Chapter 2
Posthuman Critical Theory

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Introduction

The idea of the posthuman enjoys widespread currency in the era also known as the 'anthropocene',[1] where human activities are having world-changing effects on the earth's ecosystem. The turn to the posthuman is a response to growing public awareness of fast-moving technological advances and also of contemporary political developments linked to the limitations of economic globalization, the risks associated with the 'war on terror' and global security issues. We are experiencing at present an explosion of scholarship on nonhuman, inhuman and posthuman issues, which elicit elation in equal measure to anxiety and stimulate controversial public debates and cultural representations. More importantly, for the purposes of this essay, the posthuman predicament enforces the necessity to think again and to think harder about the status of human subjectivity and the ethical relations, norms and values that may be worthy of the complexity of our times. Such issues also impact on the aims and structures of critical thought and ultimately come to bear on the institutional status of the academic field of the humanities in the contemporary neoliberal university (Collini 2012; Braidotti 2013).

In philosophy, the 'posthuman turn' is triggered by the convergence of anti-humanism on the one hand and anti-anthropocentrism on the other, which may overlap, but refer to different genealogies and traditions. Anti-humanism focusses on the critique of the humanist ideal of 'Man' as the universal representative of the human, while anti-anthropocentrism criticizes species hierarchy and advances

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[1]Nobel Prize winning chemist, Paul Crutzen, in 2002 coined the term 'anthropocene' to describe our current geological era. This term stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by our species and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else.

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ecological justice. The posthuman expresses a critical consensus that is reached about the seemingly simple notions that there is no 'originary humanicity' (Kirby 2011: 233), only 'originary technicity' (MacKenzie 2002). In other words, the term 'posthuman critical theory' marks the emergence of a new type of discourse that is not merely a culmination of the two main strands of thought—posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism—but rather a qualitative leap in a new and more complex direction (Wolfe 2010). This shift of perspective also moves the critical debates away from the explicit anti-humanism supported by post-structuralist philosophy since the 1980s and inaugurates an array of different posthumanist perspectives circulating widely today.

Although the postmodernist philosophical debate casts a long shadow over the posthuman, these two movements of thought differ considerably. Whereas postmodernist deconstructions led to moral and cognitive relativism, posthuman research is neo-foundationalist and aims at re-grounding concepts and practices of subjectivity in a world fraught with contradictory socio-economic developments and major internal fractures. It is significant to note, however, that posthuman writings tend to evoke the same knee-jerk reaction among their detractors today, as earlier postmodernist texts did to their humanist critics.[2]

The 'death of Man', announced by Foucault (1970) formalized an epistemological and moral crisis that resulted in insubordination from received humanist ideals. What was called into question was the humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the centre of world history, and more specifically, the implicit assumption that the distinctively human prerogative is 'reason'. Connected to a sovereign and rationalist ideal, this 'reason' is conceived as the motor of science-driven world-historical progress. The poststructuralist rejection of Enlightenment-based ideals of the human, however, did not stop at the humanist image of 'Man'. It also involved the acknowledgement that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about any category, be it women, LBGTs, indigenous people and other marginal subjects (Johnson 1998). New emphasis needs to be placed instead on issues of diversity and differences among all categories and on the internal fractures within each category. According to Foucault, even Marxism, under the cover of a master 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 human history.

This line of criticism gathered momentum since the 1970s. In an immanent critique of humanism, post-colonial and race theorists re-grounded the lofty claims of European Humanism in the history of colonialism and racist violence. They held Europeans accountable for the uses and abuses of this ideal by looking at colonial history and the violent domination of other cultures, but did not fully reject its basic humanist premises. The 'bellicose dismissiveness' of other cultures and

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[2]See for instance, *The New Scientist* review of my book on the posthuman: 'What's death to do with it?', by Cohen (2013), which argues that the posthuman is too important to be left only to academics or rather 'social science cognoscenti'.

civilizations was exposed by Edward Said, as "self-puffery, not humanism and certainly not enlightened criticism" (2004: 27). Many non-Western models of neo-humanism are at work in the world today. Significant examples are Brah's (1996) diasporic ethics, which echoes Shiva's (1997) anti-global neo-humanism. African humanism or Ubuntu is receiving more attention, from Collins (1991) to Drucilla Cornell (2002). Gilroy's (2000) planetary cosmopolitanism also proposes a productive form of contemporary critical posthumanism. Ecofeminists stress the link between the Western humanistic emphasis on 'Man' as the self-appointed measure of all things and the domination and exploitation of nature. They condemn the abuses of science and technology, arguing for a more harmonious approach that militates for respect for the diversity of living matters and of human cultures (Mies and Shiva 1993).

Contemporary posthuman critical thought builds on these premises but according to a different architecture. Ever mindful of the fact that, the 'human' is not a neutral term but rather a hierarchical one that indexes access to privileges and entitlements, linked to both the humanist tradition and anthropocentric 'exceptionalism', critical posthumanists, post-colonial and feminist theorists have made a strong intervention in this debate. The standard which was posited in the universal mode of 'Man' has been criticized (Lloyd 1984) precisely because of its partiality. The allegedly universal 'Man', in fact, is masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity (Irigaray 1985; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). As if this line of criticism were not enough, this 'Man' is now also called to task and brought back to its species specificity as *anthropos* (Rabinow 2003; Esposito 2008), that is to say as the representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose uniqueness is now challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns.

The posthuman cannot be said to be a new universal, not only because universalism has lost a great deal of it appeal as a result of the fundamental critiques made by postcolonial, feminist and poststructuralist theories, but also because we are not 'human' in the same way or to the same extent to begin with. Both methodologically and politically, a posthuman approach requires therefore careful cartographies of the different degrees and the extent to which any one of us can be said to be 'human'. My approach combines Foucauldian genealogies with feminist politics of location to provide embodied and embedded accounts of the multilayered and complex relations of power that structure our 'being human'. The aim of a cartographic method is to provide a politically grounded and theoretically infused account of the webs of power relations we are all entangled in (Braidotti 1994, 2011a, b).

The real methodological difficulty in releasing our bond to *anthropos* and developing critical post-anthropocentric forms of thought, however, is affective. Disloyalty to our species is no easy matter, because different ecologies of belonging are at stake in the movement towards a critical posthuman position. How one reacts to taking distance from our species depends to a large extent on the terms of one's engagement with it. Some of us feel quite attached to the 'human', that creature

familiar from time immemorial who, as a species, a planetary presence and a stratified cultural formation, spells out very specific modes of belonging. Moreover, the distance one is likely to take from anthropocentrism depends also on one's assessment of and relationship to contemporary technological developments. In my work, I have always stressed the technophilic dimension (Braidotti 2002) and the liberating and even transgressive potential of these technologies, in contrast to those who attempt to index them to conservative aims, transhumanist dreams of fast lane evolution or to banal profit-oriented systems. But loyalty to one's species has some deeper and more complex affective roots that cannot be shaken off at will. Disidentification at this level involves the pain of disengagement from *anthropos*. But it is well worth the effort: taking critical distance from familiar habits of thought cannot be dissociated from the kind of consciousness-raising that sustains critical thinking. Disidentification from established patterns of thought is crucial for an ethics and politics of inquiry that demands respect for the complexities of the real-life world we are living in. Posthuman thought is a branch of complexity theory.

Only the shallow optimism of advanced capitalism can market as unproblematic the current post-anthropocentric turn and the renewed interest in human–nonhuman interaction. Such futuristic scenarios tend to obliterate the differences that matter, notably the perpetuation of structural discriminations and injustices postulated on those allegedly antiquated variables: class, gender and sexuality, age, ethnicity, race and able-bodiedness. My argument is that we need to introduce more grounded and complex cartographies of the posthuman condition so as to strike a balance between facile euphoria and techno-pessimism about the future of a category that, out of habit, we still call the 'human'. Let me develop this aspect in the following section.

Critical Genealogies of the Posthuman

Critical cartographies are needed to explain, with some degree of accuracy, by which historical contingency, intellectual vicissitudes or twists of fate, 'we' have entered the posthuman universe.

The 'we' in action here is not a unitary—let alone universal—entity but rather a nomadic assemblage: relational, transversal and affirmative (Braidotti 1994, 2006, 2011a).

The term 'posthuman' covers at present a vast array of diverse positions and different institutional processes, which often defend diametrically opposed political agendas. To give just one example of the diversity of positions, consider the creation of two new major research institutes: on the one hand, the Oxford transhumanists gathered round the 'Future of Humanity Institute', and on the other, the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Global Risk. In a project significantly called 'super intelligence', the former argues for a carefully monitored form of human enhancement via brain–computer network interfaces as the next necessary evolutionary step for humanity. Optimistic about the opportunities for computational

growth offered by neoliberal capitalism, these initiatives combine a reductive vision of the subject based on brain–network interface—with unlimited faith in the self-correcting powers of scientific rationality. The Oxford Institute for the Future of Humanity rejects the term 'posthuman' as a logical impossibility for our species, considering the insufficient level of computational power we dispose of at present (Bostrom 2003).

The Cambridge Centre for the Study of Global Risk takes the lead in assessing the significant risks involved in too hasty an endorsement of human–technology interfaces. They also defend a more grounded perspective that locates technology in the real world and evaluates its long-term social and environmental impact in a balanced manner. These two complementary projects set the tone for the debate in relation to the posthuman turn. They combine radical expectations of transhumanist enhancement, with a firm reiteration of enlightenment-based values such as rationality and liberal individualism. Apparently nonplussed by the internal contradiction of combining radical change with the perpetuation of tradition, they reject the critical edge of posthuman theory, appease venture capitalist interventions in fundamental research and strike a politically conservative note.

The current scholarship in the field is fortunately more experimental because it takes the challenge of enhancement seriously, while remaining suspicious of the profit motive of the current market economy, driven by 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier-Boutang 2012). Research on the posthuman covers a wide range of positions and just about every imaginable variation, including doomsday scenarios. The variety of views, which I cannot summarize here, makes it imperative to set some normative framework for my critical posthuman stance.

The first critical parameter of my cartography is the rejection of 'closed' systems of thought, which already pre-empt the conclusion of what a transition to a posthuman world may look like. I do not think we are justified in taking the posthuman as an intrinsically liberatory or progressive category, nor can we embrace the equation between the 'posthuman' and post-power/gender/race/class positions, without taking into account enduring power differentials (Braidotti 2002, 2013; Livingston and Puar 2011). Nor can we restrict the discussion of the posthuman to identity-bound issues of self-formation. What is needed instead is careful negotiation in order to constitute new assemblages or transversal alliances between human and nonhuman agents, while accounting for the ubiquity of technological mediation. My argument is that we need to take the challenge of transformation right into the fundamental structures of subjectivity: the posthuman turn is not to be taken for granted.

A second critical concern I have in relation to the exuberant production of ideas round the posthuman is the tendency to posit 'humanity' as a unitary category and as an object of intense debate, just as it emerges as a threatened or endangered category (Chakrabarty 2009). This results in what I have defined as a reactive re-composition of Humanity, which expresses intense anxiety about the future of our species (Braidotti 2013). A negative sort of cosmopolitan interconnection is established through a panhuman bond of vulnerability, which cannot fail to affect social theory scholarship (Beck and Sznaider 2006). The literature on shared

anxiety about the future of both our species and of our humanist legacy is by now an established genre, as shown by the statements of significant political and social thinkers such as Habermas (2003), Fukuyama (2002), Sloterdijk (2009) and Borradori (2003). In different ways, they seem struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for the situation. The size of recent scholarship on the environmental crisis and the climate change also testifies to this state of emergency and to the emergence of the earth in the anthropocene as a political agent. Both United Nations humanitarianism and corporate posthumanism assuage this anxiety by proposing a hasty reformulation of a panhuman 'we', who is supposed to be in *this* together. I will return to *this* point in the next sections.

Post-anthropocentrism is especially thriving in popular culture and has been criticized (Smelik and Lykke 2008), as a negative way of representing the changing relations between humans and technological *apparatus* or machines in the mode of neo-gothic horror. I have labelled it as a 'techno-teratological' social imaginary (Braidotti 2002) that posits technology as the object of both admiration and aberration. The literature and cinema of extinction of our and other species, including disaster movies, is a popular genre offering dystopian reflections of the bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism. A creative alliance between feminist theorists and the science fiction horror genre (Barr 1987, 1993; Creed 1993) constitutes a fast-growing posthuman strand, proposing relational bonds between different species and across different classes of living entities (Hayward 2008, 2011; Alaimo 2010). Queer theorists have equated the posthuman with post-gender and proposed an alliance between extraterrestrial aliens and social aliens (Halberstam and Livingston 1995; Halberstam 2012; Ferrando 2013). Queering the nonhuman is now in full swing, in a series of variations that include re-thinking sexual diversity based on animal and other organic systems (Giffney and Hird 2008). Emphasis is placed on high degrees of sexual indeterminacy or indifferentiation, modelled on the morphology and sexual systems of nonhuman species, including insects (Braidotti 1994, 2002; Grosz 1995) and bacteria (Parisi 2004). Post-gender sexualities have also been postulated as post-anthropocentric modes of reflection on the extinction of the current form of human embodiment (Colebrook 2014), thus putting the nails in the coffin of the humanist subject: 'we' are indeed in *this* involution together.

The '*this*' in question highlights our historical condition, that is to say the excitement as well as the horrors of our times. The high degrees of technological mediation and the undoing of the nature–culture divide create a series of paradoxes, such as an electronically linked pan-humanity which is split by convulsive internal fractures: forced proximity can breed intolerance and even xenophobic violence. And the contradictions multiply: genetically recombined plants, animals and vegetables proliferate alongside computer and other viruses, while unmanned flying and ground armed vehicles confront us with new ways of killing and dying. Humanity is re-created as a negative category, held together by shared vulnerability and the spectre of extinction, but also struck down by environmental devastation, by new and old epidemics, in endless 'new' wars, in the proliferation of migrations

and exodus, detention camps and refugees' centres. The staggering inequalities engendered by the global economy make for violence and insurrection; the appeals for new forms of cosmopolitan relations or a global *ethos* (Kung 1998) are often answered by necropolitical acts of violence, destruction and assassination, not only by the official enemies of the west—Muslim extremists—but also by home-grown killers, which in Europe are the likes of Anders Behring Breivik.[3]

Thus, there is no question that the generic figure of the human—'we'—is in trouble and _this_ is a serious matter. Donna Haraway puts it as follows:

> … our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally branded intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly available for the progress of science and the advancement of industry. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand (1997: 74).

'Vibrant matter' (Bennett 2010) or 'inventive life' (Fraser et al. 2006) emerge as core concepts, stressing the self-organizing vitality of all living systems, thereby dethroning anthropocentric exceptionalism. Massumi refers to this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': "a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human" (1998: 60) and as such undergoing significant mutations: "species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter" (1998: 60). Karen Barad (2003) coins the term 'posthumanist performativity' to define new human/nonhuman interaction, while Hardt and Negri see it as a sort of 'anthropological exodus' from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation—a colossal hybridization of the species.

What becomes necessary in this context is to rethink posthuman subject formations. This implies the rejection of any lingering notion of human nature, but also the refusal of the transhumanist project of human enhancement based on a reductive definition of the human as coinciding with *his* cerebral and neural capacities. I want to argue in favour of a nature–culture continuum which stresses embodied and embrained immanence and includes negotiations and interactions with bio-genetics and neurosciences, but also environmental sciences, gender, ethnicity and disability studies. This shift also brings to an end of the categorical distinction between on the one hand human life—*anthropos*—and on the other, *bios,* as strictly policed prerogatives categorically distinct from the life of animals and nonhumans, or *zoe*. I have argued that what comes to the fore in this approach is the very embodied structure of the posthuman subject as a composite assemblage of human, non-organic, machinic and other elements (Braidotti 2002). This extended self is moreover marked by the structural presence of practices and apparati of mediation that inscribe technology as 'second nature'. It is an immanent and vital vision of the subject.

The next critical concern I want to bring to bear on my cartography is that, contextually, these structural changes are not happening in a vacuum, but they

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[3]Anders Behring Breivik is the Norwegian mass murderer and the confessed perpetuator of the 2011 attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utoya, killing, respectively, eight and 69 people, mostly socialist youth.

rather resonate with fast-changing conditions in advanced capitalism. The global economy engenders global nature as well as global culture (Franklin et al. 2000) and is a spinning machine that actively produces differences and multiplies quantitative differences for the sake of commodification and consumption. Global consumption knows no borders and a highly controlled flow of consumer goods, information bytes, data and capital constitutes the core of the hyper-mobility of this economic system (Braidotti 2002, 2006). Capitalist de-territorializations are never transformative in a qualitative ethical sense: they are rather quantitative accumulations driven by the profit motive and control the space-time of mobility in highly selective ways. The striated space of capitalist mobility produces different kinds of subject formations: migrant workers, refugees, VIP frequent flyers, daily commuters, tourists, pilgrims and others. The ethical process of becoming-nomadic needs to start therefore from the acknowledgements of the diametrically diverse power locations 'we' are located in.

Moreover, the violence of capitalist de-territorializations is such that it engenders forced evictions, systemic homelessness and the exodus of populations on an unprecedented planetary scale (Sassen 2014). As a result of war and devastation, a global diaspora is taking place (Brah 1996) masses of refugees and asylum seekers are on the move, trying—often fatally—to cross the borders into the Western world, where they land in detention camps and fall into the status of invisible or second-class citizens. The posthuman carries its own forms of injustice and violence.

The global economy tends to be deeply inhuman(e), displaying structural injustices including increasing poverty and indebtedness (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; Lazzarato 2012). It also engenders a 'necropolitical' governmentality (Mbembe 2003) through technologically mediated wars and counterterrorism. War has mutated into large-scale processes of damaging the basic infrastructures of cities and countries, exposing the civilian populations to both technological and more archaic horrors. New forms of inhumanity have emerged: the classical figure of the warrior or the soldier has mutated into two specular hybrid formations: on the one hand, a professional, technological figure, and on the other, the threatening figure of the terrorist ready to strike anywhere at any time. Technology plays a big role in the inhuman character of contemporary warfare: wars today are driven by drones and other post-anthropocentric unmanned vehicles, run by professionals. The unmanned aerial vehicles also known as drones, or remotely piloted aircrafts (RPA), are part of a large robot army that includes land and sea as well as air and started work in Afghanistan a decade ago.[4] 'We' are in _this_ war machine together.

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[4]In 2005, CIA drones struck targets in Pakistan three times; in 2011, there were 76 strikes, by now there are hundreds. Google Earth has designed a special programme to delete the drones' flying paths from their satellite photos. Drones come in all sorts of sizes: 'DelFly', a dragonfly shaped surveillance drone built at the technical university in Delft, weighs less than a gold wedding ring, camera included. On the other end of the scale comes America's biggest and fastest drone, Avenger (15 mn USA $), which can carry up to 2.7 tonnes of bombs, sensors and other equipment, at more than 740 km per hour.

The last but not least of my critical parameters is that the contemporary global economy has a techno-scientific structure, built on the convergence between previously differentiated branches of technology, notably nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science. They involve research and intervention upon animals, seeds, cells and plants, as well as humans. In substance, advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control of all that lives (Rose 2007). The opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism turns Life/*zoe*—that is to say human and nonhuman intelligent matter—into a commodity for trade and profit. All living creatures are inscribed in a market economy of planetary exchanges that commodifies them to a comparable degree and therefore makes them equally disposable. A devious sort of post-anthropocentric equivalence has therefore been established among species as a result of their real subsumption into the profit principle. The further perversity of advanced capitalism, and its undeniable success, consists in reattaching the self-organizing vitality of living matter back to an overinflated notion of possessive individualism (MacPherson 1962).

What constitutes capital value today is the informational power of living matter itself, transposed into data banks of bio-genetic, neural and mediatic information about species, populations and individuals, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. These practices reduce bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources, or vital capacities and thereby levels out other categorical differences. 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. The capitalization of living matter produces a new political economy, which Cooper (2008) calls 'Life as surplus'. It introduces discursive and material political techniques of population control of a very different order from the administration of demographics, which preoccupied Foucault's (1997) work on biopolitical governmentality. 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 (Beck 1999). Informational data are the true capital today, supplementing but not eliminating classical power relations (Livingston and Puar 2011). The high degree of intrusion of technologies into everyday life is one of the factors that make capitalism into a post-anthropocentric force, which Haraway (2014) recently labelled: 'capitalocene' and Jussi Parikka: 'anthro-obscene'(2015), echoing Zillah Eisenstein's 'global obscenities' and Shiva's (1997) 'bio-piracy'. The posthuman is *not* post-power.

Neo-Materialist Monistic Ontology

The cartography I have just outlined constitutes the plane of consistency or creative formation of my posthuman project. A posthumanist with distinct anti-humanist feelings and resolute technophilic leanings, I am less prone to panic at the prospect

of a displacement of the centrality of the human—both as humanist 'Man' and as *anthropos*—and can also see the advantages of such an evolution. What I want to propose theoretically is a critical form of posthuman theory and affectively a form of caring disidentification from human supremacy. The recipient of this care is future generations.

My position as a Deleuzian feminist is clear: nomadic thought provides a new ontology, a re-grounding of subjects in the radical immanence of their embodied and embedded locations.

Living 'matter' is a process ontology that interacts in complex ways with social, psychic and natural environments, producing multiple ecologies of belonging (Guattari 2000). Rejecting the established conservative tactic that consists in pouring new wine in old bottles, I am not prone to reintroducing traditional humanist values into the contemporary transformations of what counts as the basic unit of reference for the human. I want to argue instead that a change of paradigm about the human is needed to come to terms with our historical conditions.

Human subjectivity in this complex field of forces has to be re-defined as an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of social, planetary and technological factors (Braidotti 1991, 2011a). The relational capacity of the post-anthropocentric subject is not confined within our species, but it includes non-anthropomorphic elements: the nonhuman, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*.[5] It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric critical 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.

The key notion is embodiment on the basis of neo-materialist understandings of the body, drawn from the neo-Spinozist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, but re-worked with feminist and postcolonial theories. Embracing their version of vital bodily materialism, while rejecting the dialectical idea of negative difference, this theoretical approach changes the frame of reference. It differs from the more linguistically oriented branch of poststructuralism that relies on semiotics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Vital politics breaks clearly from the notion of the primacy of the psyche and its processes of signification in the formation of subjects. There is no originary and fatal capture of an allegedly 'unmarked' subject by a single matrix of power, be it the phallus, the logos, Eurocentric transcendental reason or heterosexual normativity. Power is not a cartel operated by a single masterful owner, but rather differential mechanisms of distribution of material and discursive effects which also impact on subjectivity.

Movement and speed, lines of sedimentation and lines of flight are the main factors that affect the formation of a non-unitary, posthuman subject in active

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[5]This is radically different from the negative definition of *zoe* proposed by Giorgio Agamben (1998), who has been taken to task by feminist scholars (Colebrook 2009; Braidotti 2013) for his erasure of feminist perspectives on the politics of natality and mortality and for his indictment of the project of modernity as a whole.

resonance with external flows of forces and power effects. It follows that multiple mechanisms of capture engender multiple forms of resistance. Power formations are time-bound and consequently temporary and contingent upon relational action and interaction.

A more complex vision of the subject is introduced within a materialist process ontology that sustains an open, relational self-other entity framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire. Social constructivist binary oppositions are replaced by rhizomic dynamics of repetition and difference (Deleuze 1994; Williams 2013) within a nature–culture continuum that approaches power as both a restrictive (*potestas*) and productive (*potentia*) force. The task of critical thinkers is defined accordingly as the creation of new concepts. These ideas provide the navigational tools that help us across the differential modulations of a monistic universe which overcomes the opposition 'materialism/idealism' and moves towards a dynamic brand of materialist vitalism. Deleuzian feminists build on monistic philosophy to spell out a 'vital politics', premised on the idea that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing. Moreover, it is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but rather continuous with them (Braidotti 1994; Grosz 1994; Colebrook 2000, 2004; MacCormack 2008). This approach helps us update the feminist politics of location in terms of radical immanence, with special emphasis on the embedded and embodied, affective and relational structure of subjectivity (Braidotti 2006, 2013). By extension, it helps redefine old binary oppositions, such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman, paving the way for a non-hierarchical and hence more egalitarian relationship to the species. The emphasis on rational and transcendental consciousness—one of the pillars of humanism and the key to its implicit anthropocentrism—is replaced by radical immanence and process ontology.

For Critical Posthuman Thought

The strength of posthuman critical thought, as outlined above, is in providing a frame for affirmative ethics and politics. In my work, I have proposed a relational ethics that values cross-species, transversal alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or nonhuman life. (Braidotti 2002, 2006). The focus on a *zoe* or geo-centred ethical approach requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to be human. The fact that 'we' may be in *this* together, moreover, needs to be qualified through grounded analyses of power relations and structural inequalities in the past and present.

Starting from philosophies of radical immanence, vital materialism and the feminist politics of locations, I want to argue against taking a flight into an abstract idea of a 'new' pan-humanity, bonded in shared vulnerability or anxiety about survival and extinction. What we need instead is embedded and embodied, relational and affective cartographies of the new power relations that are emerging from

the current geopolitical and post-anthropocentric world order. 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'. Yet, considering the global reach of the problems we are facing today, in the era of the 'anthropocene', it is nonetheless the case that 'we' are indeed in *this* anthropocenic crisis together. Such awareness must not, however, obscure or flatten out the power differentials that sustain the collective subject ('we') and its endeavour (*this*). There may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the re-composition of 'humanity' right now. Posthuman feminist and other critical theorists need to resist hasty and reactive re-compositions of cosmopolitan bonds, especially those made of fear. It may be more useful to work towards multiple actualizations of new transversal alliances, communities and planes of composition of the human: many ways of becoming-world together.

Posthuman critical thought is not post-political. The posthuman condition does not mark the end of political agency, but a re-casting of it in the direction of transversal alliances and relational ontology. This is all the more important as the political economy of bio-genetic capitalism is post-anthropocentric in its very structures, but not necessarily or automatically more humane, or more prone to justice.

The posthuman subject is not postmodern, because it does not rely on any anti-foundationalist premises. Nor is it deconstructivist, because it does not function within the linguistic turn or mediation. Not being framed by the ineluctable powers of signification, the posthuman subject is consequently not condemned to seek adequate representation of its existence within a system that is constitutionally incapable of granting due recognition (Olkowski 1999). Being based on Lack and Law, the linguistic signifier can at best distribute entrapment and withhold empowerment, its sovereign power building on the negative passions it solicits (Braidotti 2011b). For all vitalist 'matter-realists', this mournful vision of a subject desperately attached to the conditions of its own impotence is quite simply an inadequate representation of what 'we' are in the process of becoming. The posthuman nomadic subject is materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded—it is firmly located somewhere, according to the radical immanence of the 'politics of location'. It is a multifaceted subject, actualized by relational vitality and elemental complexity within a monistic ontology, through the lenses of Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, plus feminist and postcolonial theories. The ethics of radical immanence demand that such a subject should be 'worthy of the present', embodying and embedding *this* particular world, and thus be part of contemporary culture, science and technology. Far from being a flight from the real, posthuman thought inscribes the contemporary subject in the conditions of its own historicity.

Life, by the same token, is neither a metaphysical notion, nor a semiotic system of meaning; it expresses itself in a multiplicity of acts, encounters and events (Pearson 1999). Life, simply by being life, expresses itself by actualizing flows of energies, through codes of vital information across complex somatic, cultural and technologically networked systems. This is why I defend the idea of being 'worthy

of our time' as a way of engaging critically and creatively with vital processes and the expressive intensity of life we share with multiple others, here and now.

The nomadic vision of subjectivity is a good starting point, but we need to push it further, connecting it to two other crucial ideas: the positivity of difference and posthuman ethics. They entail the refusal of moral universalism and of binary thinking, notably the self-other distinction and the dialectics of otherness that underscores it. The positivity of difference comes to the fore, stressing the extent to which the binary logic of identity and otherness had distributed differences along a scale of asymmetrical power relations. This had reduced the notion of 'difference' to pejoration: it spells inferiority and social and symbolic disqualification for those who get branded as 'others'. They are the human and nonhuman referents of negative difference: the sexualized, racialized and naturalized others, which is to say women and LGBT; blacks, post-colonial and non-Europeans; but also animals, plants and earth others—who are reduced, both socially and symbolically—to the less than human status of disposable bodies. The dominant norm of the subject—the former 'Man' of classical Humanism—was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference.[6] This norm is used to justify the deployment of rational epistemic and social violence that marks the sexualized, racialized and naturalized 'others', whose social and symbolic existence is unprotected. This makes anthropocentrism into more than just a contingent matter of attitude: it is a structural element of our cultural practice, which is also embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practices (Braidotti 2013).

We are becoming posthuman ethical subjects by overcoming such hierarchical dichotomies and cultivating instead our multiple capacities for relations and modes of communication by codes that exceed the linguistic sign in a multidirectional manner. At this particular point in our collective history, 'we' simply do not know what our enfleshed selves, minds and bodies as one can actually do. We need to find out by embracing an ethics of experiment with intensities, which has to start with the careful composition of a plane of immanence that will ground and operationalize the missing people, or the transversal subjects that 'we' are. Desire as plenitude—as opposed to desire as lack—provides the ontological force that drives the posthuman subject formation. The ethical imagination is alive and well in posthuman subjects, in the form of ontological relationality, which stresses an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the nonhuman or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other.

Becoming posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual

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[6]Deleuze calls it 'the Majority subject' or the Molar centre of being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Irigaray calls it 'the Same', or the hyper-inflated, falsely universal 'He' (Irigaray 1985, 1993), whereas Collins (1991) calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of this particular subject of humanistic knowledge.

coordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call 'the self'. This 'self' is in fact a carnal (Sobchack 2004) and moveable assemblage within a common life space which the subject never masters but merely inhabits, always in a community, a pack or an assemblage. For posthuman theory, the *zoe*-centred subject is a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of nonhuman (animal, vegetable, viral, technological) relations.

This non-essentialist brand of vitalism reduces the hubris of rational consciousness, which far from being an act of vertical transcendence, is rather re-cast and pushed downwards in a grounding exercise of radical immanence. It is an act of unfolding the self onto the world, while enfolding the world within. Consciousness is a derivative mode of relating to one's own environment; ontological relationality, with its forms of perception and sensation, comes first. In this perspective, humanistic pride in rational and conscious self-representation comes across as blighted by narcissistic delusions of grandeur and aspirations to self-transparency. Life, as *zoe* is an impersonal nonhuman force that moves us without asking for our permission to do so and stretches beyond the bounded parameters of 'my' life, to seek other vital connections. Posthuman critical thought confronts the *zoe*-centred ontology of vital materialism lucidly, without making concessions to either moral panic or melancholia. Posthuman ethics aims at enacting sustainable modes of relation with multiple human and nonhuman others that enhance one's ability to renew and expand the boundaries of what transversal and non-unitary subjects can become (MacCormack 2012, 2014). The ethical ideal is to actualize the cognitive, affective and sensorial means to cultivate higher degrees of empowerment and affirmation of one's interconnections to others in their multiplicity. The selection of the affective forces that propel the process of becoming posthuman is regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation that functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions. My qualitative criteria for this new ethics include the following: the principle of non-profit; emphasis on the collective; acceptance of relationality and of viral contaminations; concerted efforts at experimenting with and actualizing virtual options; and a new link between theory and practice, including a central role for creativity. They are not moral injunctions, but dynamic frames for an ongoing experiment with intensities that need to be enacted collectively, so as to produce effective cartographies of how much bodies can take, which is why I also call them: thresholds of sustainability (Braidotti 2006). Posthuman ethics expresses a grounded form of accountability, based on a sense of collectivity and relationality, which results in a renewed claim to community and belonging by singular subjects. Genevieve Lloyd refers to these locally situated micro-universalist claims as 'a collaborative morality' (Lloyd 1996, 74). They aim to create collective bonds, a new affective community or polity, fuelled by our collective imaginings (Gatens and Lloyd 1999) and sustained by a vision of evolutionary processes as symbiotic modes of relation (Margulis and Sagan 1995).

In other words, to be posthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be dehumanized. On the contrary, it rather implies a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which

includes one's territorial or environmental inter-connections. This is an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical humanism, or from the moral universalism of the Kantians and their reliance on extending Human Rights to all species, virtual entities and cellular compositions (Nussbaum 2006). Posthuman theory also bases the ethical relation on positive grounds of joint projects and activities, not on the negative or reactive grounds of shared vulnerability.

The key notion in posthuman nomadic ethics is therefore the transcendence of negativity. What this means concretely is that the conditions for renewed political and ethical agency cannot be drawn from the immediate context or the current state of the terrain. They have to be generated affirmatively and creatively by efforts geared to creating possible futures, by mobilizing resources and visions that have been left untapped and by actualizing them in daily practices of interconnection with others. This project requires more visionary power or prophetic energy, qualities which are neither especially in fashion in academic circles, nor highly valued scientifically in these times of coercive pursuit of globalized 'excellence'. Yet, the call for more vision is emerging from many quarters in critical theory. Feminists have a long and rich genealogy in terms of pleading for increased visionary insight. From the very early days, Kelly (1979) typified feminist theory as a double-edged vision, with a strong critical and an equally strong creative function. That creative dimension has been central ever since (Haraway 1997, 2003; Rich 2001), and it constitutes the affirmative and innovative core of the radical epistemologies of feminism, gender, queer, race and postcolonial studies. Conceptual creativity is simply unimaginable without some visionary fuel. A prophetic or visionary dimension is necessary in order to secure an affirmative hold over the present, as the launching pad for sustainable becoming or qualitative transformations of the negativity and the injustices of the present. The future is the virtual unfolding of the affirmative aspect of the present, which honours our obligations to the generations to come.

Very much a philosophy of the outside, of open spaces and embodied enactments, posthuman thought yearns for a qualitative leap out of the familiar, trusting the untapped possibilities opened by our historical location in the technologically mediated world of today. It is a way of being worthy of our times, to increase our freedom and understanding of the complexities we inhabit in a world that in neither anthropocentric nor anthropomorphic, but rather geopolitical, ecosophical and proudly zoe-centred.

Conclusion

'We' are a missing posthuman people, who need to become constituted and actualized as a transversal subjectivity that acts in the multidirectional time of advanced capitalism. 'We' may well be in _this_ together, but _this_ project is far from unitary or simple. Against the disingenuous recomposition of 'humanity' as a category that is

simultaneously unlimited in its potential and threatened in its implementation, as proposed by the Oxford transhumanists, I want to argue for collective and democratic negotiations about what 'we' are in the process of becoming. Against the reduction of the human to a repository of cerebral capacities compatible with global computational networks, I want to argue for a nomadic vision of the subject as embedded and embodied, relational and affective.

I also want to resist however the joyful queer insurrection against all things human, in the name of a global exit from this species and its familiar patterns of 'othering'. My neo-monistic plane of consistency, my time-bound truth, lies somewhere in between these extreme positions.

We become painfully aware of being human—in a post-anthropocentric sense— just as the notion of humanity enters into another state of crisis. What the posthuman turn does for critical thought is to manifest a fundamental fracture at the heart of our thinking processes of self-representation. Namely that a category—the human—jumps to our attention ('interpellates us') and becomes thinkable at the very moment of its evanescence and disappearance.

Foucault raised this issue in *The Order of Things* (1970), commenting on the image of humanistic 'Man' as a figure drawn on the sand, being slowly wiped out by the waves of history. His discourse analysis proclaims the end of European Humanism, establishing the analytic conditions for a critique of the human in a post-Enlightenment frame of reference. Leaving all other considerations aside for now, let us focus on the effect of resonance between the crisis of a concept and the conditions that make it thinkable. If a concept becomes thinkable as it loses consistency, then I would venture that thinking functions such as a chamber of resonance, a space of vibration, between reality and our perception. This manifests both the weakness and the strength of critical thinking and I would like to ponder this issue a little longer, instead of rushing ahead to hastily resolve it.

In his discussion of the apparent tension between the thinkability of a concept and its implosion, Noys (2010) argues that the resonance between these two instances shows conclusively the radically immanent structure of our subjectivity. In other words, it is _because_ we are material and relational subjects that the processes of our subjectivation coincide with our historical conditions: 'we' are in _this_ world together. We consequently can only perceive and thus become aware of the conditions of our historicity as problems or 'crises' as they erupt and become manifest before our mind's eyes. The articulation of historical conditions (external) and subject formation (internal) is a process of mutual imbrication, enfolding's and unfolding's of the same basic and resonating materials. The apparent antonimy of internal–external factors is false and unhelpful, because what matters is their interaction, their multiple folds (Deleuze 1993).

Bringing this insight to bear on the posthuman debate, I would argue therefore that a 'crisis' is not necessarily negative, but rather the coming into focus of new conditions for relational encounters, understanding and knowledge production. By extension, Foucault's 'death of Man' actually announces a new phase in advanced capitalism—the rise of biopolitical management of Life as a nonhuman force.

Similarly, Deleuze's analysis of the political crisis round the events of May 1968 succeeds in foregrounding the structural mutations that capitalism was undergoing, towards a post-industrial system.[7] The material and discursive conditions that trigger the awareness of a concept, however, are never deterministic or static: the resonance effects of thinking rather pertain to a praxis that is situated in a time-continuum, where past and virtual futures intermingle to bring about insights and affirmative actualizations. Being a nomadic subject means striking a balance and finding some synchronicity between complex and multiple folding's and different flows of time sequences—i.e. constitute and sustain a plane of immanence (Braidotti 2006).

A 'crisis' therefore is an injection of lucidity, a dose of sobering wisdom about our real-life conditions, that resonates with us and we with it. 'We' become posthuman in *this* awareness of what no longer is the case: a unitary definition of the human sanctioned by tradition and customs. But we do remain human and all-too-human in the realization that the awareness of this condition, including the loss of humanist unity, is just the building block for the next phase of becoming subjects together. The realization of our inextricable inter-connection with both human and nonhuman others is the epistemological and ethical bonus we gain from the crisis or rather the transition brought about by our historicity. Freedom through the understanding of our bondage is the ethical value at work here, as Spinoza teaches us (Lloyd 1994, 1996).

The patterns of our becoming begin with the realization of the loss of a familiar notion of the 'human', which coincides with the awareness of the present posthuman conditions, but it moves on nomadically towards the quest for new sets of relations that will have constituted the time-continuum of becoming posthuman. So indeed, 'we' are not posthuman, but may always already have been so, and may yet become it, depending on our point of entry in this Bergsonian time frame. This is not relativism but grounded perspectivism, radical immanence, politics of locations. What matters is to negotiate collectively about what exactly we are in the process of becoming, and how much—transformation, pain, disidentification, enhancement, etc.—our embodied and embrained selves can take. The posthuman is just the question, the answer is what 'we' are capable of becoming and *this* answer can only be a practical and pragmatic one. It is the praxis that aims at becoming a multitude of missing people, multiple 'we' becoming-world together, amidst the painful contradictions of the anthropocene moment, when the waves of world history may be about to erase from the sandy shores of this planet the face of a species that will have been our own.

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[7]In *Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972, Deleuze and Guattari go so far as to foresee even the financialization of the economy and the emergence of a system based on debt.

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