁴⁸ Commercially minded postanthropocentrism treats “life” as both human and nonhuman resource, and a cynical democratization of the value of living organisms is thus enacted.

Informational data are the true capital today, as Patricia Clough points out in her analysis of the “affective turn.”⁴⁹ Biogenetic, neural, and mediatic databanks reduce bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources or vital capacities and level out other social differences. The focus is on the accumulation of information itself—its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. Within the political economy of advanced capitalism, what constitutes capital value is the informational power of living matter itself, a phenomenon that

Melinda Cooper calls “life as surplus.”⁵⁰ It introduces discursive and material political techniques of population control of a very different order from the administration of demographics that preoccupied Foucault’s work on biopolitical governmentality.⁵¹ Today, we are undertaking “risk analyses” not only of entire social and national systems but also of whole sections of the population in the world risk society.⁵² The data-mining techniques employed by “cognitive capitalism” to monitor the capacities of “biomediated” bodies—DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection, and iris or hand recognition—are also operationalized in systems of surveillance both in civil society and in the wars against terror, according to the necropolitical governmentality that is the trademark of our era.⁵³

In response to this system, I would propose species egalitarianism, which opens up productive possibilities of relations, alliances, and mutual specification.⁵⁴ This position starts from the pragmatic fact that, as embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of something we used to call “nature,” despite transcendental claims made for human consciousness.⁵⁵ Resting on a monistic ontology drawn from neo-Spinozist vital materialist philosophy, I have proposed cross-species alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its nonhuman aspects.⁵⁶ This relational ontology is *zoe*-centered and hence nonanthropocentric, but it does not deny the anthropologically bound structure of the human. Anthropomorphism is our specific embodied and embedded location, and acknowledging its situated nature is the first step toward antianthropocentrism. This shift of perspective toward a *zoe*- or geocentered approach requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to speak and think at all, let alone think critically.

This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life—both organic and discursive—that has traditionally been reserved for *Anthropos*, that is to say, *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and nonhuman life, also known as *zoe*. The dynamic, self-organizing structure of life as *zoe* stands for generative vitality.⁵⁷ It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories, and domains. *Zoe*-centered egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the postanthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded, and unsentimental response to the opportunistic transspecies commodification of life that is the logic of advanced capitalism.

The urgent feminist question for me is how to combine the decline of anthropocentrism with issues of social justice. Can an “insurgent postanthropocentrism” come to the rescue of our species?⁵⁸ The sense of insurgency in contemporary posthuman scholarship is palpable in the era that Haraway recently labeled the “Capitalocene.”⁵⁹ Does the posthuman—in its posthumanistic and postanthropocentric inceptions—complicate the issues of human agency and feminist political subjectivity? My argument is that it actually enhances it by offering an expanded relational vision of the self, as a nomadic transversal assemblage engendered by the cumulative effect of multiple relational bonds.⁶⁰ The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all nonanthropomorphic elements, starting from the air we breathe. Living matter—including embodied human flesh—is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life and connects to the animal and the earth.⁶¹ Nomadic philosophy of radical immanence foregrounds embodiment and embeddedness, not disconnection from the thinking organism. We think with the entire body, or rather, we have to acknowledge the embodiment of the brain and the enbrainment of the body.⁶² In this respect, vital materialist feminism should strike an alliance with extended mind theories and distributed cognition models inspired by Spinoza and with qualitative neurophilosophies.⁶³ It is important accordingly not to work completely within the social constructivist method but rather to emphasize process ontologies that reconceptualize the connection to the nonhuman, vital forces, that is, *zoe*.

The case is being argued by a new wave of scholarship: “matter-realists” feminists emphasize “inventive” life and “vibrant matter,” while different kinds of neomaterialist feminism are in full swing.⁶⁴ There is no question that contemporary feminist theory is productively posthuman, as evidenced by the work of Karen Barad, who coined the terms *posthumanist performativity* and *agential realism* to signify this enlarged and, in my terms, postanthropocentric vision of subjectivity.⁶⁵

Queer science studies is especially keen on a transversal alliance between humans and other species; thus Stacy Alaimo theorizes transcorporeal porous boundaries between human and other species, while Eva Hayward calls for “humanimal relations” and “transspeciated selves.”⁶⁶ A technoelectrical, posthuman turn is at work that combines

organic autopoiesis with machinic self-organizing powers, as announced by Félix Guattari in his pioneering work on our ecotechnologically mediated universe.⁶⁷ The consensus is that there is no “originary humanity” but only “originary technicity.”⁶⁸

Posthumanists of many dispositions are also calling for a transformation of the by now classical radical “studies” areas and to reach out for a new deal with the culture of science and technology.⁶⁹ The posthuman turn has gone viral in comparative literature and cultural studies, in new media studies, and in the framework of social theory and neo-Spinozist political theory.⁷⁰

The posthuman feminist subject does yield a new political praxis. It is an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, biotechnologically mediated bodies are capable of doing in the radical immanence of their respective locations. Mindful of the structural injustices and massive power differentials at work in the globalized world, I think feminist theory needs to produce more accurate accounts of the multiple political economies of power and subject formation at work in our world. These cartographies actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature–culture continuum and is technologically mediated but still framed by multiple power relations.

The political advantage of this monistic and vital approach is that it provides a more adequate understanding of the fluid and complex workings of power in advanced capitalism and hence can devise more suitable forms of resistance.⁷¹ These explorations of embedded and embodied materialism result not only in a serious reconsideration of what counts as the “matter” for materialist feminist thought. Emphasis on a Spinozist monistic allows us to move toward a dynamic, nonessentialist, and relational brand of materialist vitalism. This results in the dislocation of difference from binaries to rhizomatics, from sex–gender or nature–culture to processes of differing that take life itself, or the vitality of matter, as the main subject.

Neomaterialist feminism has to confront the paradox that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing, but this does not in itself resolve or improve the power differences at work in the material world. Feminists may have to embrace this humble starting point by acknowledging a life that is not ours—it is *zoe* driven and geocentered. And yet for us, members of

this species, it will always be anthropomorphic, that is to say, embedded and embodied, enfleshed, affective, and relational. It is by embracing resiliently our anthropomorphic frame and the limits and possibilities it entails that we can become creatively *zoe*-centered, opening up to possible actualization of virtual forces. The radical immanence of self-aware anthropomorphism, the politics of that particular location, constitutes the start of a critique of delusional anthropocentrism. We may yet overcome anthropocentrism by becoming anthropomorphic bodies without organs that are still finding out what they are capable of becoming.

SEXUALITY IS A FORCE BEYOND GENDER

As I have argued so far, advanced capitalism as a biogenetic cognitive system of commodification of all that lives reduces organisms to their informational substrate in terms of materiality and vital capacity. By implication, this means that the markers for the organization and distribution of differences are now located in microinstances of vital materiality, such as the cells of living organisms and the genetic codes of entire species. We have come a long way from the gross system that used to mark difference on the basis of visually verifiable anatomical and physiological differences between the empirical sexes, the races, and the species. We have moved from the biopower that Foucault exemplified by comparative anatomy to a society based on the mediated governance of molecular *zoe* power of today. We have equally shifted from disciplinary to control societies, from the political economy of the Panopticon to the informatics of domination.⁷² The question of difference and power disparity, however, remains as central as ever.

The technologically mediated world is neither organic–inorganic, male–female, nor especially white. Advanced capitalism is a postgender system capable of accommodating a high degree of androgyny and a significant blurring of the categorical divide between the sexes. It is also a postracial system that no longer classifies people and their cultures on grounds of pigmentation but remains nonetheless profoundly racist.⁷³ A strong theory of posthuman subjectivity can help us to reappropriate these processes, both theoretically and politically, not only as analytical tools but also as alternative ground for formations of the self.

What are the consequences of the fact that the technological apparatus is no longer sexualized, racialized, or naturalized but rather neutralized as figures of mixity, hybridity, and interconnectiveness, turning transsexuality into a dominant posthuman *topos*?⁷⁴ If the machinic apparatus is both self-organizing and transgender, the old organic human body needs to be relocated elsewhere. What and where is the body of the posthuman subject? Some queer theorists, striving to overcome the oedipalized sexual binary system, tend to equate the posthuman with postgender and have taken the leap beyond the flesh.⁷⁵ Although the posthuman is not automatically hyperqueer, queering the nonhuman is a popular trend.⁷⁶ Ever mindful of Lyotard's warning about the political economy of advanced capitalism, I think we should not trust the blurring effects and states of indeterminacy it engenders.⁷⁷ However tempting, it would be misguided to assume that posthuman embodied subjects are beyond sexual or racialized differences. On the contrary, discriminatory differences are more strongly in place than ever, though they have shifted significantly.

In terms of feminist politics, this means we need to rethink sexuality without genders, starting from a vitalist return to the polymorphous and, according to Freud, "perverse" (in the sense of playful and non-reproductive) structure of human sexuality. We also need to reassess the generative powers of female embodiment, which have not been appraised sufficiently by feminists. In this vital neomaterialist feminist approach, gender is just a historically contingent mechanism of capture of the multiple potentialities of the body, including their generative or reproductive capacities. To turn this historically contingent capture apparatus of gender into the transhistorical matrix of power, as suggested by queer theory in the linguistic and social constructivist tradition, is quite simply a conceptual error.⁷⁸ Sexuality may be caught in the sex-gender binary, but is not reducible to it. The mechanism of capture does not alter the fact that sexuality carries transversal, structural, and vital connotations. As life force, sexuality provides a nonessentialist ontological structure for the organization of human affectivity and desire. By extension, a social constructivist account confines itself to the description of a sociological process of bounded identity formation, missing the point about the in-depth structure of sexuality. The counterargument is that sexuality is both post- and pre-identity, as a constitutive force that is always already present and hence prior to

gender, though it intersects with it in constructing functional subjects in the social regime of biopolitical governmentality.

Furthermore, sexuality as a human and nonhuman force pertains to the vital chaos, which is not chaotic but the boundless space of virtual possibilities for pleasure-prone affirmative relations.⁷⁹ These intensive forces bypass, underlay, precede, and exceed the normative social apparatus of gender. The vital force par excellence, sexuality gets captured, inscribed, formatted into a sex-gender dichotomy—as a social-symbolic system of attribution of qualities and entitlements—for the purpose of disciplining and punishing the social body.

In other words, for posthuman monistic feminists, gender is a form of governance that has to be disrupted by processes of becoming-minoritarian/becoming-woman/becoming-animal/becoming-imperceptible.⁸⁰ They are the transformative counteractualizations of the multiple, always already sexed bodies we may be capable of becoming. In a nomadic vein, I have argued that becoming-woman entails the evacuation or destitution of the socially constituted gendered identities of women (as molar formations), returning them to the virtual multiplicity of chaotic forces of becoming. This is what I have called the feminist becoming-woman, then the "virtual feminine."⁸¹

On this point, all vital materialist feminists concur: Grosz refers to it as "a thousand tiny sexes"; Colebrook labels it "queer passive vitalism"; and Patricia MacCormack similarly draws attention to the need to return to sexuality as a polymorphous and complex, visceral force and to disengage it from both identity issues and all dualistic oppositions.⁸² Luciana Parisi's innovative adaptation of Guattari's schizoanalysis and Lynn Margulis's concept of "endosymbiosis" produce a schizogenesis of sexual difference as an organic variable of autopoiesis.⁸³ Posthuman feminists look for subversion not in counteridentity formations but rather in pure dislocations of identities via the disruption of standardized patterns of sexualized, racialized, and naturalized interaction. Feminist posthuman politics is an experiment with intensities beyond binaries that functions by "and-and," not by "either-or."

Posthuman vitalist feminism, resting on a dynamic monistic political ontology, redefines the body as an incorporeal complex assemblage of virtualities that encompasses sexuality as a constitutive element: one is always already sexed. A postanthropocentric feminist approach makes it clear that bodily matter in the human, as in other species, is

always already sexed and hence sexually differentiated along the axes of multiplicity and heterogeneity. Sexuality is conceptualized as a generative ontological force that cannot be adequately contained within the dichotomous view of gender defined as the social construction of differences between the sexes but rather is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institutions.⁸⁴

In other words, we need to experiment with intensity—run with *zoe*—to find out what posthuman sexed bodies can become. Because the gender system captures the complexity of human sexuality in a binary machine that privileges heterosexual family formations and literally steals all other possible bodies from us, we no longer know what our sexed bodies can do. We therefore need to rediscover the notion of the relational complexity that marks sexuality in its human and posthuman forms. These experiments with what sexed bodies can do, however, do not amount to saying that in the social sphere, pejorative differences no longer matter, or that the traditional power relations have been resolved. On the contrary, on a world scale, extreme forms of polarized sexual difference are stronger than ever. They get projected onto geopolitical relations between the West and the rest, creating belligerent gendered visions of a “clash of civilizations” that is allegedly predicated in terms of women’s and LGBT people’s rights.⁸⁵ “Homonationalism” is a pawn in contemporary international relations and a central concern for feminist and queer politics.⁸⁶

These complex developments make it all the more urgent to reassert the concept of difference as both central and nonessentialistic. Difference as the principle of not-One, that is to say, as differing, is constitutive of the posthuman subject and the postanthropocentric forms of ethical accountability that characterize it.⁸⁷ In my view, posthuman ethics urges us to endure this principle at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple “Others” in a vital web of complex interrelations.⁸⁸ This ethical relational principle breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality, and oneness but also the oedipalized narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable lack, and irreparable separation. What I want to emphasize instead, in a more affirmative vein, is the generative force of the relation and the awareness that difference as positivity entails flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity, and desire. Posthuman feminist theory stresses the productive aspects of vital materialism, that is to say, a generative notion of complexity.

At the beginning, there is always already a relation to an affective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind: ontological relationality.

Sexuality beyond gender is the epistemological, but also political, side of contemporary vitalist neomaterialism. It consolidates a feminist genealogy that includes creative deterritorializations, intensive and hybrid cross-fertilizations, and generative encounters with multiple human and nonhuman others. The counteractualization of the virtual sexualities—of the bodies without organs that we have not been able to sustain as yet—is a posthuman feminist political praxis.

CONCLUSION: RECOMPOSING HUMANITY

A materialist politics of posthuman differences works by potential becomings that call for actualization. They are enacted through a collectively shared praxis and support the process of recomposition of a missing people. This is the “we” that is evoked and actualized by the postanthropocentric creation of a new pan-humanity. It expresses the affirmative, ethical dimension of becoming-posthuman as a gesture of collective self-styling or mutual specification. It actualizes a community that is not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of ancestral communal violence, or the melancholia of unpayable ontological debts but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of their interdependence with multiple others, most of which, in the age of the Anthropocene, are quite simply not anthropomorphic.

In this respect, posthuman feminist and other critical theorists need to resist the hasty recompositions of cosmopolitan bonds that are currently proposed by corporate and other forms of neohumanism. The global economy is postanthropocentric in unifying all species under the imperative of the market, and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole. But in the era of the Anthropocene, it is also neohumanistic in forging a new pan-human bond made of vulnerability and fear of extinction. The moral overtones of this methodological cosmopolitanism barely conceal its self-interested nature.⁸⁹ Feminist, postcolonial, and race theorists have been quick in denouncing the hypocritical nature of such hasty recompositions of a pan-human bond of shared fear of extinction.⁹⁰ They have reinscribed power relations

at the heart of the climate change and environmental crisis debate and called for more situated and accountable analyses.⁹¹

This means that the posthuman is not postpolitical but rather recasts political agency in the direction of relational ontology. Feminist posthuman critiques need to focus therefore on the continuing or renewed power differentials, on the structures of domination and exclusion in advanced capitalism. Class, race, gender, and age have moved center stage in the global economy and its necropolitical governmentality. The posthuman is not postwar but rather has inscribed warfare as an extensive logistical operation integrated into its technoscientific apparatus. Environmental issues are inscribed at the intersection of major geopolitical concerns and involve both human and nonhuman agents and forces. Earth-related issues are not immune to social relations of class, race, age, disability, sexual preference and should not be renaturalized.

Starting from philosophies of radical immanence, vital materialism, and the feminist politics of locations, I have argued against taking a flight into an abstract idea of a “new” humanity. What we need instead is embedded and embodied, relational and affective cartographies of the new power relations that are emerging from the current geopolitical order.⁹² Class, race, gender and sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness are more than ever significant markers of human “normality.” They are key factors in framing the notion of and policing access to something we may call “humanity.” And yet, considering the global reach of the problems we are facing in the Anthropocene today, it is nonetheless the case that “we” are in *this* together. Such awareness must not, however, obscure or flatten out the power differentials that sustain the collective subject (“we”) and its endeavor (*this*). There may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the recomposition of “humanity” right now.

In this respect, the posthuman is not a new generic category but rather a navigational tool—in Deleuze’s terms, a “conceptual persona”—that can assist us in coming to terms with the complexities of our times. Like all emerging movements, posthuman feminism is fast moving and already mutating into a number of contemporary discursive events. For instance, a new alliance between environmentally aware “green” politics and traditional “red” politics within the humanities has produced another wave of critical studies areas: postcolonial environmental humanities emerges as a crossover between Native American studies and

other indigenous studies areas and the environmental humanities.⁹³ A similar crossover is occurring with the postcolonial digital humanities, which combine the heritage of postcolonial and indigenous studies and feminist critiques with digital mediation.⁹⁴ Confronted by such rich and complex developments, it may be wise for posthuman feminist theory to work toward multiple transversal alliances across communities: many recompositions of the human and new ways of becoming-world together.

NOTES

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