POSTHUMAN CRITICAL THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This article argues the case for posthuman critical theory within the context of the Anthropocene, as both the convergence of posthumanist and postanthropocentric discourses and their development in a qualitatively new and more complex direction. By adopting a cartographic approach to the posthuman, the article surveys recent scholarly production in the field and argues for the need to rethink subjectivity as a collective assemblage that encompasses human and nonhuman actors, technological mediation, animals, plants, and the planet as a whole. Resting on a monistic ontology drawn from critical Spinozism and Deleuzian vital materialism, the article makes the case for posthuman ethics as the expression of affirmative compositions of transversal, multiple, and collective practices of becoming-posthuman.

KEYWORDS

posthuman critical theory, Anthropocene, subjectivity, monistic ontology, posthuman ethics

INTRODUCTION

Whether we appreciate the term or not, these are posthuman times and scholarship in this field is in full expansion. Spectacular developments, notably in the life and neural sciences and the study of the earth and ecological systems, as well as digital information technologies, have altered our shared understanding of what counts as the basic unit of reference for the human. The posthuman turn is triggered by the convergence of antihumanism, on one hand, and anti-anthropocentrism, on the other. Antihumanism focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal of "Man" as the universal representative of the human, while anti-anthropocentrism criticizes species hierarchy and advances ecological justice. Both these strands enjoy strong support, but they refer to different genealogies and traditions (Braidotti 2013). In my perspective, posthumanism and postanthropocentrism

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profit from a tradition of thinking the nonhuman that is characteristic of French philosophy, especially thinkers such as Bachelard, Canguilhelm, Serres, Foucault, and Deleuze. This tradition defends a life philosophy based on nondialectical processes, which acquires momentum in the critical Spinozism developed in the 1970s. This tradition of life philosophy as process becomes most relevant as a background to the monistic political ontology and the anatomy of advanced capitalism developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1977; 1987).

My argument in favour of posthuman critical theory starts from the assumption that a new, subtler, and more complex relationship to our planetary dimension is now needed and that a more egalitarian relationship to nonhuman others is called for. Academic research needs to rise to the challenge, as evidenced for instance by the official acceptance by the scientific community of the term "Anthropocene"[1] as the correct definition of our geological era. This is a time when human activity is having a significant impact on the Earth's ecosystems and on our collective capacity to survive (or not). This realization contributes to raising the issue of the human to a new level of public policy and collective anxiety. Posthuman critical theory argues for the pertinence of the posthuman predicament as a way of reframing the Anthropocene issue. In Deleuze's language, it is a "plane of composition," which means a problem-driven collective field of enquiry that aims at formulating new sets of conceptual and ethical questions. The term "posthuman critical theory" therefore marks the emergence of a new type of discourse that is not merely the effect of the convergence of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism and a culmination of these two strands of thought, but rather a qualitative leap in a new and more complex direction. This shift of perspective also moves the critical debates away from the explicit antihumanism supported by poststructuralist theories since the 1980s and inaugurates an array of different posthumanist perspectives circulating in the current era (Braidotti and Gilroy 2016).

THE POSTHUMAN AS FIGURATION

The posthuman is a figuration, or *conceptual persona*, not a concept in the strict sense of the term. It operationalizes the critical thinker's engagement with the present by a specific methodology, which I have developed out of the neomaterialist branch of poststructuralist philosophy, notably the work of Foucault (1970) and Deleuze and Guattari (1994). The key notion is to draw discursive and material *cartographies of the present,* which account for the documents and the monuments, the semiotic and material conditions of contemporary knowledge production. The term "cartography" implies a reference to the genealogical

method of Foucault, as a tool for drawing the "diagrams of the present" and analyzing the microphysics of power in postindustrial societies. Deleuze and Guattari move the argument further and stress the importance of linking the singular actualizations of subject-formations—in terms of nomadic, transversal assemblages—to immanent analyses of concrete power relations.

A cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed map of the present or "actual moment" in terms of scholarly and discursive production. It rests on Deleuze's insightful philosophy of time as a continuum, creatively adopted from Bergson, which defines the present as a multilayered and pluridirectional concept. The present is both the record of what we are ceasing to be and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming: it is here and now, but also virtual. This notion is crucial in Deleuze's philosophy, as it refers to the sum total of possible alternative modes of being. He develops it with Spinoza, but also Leibniz, as a form of "perspectivism," that is, as the idea of multiple possible worlds and of multiple modes of perception of this very possibility. For Deleuze this notion acquires ethical connotations and it points to an intensive, qualitative shift in ways of becoming. By extension, it means that the task of cartography is to provide insights into multiple dimensions: to be critical about the actual conditions, but also creative in terms of new figurations or navigational tools that aim at *actualizing* the virtual.

An adequate cartography aims to bring forth alternative figurations or *conceptual personae* to steer a course through an account of the present, in its dual aspects, noted above, as the record of what we are ceasing to be and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming. In other words, a figuration fulfils the double function of documenting and exposing the sedentary and restrictive structures of dominant subject-formations (power as *potestas,* or entrapment). On a more affirmative level, however, the same figuration also expresses alternative representations of the subject as an ongoing process of transformation (power as *potentia*, or empowerment). In some ways, a figuration is the dramatization of both the processes of critical thinking and of virtual becoming.

For example, figurations that are prominent in my work, such as the feminist philosopher, the nomadic subjects, or the posthuman—much like other figurations such as the cyborg, oncomouse, and companion species in Donna Haraway or any of Deleuze's *conceptual personae*—are material signposts for specific geopolitical and historical locations. But they also point to patterns of becoming-nomadic, by which I mean actualizing the virtual. As such, they express complex generic singularities, not universal claims (Braidotti 2011a). Nomadic subjectivity is not linked to bound individuals, but rather takes place transversally, in between nature and technology, male and female, black and white, local and global—present in the sense of the duality defined above in

assemblages that flow across and displace the binaries. These in-between states defy the logic of excluded middle and, although they allow an analytic function to the negative, they reject negativity and aim at the production of joyful or affirmative values and projects (Braidotti 2011b). Through the combined impact of situated cartographies and creative figurations, a new alliance of critique with creation is put to the task of redefining critical theory as the quest for alternatives to the dominant vision of the subject.

This is where radical epistemologies such as feminism and antiracism enter the picture as well. I read the philosophical function of figurations in terms of the feminist method of Adrienne Rich's "politics of locations" or Haraway's "situated knowledges" as a form of radical immanence. In this perspective, a figuration is also a map of one's historical and social locations that enables analyses of specific power formations and the elaboration of forms of resistance. This approach assumes a feminist neomaterialist perspective, namely the embodied and embedded situated, relational, and affective structure of (feminist) knowledge production. Politics of locations, or radical immanence, is one of feminism's conceptual contributions to contemporary critical thought. The other is affirmative politics. Cartographic figurations and *conceptual personae* respond therefore to two requirements that are central to my work, namely, to account for one's locations in terms both of space (geopolitical, social, and ecophilosophical dimension) and time (historical and genealogical dimension). Implicit in this is the added objective of providing alternative figurations or schemes of representation for these locations.

I define the posthuman accordingly as a critical and creative figuration, or as a *conceptual* persona that illuminates the complexities of the present, defined as both the actual and the virtual.

In philosophical terms—as opposed to the specific geological sense of the term—it is less of a substantive entity than a conceptual persona that illuminates a series of emerging discourses generated by the intersecting critiques of humanism and of anthropocentrism. What the posthuman makes thinkable nowadays, across many fields, is the discursive and material unfolding of this critical convergence. Some of them are linked to discourses of extinction, crises and survival, but many are generative and propositional. Let me point out the more obvious ones. First, any lingering notion of human nature is replaced by a continuum, which Haraway as "naturecultures" (Haraway 2003). This shift also brings to an end the categorical distinction between life as *bios,* the prerogative of *Anthropos*, and the life of animals and nonhumans, or *zoe* (Braidotti 2006). What come to the fore instead are new human–nonhuman linkages, which include complex media–technological interfaces of biological and nonbiological matter. The double mediation, bio- and info-technological, is of crucial importance

to the posthuman predicament. These discourses express not only the critical interrogation of the category of anthropocentrism, or species supremacy, but with it also the awareness of the relational structure of the embedded and embodied, extended self. They also allow an "ecosophical" vision of subjectivity on a multiplicity of nomadic, "ecosophical" levels (Guattari 2000), which include the environmental, the social, and the psychic. And, as a further transposition, this monistic continuum is also mediated. Posthuman critical theory offers also points of encounter with the fast-growing field of indigenous knowledges and epistemologies (Braidotti 2016; Bignall, Hemming, and Rigney 2016). With this in mind, let me move on to my cartography of posthuman knowledges.

A CARTOGRAPHY OF THE POSTHUMAN PREDICAMENT

As a result of the premises stated above, I propose to approach the posthuman as a multiplicity, not as one single question. There are no single issues in posthuman critical theory, but rather a thematic variety that expresses the same intuition about a change of paradigm, away from anthropocentrism. Posthuman scholarship covers a range of diverse positions and often opposed political agendas, as can be seen from the extensive work that has been done within this growing field.[2] The proliferation of productive scholarship, however, takes place alongside a considerable amount of social theory and general literature that focuses on shared anxiety about the future of both our species and our humanist legacy. Significant voices in this field are progressive thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas and conservative ones such as Francis Fukuyama. Social critics such as Peter Sloterdijk and Jacques Derrida are also very alert on this issue. In different ways, they express deep concern for the status and the future of the human, and some seem struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for it. Few of them take technological mediation as a positive factor.

In a recent survey (Braidotti 2016), I identified some metapatterns across the different areas of posthuman scholarship and defined them as creative interdisciplinary hubs, or generative productive cores. The pattern they design is not linear, but rather like rhizomic lines that zigzag through different fields—notably the critical "studies" areas that have been growing interstitially since the 1970s, as well as several established disciplines. Let me give some examples: first, comparative literature and cultural studies, which have played a pioneering role and have innovated on methods as well as themes (see Wolfe 2003, 2010; Herbrechter 2011; Nayar 2013). Especially relevant are ecocriticism and animal studies (see Iovino and Opperman 2014; Alaimo 2010). Another pioneering interdisciplinary hub is what we used to call "media studies," which

in posthuman scholarship has taken a more material turn in order to account for the political economy of human/nonhuman interaction and mediated affect in our times (see Parikka 2015; Fuller 2005; Gabrys 2011; Terranova 2004). Environmental studies (see, among others, Lovelock 2009; Clarke 2008; van Dooren 2014; De Fontaney 1998; Wolfe 2003) are another crucial innovator in postanthropocentric thinking, with intellectual giants such as Donna Haraway straddling this field and science and technology studies (see also Stengers 1987; Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 2000).

Throughout my work, including that on the posthuman, I foreground the innovative impact of feminist, gender, and LGBTQ+ theory, as well as postcolonial studies, as intersectional hubs. In their efforts to think their way across and hopefully out of patriarchal logic and phallocentric violence, feminists have been among the first to theorize a qualitative posthuman shift based on the continuum between the human and the nonhuman actors of change (see Balsamo 1996; Braidotti 2002; Grosz 2011; Halberstam and Livingston 1995; Halberstam 2012). This trend is picking up momentum in contemporary queer posthuman and inhuman theories (see Giffney and Hird 2008; Hird and Roberts 2011; Gruen and Weil 2012; Livingston and Puar 2011; Colebrook 2014b), with special emphasis on "posthuman sexuality" (MacCormack 2012). A sort of intergalactic alliance of feminists and LGBTQ+ with aliens and monsters lies at the heart of the science fiction horror genre, which is one of the most popular contemporary cultural trends (see Haraway 1991, 2004; Braidotti 2002). It supports the composition of an assemblage between women and LGBTQ+ as the others of "Man," and the other "others" in the form of nonwhites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous, and hybrid subjects), nonanthropomorphic organisms (animals, insects, plants, trees, viruses and bacteria), and so forth—a colossal hybridization of species.

The main link between feminist theories and the posthuman critical turn for me lies in the notion of embodied and embedded, relational and affective structures of subjectivity. The feminist neomaterialist tradition is the genealogical missing link here, which contemporary feminist materialism is developing further (see Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012; Coole and Frost 2010; Neimanis 2014; Cuboniks 2015). The emphasis on vital embodiment is also on a spin, with phenomenologically oriented carnal thought (Sobchack 2004) evolving Jane Bennet's "vibrant matter" and inventive life. Barad's posthuman "performativity" gives way to Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality and multispecies becoming.

In other words, the critique of the humanist and anthropocentric idea of the human has generated a number of alternative visions and values. Although it is true that "Man the taxonomic type has become Man the brand" (Haraway 1997, 74), and that we are entitled to define this generic being, formerly known

as "him," as "Ex-Man" (Massumi 2002, 60), it is equally true that the current "anthropological exodus" from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation results in a productive form of hybridization.

This is all the more true if we keep in mind that the "human" is not a neutral term, but rather one that indexes access to privileges and entitlements through processes of "humanization" ("normalization") that are driven by and enforce power relations. By extension, we cannot naively take the posthuman as an intrinsically subversive or liberatory category: the "posthuman" is not post-power. I have argued, on the contrary, that gender, race, class, and age are serious power differentials and that, in order to address them, we need to negotiate new assemblages or transversal alliances. A significant development in this area is the recasting of disability studies in the affirmative mode of proposing "otherwise enabled" bodies that defy the expected standards of normality, not merely in terms of gender normativity. So, in spite of the negative rhetoric, there is no crisis here, just a huge vitality of inspiration.

It is crucial to point out, however, that these developments are taking place in the context of advanced capitalism. The global economy can be said to be postanthropocentric in that it responds to one single prompt: the profit motive. It consequently unifies all species under the imperative of the market, and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole. Advanced capitalism both invests in and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives: it controls and has patented the genetic codes of most organisms. This context produces a paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of postanthropocentrism on the part of market forces, which happily trade in life itself. Life, as it happens, is not the exclusive prerogative of humans.

Moreover, the globalized context in which the decentering of anthropocentrism for the sake of global consumption is taking place is significant: as I argued elsewhere (Braidotti 2002, 2006), advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification. It is a multiplier of deterritorialized differences, which are quantified and exchanged as goods, data, and capital. In her analysis of the new organic food industry, Jackie Stacey argues that we literally eat the global economy (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 2000). We are reminded by Paul Gilroy (2000) and Celia Lury (1998) that "we also wear it, listen to it and watch it on our many screens, on a daily basis" (Braidotti 2013, 59). The opportunistic political economy of biogenetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species, when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals, and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity. The uniqueness of Anthropos is intrinsically and explicitly displaced by this equation.

What constitutes capital value today is the informational power of living matter itself, transposed into data banks of biogenetic, neural, and media information about individuals, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. The focus is on the accumulation of information itself, its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. "Data-mining" includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as specific strategic targets for capital investments, or as risk categories. My position as a Deleuzian—that is to say, a neo-Spinozist critical thinker—is clear: Living "matter" is a monistic process ontology that interacts in complex ways with social, psychic, and natural environments, producing multiple ecologies of belonging (Guattari 2000). A change of paradigm about the human is needed to come to terms with these new insights. Human subjectivity in this complex field of forces must be redefined as an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of all these factors (Braidotti 2011a).

The relational capacity of the postanthropocentric subject is not confined within our species, but includes all nonanthropomorphic elements: the nonhuman, vital force of life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*. 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 feminist turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded, and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of life that is the logic of advanced capitalism.

A MONISTIC APPROACH

Posthuman critical theory, in my perspective, is neomaterialist. It rests on monistic ontologies based on the reappraisal of Spinoza developed by French philosophers since the 1970s (Braidotti 2016) that foreground process ontologies and the positivity of difference as a process of differential modulation within a common matter. The key notion is that matter, including the specific bound volumes of matter that constitutes humans themselves, is not organized in terms of dualistic mind/body oppositions, but rather as materially embedded and embodied subjects-in-process. Such complex singularities relate to a multiplicity of forces, entities, and encounters, which include both human and nonhuman others. This emphasis on the monistic univocity of life does not deny the power of differences, but rather argues that they are not structured according to the dialectical principle of internal or external opposition, and therefore do not function hierarchically.

Critical Spinozism therefore consists in activating the concept of monism, defining matter as vital and intelligent, or self-organizing, and thereby producing

the combination of "vitalist materialism" or "radical immanence" (Deleuze 1988, 1992). Monism highlights the embrainment of the body and the embodiment of the mind: all matter being one and immanent to itself, it is self-organizing in both human and nonhuman organisms (see also Lloyd 1994, 1996 and Protevi 2013), and it is driven by the ontological desire for the expression of its innermost freedom (conatus).

This approach offers the advantage of redefining traditional binary oppositions, such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman, paving the way for a nonhierarchical and more egalitarian relationship among members of the same species as well as between different species. This radical relocation of difference as an active process of differing breaks from the dialectical tradition, which equated difference with pejoration and defined the subject as coinciding with/being the same as the humanist ideal of consciousness, rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior. The feminist and antiracist critical traditions have done groundbreaking work in disengaging difference form this hierarchical system, which resulted in making entire sections of living beings into marginal and disposable bodies: these are the sexualized,[3] racialized, and naturalized others who carry difference as a negative mark on their backs (Braidotti 2006).

In opposition to this, vital materialism encourages the nomadic politics of "becoming-minoritarian" through a politics of affirmation based on a monistic vision of matter as a multilayered and multidirectional relational force. The focus is on the force of relationality, which is not a way of denying antagonism, but rather a different method of reworking it, starting from the specificity of one's locations and the complex web of social relations that compose the self. This self is not an atomized entity but a nonunitary relational subject, nomadic and outward bound. Transversality is a way of actualizing the primacy of the relation, of interdependence and co-creation, with emphasis on nonhuman or ahuman life: the force and autonomy of affect and the logistics of its actualization (Massumi 2002). Nomadic transversality actualizes *zoe*-centred egalitarianism (Braidotti 2006).

Another significant advantage of this posthumanist monism is that, by introducing an inclusive postanthropocentric vision of subjectivity, it also embraces nonhuman agents. Vital neomaterialist theories lead to a productive "ecosophical" approach that extends to a better understanding of the complex interaction of social, psychic, natural, and technological factors in the construction of multiple ecologies of belonging. Ecosophical species equality in a critical posthuman frame urges us to question the violence and the hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism. In my view, monistic relationality stresses posthuman ethics as compassionate co-construction of transversal subjectivity. It also constructs theoretical and political connections with non-Western epistemologies

and especially indigenous knowledge systems, which propose different modes of both environmental governance and ecosophical belonging (Bignall, Hemmings, and Rigney 2016).

By extension, monistic ontologies support nature–culture–media ecologies, which undo the categorical separation between natural entities and manufactured artefacts. This is one of the most radical aspects of critical Spinozism, namely the extent to which it challenges such a divide, by proposing a classification of all entities—things, objects, and human organisms included—in terms of their forces and impacts upon other entities in the world. An ethology of forces, in other words, rather than a discourse about origins and causality, produces a displacement of the anthropocentric value systems. This makes it possible to expand the continuum nature–culture to include media and digital networks, that is, "media ecologies" (Fuller 2005). Digital networks can be approached as a continuum of self-organizing vital systems of environmental, technological, psychic, social, and other kinds. Not only are we all "part of nature" (Lloyd 1994), but, in addition, we inhabit Haraway's "naturecultures"—which are technologically mediated and globally interlinked. This deceptively simple step expresses a complex and fundamental insight, namely that all living matter today is mediated along multiple axes: we are immersed in "medianatures" (Parikka 2015).

The monistic approach is also crucial for grounding a posthuman ethical practice based on the co-construction of joyful or affirmative modes of relation, by reworking negativity as a collective praxis. This ethical impulse is crucial for redefining the terms of a shared humanity, and I will return to it in my conclusion.

POSTHUMAN CRITICAL THEORY

The cartographic approach encourages an epistemological and political line of argument, which I would like to apply to a redefinition of the mission of the contemporary humanities (Braidotti 2016). As I have argued elsewhere, my basic criteria are cartographic accuracy; the importance of combining critique with creative figurations; the ethics of affirmation; transdisciplinarity; the principle of nonlinearity; the powers of memory and the imagination; and the tactical method of defamiliarization (Braidotti 2013). Let me illuminate some of them.

Nonlinearity, or rhizomic thinking in a zigzagging pattern, is one of the operative words for posthuman critical theory and one of its main links to the complexity not only of contemporary science, but also of our social system, the global economy being a mediated and weblike system. The sheer quantity, as well as the heteroglossia, of contemporary data defies the linearity of traditional

logic and demands more complex topologies of distributed knowledge for contemporary nomadic, multidirectional relational subjects. Deleuze teaches us that linearity has a temporal dimension, which is the dominant mode of *Chronos*, based on institutional stability and respect for the authority of the past. This timeline runs alongside the cyclical and more transformative time of becoming or *Aion.* They support different knowledge practices: *Chronos* upholds "Royal science"—officially recognized and well-funded; *Aion*, on the other hand, produces "Minor science"—unrecognized and mostly underfunded. The former is protocol-bound, the latter creativity-prone. Loyal to the method of inclusive disjunctions, Deleuze does not propose these options as dialectically opposed, but rather as coexisting. The continuity between them generates multiple lines of conceptual resonance (Deleuze 1988).

Inspiration for conceptual creativity comes from the never-ending flow of connections between the transversal subjects who compose the nomadic assemblage and their multiple "outsides." Creativity—the working of the imagination—cannot be disconnected from memory—the multidirectional working of time. In a monistic philosophy of becoming, the past is always recomposed as action or praxis in the present—doubled up as actual and virtual becoming. This intensity is simultaneously after and before us, both past and future, in a flow or process of mutation, differentiation, or becoming. In posthuman critical thinking, we need to keep in mind the larger picture and pursue an affective opening-out toward the geophilosophical or planetary dimension of "chaosmosis," as Guattari calls it. The thinking subject must be turned into the threshold of gratuitous (principle of nonprofit), noninstrumental (principle of nomadic mobility or flow) acts that express the vital energy of transformative becoming (principle of nonlinearity). This is precisely what the notion of the virtual refers to, in Deleuze's thought. The ethical principle is the actualization of the intensity of affective forces and relations. In Bergson as in Deleuze it has as much to do with the imagination, that is to say, creative reworking of the virtual past, as with the flat repetition of chronologically prior experiences. Thus, memory and the imagination cannot easily be separated: the memory works through nonlinear nomadic transpositions, or as creative and generative interconnections that multiply the possibilities of joyful expansion and affirmative relations among different entities (Braidotti 2006).

Of all the set criteria for posthuman critical theory, however, the most important is the tactical method of defamiliarization, that is to say, disconnection of the subject from familiar and habitual patterns of identity. Elaborated by feminist and postcolonial thought as a central method for critique of dominant subject formations, the task of defamiliarizing our habits of thought is akin to the critique of the power we inhabit and have become accustomed

to: to evolve toward a posthuman frame of reference. Consequently, these disidentifications occur along the axes of becoming-woman (sexualization), becoming-other-than-European (racialization), and becoming-animal or -earth (naturalization) (Braidotti 2006). Some of these deterritorializations engage anthropomorphic agents, while the process of becoming-earth demands a more radical break with established patterns of thought and introduces a radically imminent planetary dimension. The latter is especially difficult, emotionally as well as methodologically, as it can involve a sense of loss and pain, which in turn can produce fear, vulnerability, and a sense of nostalgia. Gayatri Spivak encourages us to follow the postcolonial injunction of "unlearning our privilege as our loss" (Spivak 1990, 9). I would extend this to account for our relational ethical deficits, notably toward those who are marked as "different," that is to say as "otherwise" human, as well as the nonhuman others. The ethical frame of reference becomes the world, in all its open-ended, interrelational, transnational, multisexed, and trans-species flows of becoming: a native or indigenous form of cosmopolitanism (Braidotti 2006, 2013).

These criteria frame a posthuman critical theory that can never be dissociated from an ethics that demands respect for the complexities of the real-life world we are living in and is willing to translate such complexity into academic scholarship in the humanities. We need to move toward what I call the critical posthumanities, by which is meant an intensive form of interdisciplinarity, transversality, and boundary-crossing among a range of discourses. This transdisciplinary approach affects the very structure of thought and enacts a rhizomatic embrace of conceptual diversity in scholarship. Posthuman critical theory amounts to higher degrees of disciplinary hybridization and requires intense defamiliarization of our habits of thought, through nomadic encounters that subvert the protocols of institutional reason. Complexity becomes—again—the operative word, both in the actualized practices of states of Royal science and in the virtual becoming of Minor science. A monistic vision of matter as autopoietic calls for a revision of the subject of knowledge as a complex singularity, an affective assemblage, and a relational vitalist entity.

These are the building blocks of qualitative shifts toward critical posthuman theory, as opposed to a mere quantitative proliferation of nonhuman objects of study. In the present public debate about the future of the university, new institutional alternatives are being experimented with. For instance, the Oxford Institute for the Future of Humanity embodies the transhumanist model through a program called "superintelligence," which combines the humanistic belief in the perfectibility of Man through scientific rationality with a posthuman program of enhancement. In a splendid tribute to Royal science—and the corporate world—the director Nick Bostrom pledges allegiance to the European Enlightenment in combining brain research with robotics and computational

sciences, plus clinical psychology and analytic philosophy. The posthuman in this project gets redefined as a superhuman metarationalist entity. I want to plead for a different approach, grounded in monistic affirmative ethics, based on a different understanding of matter as immanent interconnections: Minor science. The task of critical theory is activating subjects to enter into new affective assemblages, to co-create alternative ethical forces and political codes—in other words, to compose a missing people.

Critical posthuman theory marks the end of what Vandana Shiva called "monocultures of the mind" (1993) and it pursues the radical politics of location and the analysis of social forms of exclusion in the current world order of "biopiracy" (Shiva 1997), "necropolitics" (Mbembé 2003), and worldwide dispossession (Sassen 2014). Furthermore, it foregrounds subjectivity by stating that the posthuman critical subject is a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires defamiliarization from traditional ways of thinking. The critical posthuman thinker remains committed to social justice and, while acknowledging the fatal attraction of global mediation, she is not likely to forget that one-third of the world population has no access to electricity.

CONCLUSION: RECOMPOSING HUMANITY

Posthuman critical theory proposes to resist any foregone conclusion about the transition the "human" and "humanity" is going through and to focus instead on the ongoing processes of transformation. It would be equally false to assume that the posthuman implies relations and values that are intrinsically progressive, or that it will automatically undo power relations based on class, gender, race, sexuality, age, or disability (Braidotti 2002, 2013). There is in fact large and growing evidence that points to the exact contrary. I have argued that what we need instead is accurate cartographic accounts of new subject positions as transversal alliances between human and nonhuman agents, which may account for the ubiquity of technological mediation and the complexity of interspecies alliances, while foregrounding continuing patterns of exclusion and marginalization.

In my critical frame, the posthuman "we" is not to be taken for granted, but needs to be constructed in the concrete practice of becoming-posthuman as a collective assemblage. Indeed, "we" are in *this* posthuman predicament together. But "we" are not the same, in locations, power, accountability, *potestas*, and *potentia*. Advanced capitalism is postanthropocentric in unifying all species under the imperative of the market, and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet. But in the era of the Anthropocene it is also neohumanistic in forging a new panhuman bond made of vulnerability and fear of extinction. It is both an unstable category and a deeply challenged one in our Anthropocene

present. Against corporate panhumanism, I argue that "we" only makes sense as a praxis, a project enacted through a collectively shared project that aims at actualizing the virtual, that is to say, at assembling a missing people. This is the situated posthuman ethics that emerges in a multiplicity of new alliances, between technologically mediated agents and human and nonhuman actors. It includes a variety of theoretical and political positions, ranging from the inhuman neohumanism of queer and LGBTQ+ theorists to the neohumanism of postcolonial and race theorists.

Starting from philosophies of radical immanence, vital materialism, and the feminist politics of locations, I have argued for embedded and embodied relational and affective cartographies of the new power relations that are emerging from the current geopolitical order. Instead of embracing the idea of a new panhumanity, bonded in shared vulnerability or anxiety about survival and extinction, in what Ulrich Beck calls a *World Risk Society*, I want to plead for affirmative politics grounded in immanent interconnections: a transnational ethics of place.

The posthuman as a conceptual persona or navigational tool expresses the affirmative ethical dimension of becoming-posthuman as a gesture of collective self-styling, or mutual specification. It actualizes a community that is situated and hence not universalist, not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of ancestral communal violence, or ontological melancholia, but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of interdependence with multiple others most of which, in the age of the Anthropocene, are not anthropomorphic. I am not in favor of even a partial rapprochement with universalism, but considering the global reach of problems in the era of the Anthropocene, some generic lines need to be drawn. The crucial ethical imperative is to refuse to conceal the power differentials that divide us. There may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the posthuman recomposition of "humanity" right now: many contested ways of becoming-posthuman.

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NOTES

1. The Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen coined the term "Anthropocene" in 2000 to describe our current geological era in terms of human impact upon the sustainability of the planet. The adoption of "Anthropocene" as a scientific term was officially recommended by the International Geological Association in Cape Town in August 2016.
2. See monographs on (among others) humanism/antihumanism (Soper 1986), the inhuman (Lyotard 1988; Grimaldi 2011), posthumanism (Badmington 2003), the posthuman manifesto (Pepperell 2003), postanthropocentric metamorphosis (Clarke 2008), ceasing to be human (Bruns 2010), the nonhuman (Raffensoe 2013), extinction of life on earth (Lovelock 2009), extinction *tout court* (Colebroook 2014a , 2014b), future of the human (Armstrong and Montag 2009), posthuman personhood (Wennemann 2013), and the "new" human (Rosendhal Thomsen 2013).
3. I use "sexualize" here to mean "assume a sexual/gendered identity."

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