

# Transposing Life

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Genetic bio-capitalism is less of a concept than a web of multi-layered and contested discourses and social practices focusing on the management of Life and living matter. Contemporary genetics, bio-technologies and their convergence with information technologies are central to the shift toward the post-human politics of “Life” as “Bios” or “Zoe,” which I aim to discuss in this essay. The mutual interdependence of living beings and technologies creates a new symbiotic relationship, which displaces both the humanistic assumption about “Man” as the measure of all things and also the anthropocentric hubris that automatically positions the “Human” at the center of all discursive and social practices. A radical critique of anthropocentrism leads to the recognition of the entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making of subjectivity and contemporary social practices. This is what I refer to as “zoe” or non-human life (Braidotti, *Transpositions*).

The notion of the post-human as both post-humanism and as non-anthropocentrism lies at the core of a number of scientific discourses about Life, in social and political theory as well as cultural critique. This emphasis on Life forces was both announced in and renewed by post-structuralist philosophies of bio-power, which emphasize the play of differences, the work of resistance and the production of alternative subject positions. A reference to Foucault may well be de rigueur here, but his unfinished project on bio-power is one of a number of significant explorations in critical and anti-essentialist vitalist politics which grew on the far left of the European political spectrum and in Europe-based Continental philosophy through the 1970s and 1980s. Gilles Deleuze’s notion of radical immanence (“L’immanence” 3–7) and Irigaray’s experiments with the sensible transcendental are other significant models (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*).

Michel Foucault reads bio-power in the frame of his analysis of both the cultural logic and the political economy of modern governmentality. This encompasses the management of all the living resources that compose a people, not only those covered by the sociological categories of class, gender, race and ethnicity, but also some more visceral or elemental ones. These have to do with the sheer bodily materiality, or corporeality, of the subject. They are the generative, living forces of individuals as members of a species, which are bio-political *par excellence* and thus both propel the production of and escape the control by discursive practices. Bio-power tends to turn all subjects into disposable bodies, yet it does so with striking degrees of internal differentiation and, more importantly, it encounters resistance at all levels. The focus of a Foucauldian analysis falls upon the technologies of subject-formation and their complex webs of social relations. In a theoretical move that runs alongside feminist and postcolonial analyses, without ever acknowledging them, however (Braidotti, *Patterns*; McNay) Foucault foregrounds the importance of micro-instances of power and locates resistance at a suitably molecular level. The workings of bio-power are best exemplified by relatively recent discursive phenomena such as population statistics, public health (mental as well as physical), sexology and the gradual elimination of anomalies, defects and malfunctions among the population in a proliferation of techniques for disciplining embodied subjects, which amounts to a “soft” eugenics.

The Foucauldian take on bio-power not only refines our understanding of the all-pervasive techniques of control and surveillance, including those that are self-implemented, but it also has another merit. It highlights the paradoxical proximity of social practices that are related to death in the sense of elimination, exclusion and even extermination. The politics of bio-power affect the subjects who are allowed to survive, as well as those who are doomed to perish. It is a rather brutal regime of gradual, all-pervasive selection, which takes the form of distributing and controlling the entitlement to “life” understood as survival and perpetuation. Giorgio Agamben develops this aspect of Foucault's work and I will return to it later. It is the case that one cannot deal adequately with the social and political implications of bio-politics without raising the question of death and ways of dying: necro-politics and bio-power are two faces of the same coin. I do not think, however, that we need to diversify our thinking and terminology about death, so as not to reduce it to either radical exteriority or to the metaphysics of finitude, but rather take it in as a vital component of our biogenetic system. I shall not, however, pursue this line further here.

The theoretical legacy of Foucault's project on contemporary bio-governmentality is problematic. The unfinished nature of Foucault's project has been complicated by two elements: the first is the split that has occurred between the so-called “second” Foucault—who through the history of sexuality defined as technologies of self-styling, posits a new model of ethical inter-relation—and the earlier Foucault, who concentrated on the analysis of power formations and patterns of exclusion. This split

reception institutionalizes a new division of labor between power analyses on one hand and ethical discourses on the other. This meta-ethical turn is useful in stressing the need to elaborate new systems of values that reflect the changing structures of subjectivity. It also creates, however, an unresolved tension in relation to the first phase of Foucault's work, more centred on power. It is, therefore, urgent to assess the state of the theoretical debates on bio-power after Foucault, especially in terms of its legal, political and ethical implications.

The second problematic element in the reception of Foucault's bio-power is the rapid rate of progress and change undergone by contemporary biotechnologies and the challenges they throw to the human and social sciences. Here Foucault's work has been criticized, notably by Donna Haraway, for relying on an outdated vision of how technology functions. It is argued that Foucault's bio-power provides a cartography of a historical moment that is now past. Haraway's work itself offers a stark contrast in that it also starts from the assumption that "life as a system to be managed, a field of operations constituted by scientists, artists, cartoonists, community activists, mothers, anthropologists, fathers, publishers, engineers, legislators, ethicists, industrialists, bankers, doctors, genetic counsellors, judges, insurers, priests, and all their relatives—has a very recent pedigree" (174). In other words, contemporary science has moved beyond Foucault's bio-power and has already entered the age of "the informatics of domination", which is a different regime of discourse, visualization and control. Deleuze and Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus; A Thousand Plateaus*) also analyze this new formation of power over life in their work on capitalism as schizophrenia and move beyond the Foucauldian framework. They provide the single most coherent analysis of materialist vitalism, or "Life" in a post-anthropocentric vein. More on this later.

A central element of discrepancy between Foucault's bio-power and the contemporary structure of scientific thought is the issue of anthropocentrism. Contemporary technologies are not man-centered, but have emphasized the mutual interdependence of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making of social and political practices. The focus on life itself as *zoe* or post-human force encourages a sort of bio-centered egalitarianism (Pearson, *Viroid Life*), forcing a reconsideration of the concept of subjectivity in terms of "life-forces."

It dislocates but also redefines the relationship between self and other by shifting the traditional axes of difference—genderization, racialization and naturalization—away from a binary opposition into a more complex and less oppositional mode of interaction. Bio-politics thus re-locates the Same-Other interaction and inaugurates alternative modes of relation in multiple, non-dialectical and complex ways. These "hybrid" social identities and the modes of multiple belonging they enact are not based on the reproduction of sameness, but rather on the recognition of incommensurable difference as constitutive of the Self-Other relationship. They may constitute

the starting point for mutual and respective accountability, and pave the way for an ethical re-grounding of social participation and community building. More on this in the conclusion.

### **Life as Zoe**

In light of these critical considerations, I want to propose a shift of emphasis away from the residual Kantianism of the late Foucault and argue for a neo-vitalist perspective that combines Deleuze with feminist, post-colonial and race theory. This shift implies a change of emphasis from the classical and highly formalized distinction between “*bios*” and “*zoe*.” I value *zoe*, as vitalistic, pre-human and generative life, rather than *bios*, the political discourse about life. I want to defend the argument that the emergence of *zoe* results in the need for a shift of paradigm about bio-politics in general and for the politics of difference more specifically. Let me expand on this.

The emergence of vital politics, or “life itself” (Rose), scrambles the relationship between Same and others which had already become unsettled in postmodernity. The relationship to woman/native/nature, which mark respectively the processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization—albeit in the non-dialectical, deconstructive, affirmative or rhizomatic manner made current by poststructuralist analyses—not only confirms the power of the One and hence the replication of Sameness. The whole frame of the interaction is rather reorganized in relation to the emergence of *zoe*, so that what returns as a major concern is the “other” of the human defined as the anthropo-centric vision of the embodied subject. This is the other face of *bios*, that is to say *zoe*, the generative vitality of non- or pre-human or animal life. This pre-human force combines in surprising ways with the non-human potency of contemporary technologies. They converge upon the production of discourses that take “Life” as a subject and not as the object of social and discursive practices and contribute to the making of the post-human predicament.

The political economy of this shift of perspective in bio-genetic capitalism is complex. The bio-technological interventions neither suspend nor automatically improve the social relations of exclusion and inclusion that historically had been predicated along the sexualized, racialized and naturalized lines of demarcation of “otherness.” In some ways, the ongoing technological revolution merely intensifies the patterns of traditional discrimination and exploitation (Eisenstein; Shiva; Gilroy).

As a consequence, critical social and cultural theory need to develop new tools for the analysis of power over living matter in the complex frame of the new global world order, at the same point in time when the very notion of *bios/zoe* or life is called into question in a variety of ways. For instance, this emphasis on life as *bios-zoe* opens up the eco-philosophical dimension of the problem, which inaugurates alternative ecologies of belonging. It shifts toward the recognition of the inextricable entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making of the subject. It is

a sort of bio-centered egalitarianism which, as Keith Ansell Pearson (*Germinal Life*) suggests, forces a reconsideration of the concept of subjectivity in relation to the “others” of the human, the vegetable and the environment: all of them being “life-forces” that displace anthropocentrism. It also marks a post-secular turn that acknowledges the emergence of the Earth as a planetary political agent and hence of new modes of panhuman inter-connection. Let me explore this point further with a series of selected examples.

### **Embodied capital**

The work of Franklin, Lury and Stacey shows that the global economy entails the cannibalization of nature by a market ruled by short-term profit based on bio-genetic matter. This process is matched by an increased degree of control, reterritorialisation and, consequently, re-invention of nature. However, refigured and saturated with technological culture, “nature” also resists. It is more than the sum of its marketable appropriations and remains an agent that acts beyond the reach of commodification. The point in case here would be environmental catastrophes and the extent to which they exemplify the co-presence of nature and culture in contemporary global risk societies (Beck, *Risk Society*; *World Risk Society*). I refer to this surplus vitality of living matter in terms of *zoe*, post-human life, as opposed to the discursive production of meanings of life as *bios*. I will return to this.

Franklin argues that contemporary technology-driven societies develop and are supported by a genetic social imaginary that rests on the equation between the genetic code or DNA and marketable brand names. Genes are capital. Thus, contemporary car engineering, for instance, is visually marketed in a genetic format, which stresses the industrial transmission of inherited traits through careful selection and manufacturing of strengths and weaknesses. This commercialized version of social Darwinism adds a touch of irony to the widespread idea of the “next generation” of electronic gadgets, computers, cars or whatever.

Accordingly, the political economy of the bodies-technologies interaction has undergone a paradoxical evolution. In the historical phase of modernity, the machine provided a sort of body-double which, as the site of imaginary projection, was both genderized and eroticized. Examples of this are the female robot in Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* (Huysen) or the virile locomotives in Eisenstein’s cinema (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*). In post-modernity, however, this relationship changes: electronic and digital machinery and their post-human bodies are figures of complexity, mixture, hybridity and interconnectivity (Halberstam and Livingston). As such, they do not provide a smooth surface for projection, are not positioned comfortably within the gender polarity, nor are they particularly sexualized. Contemporary technology marks instead a systematic scrambling of codes (Hayles), hence a space of sexual indeterminacy, undecidability or trans-sexuality.

This is echoed by the notion of stepping beyond gender, which is highly dominant in contemporary advanced cultures. This fantasy is conveyed both in the dominant molar mode by the social imaginary about cyborgs and in the more radical minoritarian mode by feminist, queer and other counter-cultures. This blurring of the boundaries of gender and sexual difference, in the sense of a generalized androgynous drive, is characteristic of post-industrial societies (Lyotard) and hence cannot be assumed to be intrinsically transgressive. In fact, queering identities can be seen as a dominant ideology under advanced capitalism (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*). This sexually indeterminate or transsexual social imaginary may appear at first to blur or interfere with the replication of sameness, or cultural cloning, which is so central to the political economy of advanced capitalism—as it was to the old phallo-logocentric world order. On closer analysis, however, it does nothing of the sort. The discourse of indeterminacy and of degrees of in-between-ness goes hand-in-hand with the brutal return of sexual polarizations and rigid gender roles, both in the West and in the rest.

This can be demonstrated with reference to contemporary global politics. The so-called “clash of civilizations” is postulated and fought out on women’s bodies as bearers of authentic ethnic and religious identities. The painful paradoxes implied here can be shown by the claim made by the anti-feminist and arch-conservative President George W. Bush, that he invaded Afghanistan also to liberate the Burka-clad Afghan women. This is a racist and sexist manipulation that aims to justify one of the many commercially-driven wars of conquest. Another would be the charge—made during the Iraq war—that the European Union has become feminized or effeminate and hence has lost the edge in military leadership to the far more virile U.S.A. The global political arena posits both gender dichotomies and sexual difference defined as the specificity of separate gender roles as the terrain on which power politics is postulated. In a context of racism, xenophobia and global degradation of the status of women and children, this type of gender politics results in mutual and respective claims about authentic and unitary female identity on the part of the “liberated” West and of its allegedly traditionalist opponents. They are mirror images of each other and engender specular forms of fundamentalism.

This schizoid double-pull of simultaneous displacement and re-fixing of differences, including the binary gender opposition, is one of the most problematic aspects of contemporary political culture. It is also the key to its vehement anti-feminism, in that it erodes the grounds for the affirmation and the empowerment of embodied and embedded feminist political subjects. In this context, the maternal function and hence the reproduction of the human in its bio-cultural mode has become simultaneously disengaged from the female body—in bio-technologically assisted reproduction—or in technophilic social practices that actualize “the desire to be wired.” Motherhood has also, however, been re-naturalized in a number of paradoxical variations ranging from fundamentalist religious convictions to secular affirmations of

being “proud to be flesh.” These paradoxical patterns reflect the schizophrenic double-pull that marks the global era. The simultaneous occurrence of opposite effects defeats the logic of excluded middle and fits in with the manic-depressive alternation of euphoria and melancholia, which is the political economy of affectivity in advanced capitalism. To translate this into the language of nomadic subjects: the pull toward traditional or reactive values (Molar, sedentary, linear, static, replication of Sameness) is balanced by a more progressive and active drive toward more innovative solutions (Molecular, nomadic, dynamic, positivity of incommensurable differences). The molar line of reterritorialization and the multiple lines of becoming are contiguous, but they trace altogether divergent patterns. Keeping these two lines well distinct qualitatively, while respecting the simultaneity of their occurrence is an analytic necessity, albeit a challenging one (Braidotti, *Transpositions*).

### **The immaterial labor of the digital proletariat**

A second example of this political economy of bio-genetic capitalism is the analysis of the labor and economic politics of the globalized world, as exemplified by those who are marginalized. A significant case is provided by the workers in call centers who cater to the information society by processing phone inquiries from selected locations miles away from the callers’ homes. Denounced strongly by Arundhati Roy, these “call centers” or data outsourcing agencies are a multi-billion dollar industry that has attracted a great deal of critical attention in both mainstream and alternative media (Biemann). This kind of service industry labor presents a number of features that are reminiscent of the exploitative work conditions of former industrial culture, but also innovates on them.

In their work replying to phone enquiries, indigenous workers simulate the Western consumers whose queries they are handling. This strategy is not mere impersonation, for there is no visual or physical contact between the parties involved. Nor can it be seen as a form of identification, as the workers need not feel or experience themselves as being from a different culture/nation in order to fulfil their contractual obligations. It is rather like a logistical issue: working in a call center is about carefully orchestrated simulation that plays on the accent, the affected knowledge of local weather, lifestyles, cultural traditions and enforced cheerfulness. As such, it requires a radical “Othering” of oneself, or a mild form of schizophrenia, which is not a masquerade in the ironical sense of self-exploration, but reification of the worker’s own life-world. Not unlike characters in a chat room, call centre workers perform their labor market persona in such a way as to emerge from the process neither wiser nor enriched (especially considering that workers in these call centers are paid one-tenth of their Western counterparts), but rather firmly located as “the emerging digital proletariat that underpins the new world economy” (Biemann 85). Another significant example of the same phenomenon is the extensive reliance of the computer games

industry on test-players drawn from mostly male youth in former Eastern Europe. Playing computer games up to 15 hours a day at a time—in an industry that operates continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week—for wages of about U.S.\$130 a month, these digital workers have invented the virtual sweatshop (Harding).

This is today's immaterial variation on the theme of bodily exploitation, which fits into the global marketing of both material commodities and of Western lifestyles, cultures and appropriate accents. Hardt and Negri stress the immaterial and affective nature of this labor force which trades phonetic skills, linguistic ability and proper accents services, as well as requiring attention, concentration, high spirits and great care. This *tour de force* by the digital workers of the new global economy rests on an acute and explicit awareness of one's location in space and time, and yet it functions through border crossings, nomadic shifts and paths of deterritorialization. The allegedly ethereal nature of cyberspace and the flow of mobility it sustains are fashioned by the material labor of women and men from areas of the world that are thought to be peripheral. The collapse of the binary opposition of center-periphery introduces a new fluctuating continuum between discrete spaces in the global economy. This space of fluctuation is racialized and sexualized to a high degree and it is exploited accordingly, thus reproducing traditional relations of power that defy the complexity of the very material conditions that engender them.

### **Bio-piracy**

The third example I want to quote is what Vandana Shiva has called bio-piracy, namely the plea for bio-diversity in global culture by resisting the practice of patenting biotechnological products. Shiva connects this practice to European empire building over the last 500 years and sees a continuum between them and the policies of the WTO and the World Bank. In a Foucauldian shift, Shiva links bio-piracy to the individualist philosophies of Locke, Hume and other “fathers” of liberalism, arguing that their theoretical works both reflect and legitimate capitalist appropriation of the world's resources and the eviction of others. These individualist theories are still operational in contemporary legal practices and institutions such as intellectual property rights and the policies of the World Trade Organization and the GATT apparatus. What marks specifically the present historical era, argues Shiva, is the fact that the target of capitalist looting has shifted from the former colonies to the “new frontiers,” to the “natural resources” represented by human genetics in general, and women's reproductive powers in particular. Capital, as I argued earlier, is the generative power of living matter and the resilient vitality of “Life.” The self-generative power of living matter is both denied and enhanced by patenting and branding for the sake of corporate profit. Life, as both *bios* and *zoe*, actualized in seeds and cells, is cash.

In Shiva's assessment, “bio-piracy,” as the ultimate colonization of the interior of living organisms, not only destroys bio-diversity, endangering the many species that

used to live on this planet. It also threatens cultural diversity by depleting the capital of human knowledge through the devalorization of local knowledge systems and world-views. Eurocentric models of scientific rationality and technological development damage human diversity. The patent system legalizes bio-piracy, spreads monocultures and homogenization in both nature and social systems. The strategy of resistance proposed by Shiva is globalized eco-feminism.

In a significant divergence of opinion with Shiva; Franklin, Lury and Stacey point to a structural ambivalence in the political economy of advanced capitalism. They argue that, as a privatized icon for commercialized biodiversity, the seed connects the old Universalist idea of “nature” to the financial reality of global culture. Just as the Humans have their Genome project, plants have their Heritage Seed catalog, which patents a number of seeds. They are advertised as organic, home-grown, but also ancient and, as such, the repository of old lore and cultural authenticity. This holistic ethos guarantees both the perpetuation of the species and the preservation of techno-culture. The reproductive female body as a whole is the seed which corporate capitalism wants to patent and eventually clone, according to the paradox of a new global compound of nature/culture that is naturalized and commercialized simultaneously. In both cases, however, the seed as the gene conveys the notion of purity of the lineage and of direct genetic inheritance.

In other words, in the era of globalization, the very notions of cultural diversity and local knowledge systems can be seen as one of the products of advanced capitalism, not as its excluded others. Diversity, including indigenous or authentic local culture, has become a highly valuable and marketable commodity. In its commercialized form, it has increased the uniformity of consumers’ habits, while sponsoring the proliferation of “local” differences or micro-diversities. The global market is fuelled by “differences,” so that the “local” is a political space constructed by the global flows of capital (Hardt and Negri). Because the proliferation of local differences for the sake of marketability is one of the features of the global economy, one must beware of taking any claim to local cultural identity and difference at face value. All identities are in process and, consequently, are inherently contradictory. They are best approached in an open-ended and contested manner, in keeping with the cognitive and figural “style” of philosophical nomadism and its transposing method (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses; Transitions*).

### **The plight of animals**

The paradoxes and contradictions of our post-human historical condition are brought into stark evidence by the status of animals, which provides my last illustration. If people in war-torn lands such as Afghanistan are reduced to eat grass in order to survive (*Guardian Weekly* 3–5 Jan. 2002), the former herbivore bovine animals of the United Kingdom and parts of the European Union have turned carnivore. Our agricultural

bio-technological sector has taken an unexpected cannibalistic turn by fattening cows, sheep and chickens on animal feed. This is not the least of the paradoxes confronting the critical thinker and the aware citizen these days. Animals (mice, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, rabbits, birds, poultry, and cats) are bred in industrial farms, locked up in battery-cage production units reminiscent of torture chambers. Paradoxically, however, because they are an integral part of the bio-technological industrial complex, more animals enjoy peculiar privileges. Thus, livestock in the European Union receive subsidy to the tune of U.S.\$803 per cow. This is not so remarkable when compared to the U.S.\$1,057 that is granted to each American cow and U.S.\$2,555 given to each cow in Japan. These figures look quite different when compared to the Gross National Income *per capita* in countries such as Ethiopia (U.S.\$120), Bangladesh (U.S.\$360), Angola (U.S.\$660) or Honduras (U.S.\$920) (*Guardian Weekly* 11–17 Sep. 2003).

Animals provide living material for scientific experiments. They are manipulated, mistreated, tortured and genetically recombined in ways that are productive for our bio-technological agriculture, the cosmetics industry, drugs and pharmaceutical industries and other sectors of the economy. The monitoring group “Gene Watch Outs” places their numbers at a half million per year; other animals, such as pigs, are genetically modified to produce organs for humans in xeno-transplantation experiments (*Guardian Weekly* 23–29 May 2002). Animals are the mass of tradable disposable bodies of many species, which are inscribed in a global circulation. They are also sold as exotic commodities and constitute the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms, but ahead of women. Cloning animals is now an established practice: Oncomouse and Dolly the sheep are already part of history; the first cloned horse was born in Italy on May 28, 2003. It took more than 800 embryos and nine would-be surrogate mother mares to produce just one foal (*Guardian Weekly* 14–20 Aug. 2003). These developments are in keeping with the complex and dynamic logic of contemporary genetics, which confront us with non-linear ways of conducting science that are better rendered as transpositions (more on this term below). Bio-genetic capitalism entails the commercialization of life forms in all their complexity, through a series of systematic but scattered modes of appropriation.

### **The emergence of zoe**

The series of examples I have provided illustrate the perversity of contemporary bio-capitalism. Its political economy consists in multiplying and distributing differences within categories and species only for the sake of profit. It produces ever-shifting waves of genderization and sexualization, racialization and naturalization of multiple “others,” while de-materializing them. It has thus effectively disrupted the categorical distinctions that used to exist among the empirical referents of Otherness—women, natives and animal or earth others—and the processes of discursive

formation of genderization/racialization/naturalization. Once the empirical referents and the discursive processes are de-linked, advanced capitalism looks like a system that promotes feminism without women, racism without races, natural laws without nature, reproduction without sex, sexuality without genders, multiculturalism without ending racism, economic growth without development, and cash flow without money. Late capitalism also produces fat-free ice cream and alcohol-free beer next to genetically modified health food, companion species alongside computer viruses, new animal and human immunity breakdowns and deficiencies, and the increased longevity of those who inhabit the advanced world. Welcome to capitalism as schizophrenia!

This colossal hybridization effort also means that the political representation of embodied subjects can no longer be understood within the visual economy of biopolitics in Foucault's sense of the term. Nor is it just *specular* anymore in the psychoanalytic dialectical scheme of oppositional recognition of self-and/as other. It has rather become schizoid, or internally disjointed (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus; A Thousand Plateaus*). It is also *spectral* (Derrida) living beings are represented as a self-replicating system that is immersed in a visual economy of endless circulation. Contemporary embodied subjects have to be accounted for in terms of their surplus value as genetic containers on one hand, and as visual commodities circulating in a global circuit of cash on the other. Much of this information is not knowledge-driven, but rather media-inflated and thus indistinguishable from sheer entertainment. Today's capital is spectral and our social imaginary is forensic (Braidotti, *Transpositions*) in its quest for traces of a life that it no longer controls.

The Life that inhabits us is not ours: we are just time-sharing it. Life is half animal, *zoe* (zoology, zoophilic, zoo); and half discursive, *bios* (bio-logy). Whereas philosophy has always upheld this classical distinction in a strict hierarchical order that privileges the latter, contemporary critical theory is calling for a serious restructuring of this relationship. *Zoe* is no longer the poor half of a couple that foregrounds *bios* defined as intelligent discursive life. The spurious humanism of centuries of Christian indoctrination about the centrality of "Man" has worn rather thin. The mind-body dualism, which had historically functioned as a shortcut through the complexities has lost credibility. *Zoe* as post-human force is now the central concern: it covers the entire animal and Earth's others. This used to be called "Nature" and be constructed as the constitutive outside of the human polity. Now, *zoe* no longer marks the outside of the subject. We can therefore speak of a generalized "becoming infrahuman" of Life—so much so that this category has cracked under the strain and has splintered into a web of interconnected effects.

### **Life, encore**

Different theoretical positions have emerged in recent scholarship about bio-politics in biogenetic capitalism. For instance, some thinkers stress the importance of moral

accountability as a form of bio-political citizenship, thus re-asserting the notion of “Life” as “bios,” that is to say an instance of governmentality that is as empowering as it is confining (Rose; Rabinow; Esposito). This neo-Kantian school of thought locates the political moment in the relational and self-regulating accountability of bio-ethical subjects that take full responsibility for their genetic existence. The advantage of this position is that it calls for a higher degree of lucidity about one’s bioorganic existence—which means that the naturalist paradigm is definitely abandoned. The disadvantage of this position, however, in a political context of dismantling the welfare state and increasing privatization, is that it allows a neo-liberal perversion of this notion. Bio-ethical citizenship indexes access to and the cost of basic social services such as health care to an individual’s manifest ability to act responsibly by reducing the risks and exertions linked to the wrong lifestyle. In other words, here bio-ethical agency means taking adequate care of one’s own genetic capital. The recent campaigns against smoking, excessive drinking and overweight constitute evidence of this neo-liberal normative trend that supports hyper-individualism.

A second important group is formed by feminist, environmentalist and race theorists who have addressed the shifting status of “difference” in advanced capitalism in a manner that respects the complexity of social relations and critiques liberalism, while highlighting the specificity of a gender and race approach. In feminist theory—a relevant area of scholarship that I find missing from far too much of the scholarship on bio-politics, globalization and technology studies—this point has been taken quite seriously (Haraway; Gilroy; Benhabib; Butler; Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*; Grosz; Barad). Feminist, environmentalist and race theorists have addressed the shifting status of “difference” in advanced capitalism in a manner that respects the complexity of social relations and critiques liberalism, while highlighting the specificity of a gender and race approach (Gilroy; Essed and Goldberg; Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*; Butler; Grosz).

A third grouping takes its lead from Heidegger and is best exemplified by Giorgio Agamben. It defines “bios” as the result of the intervention of sovereign power as that which is capable of reducing the embodied subject to “bare life,” that is to say “zoe.” The vitality of the subject is identified with its vulnerability and thus reduced to its propensity to death and extinction. Bio-power leads primarily to necro- or Thanatos-politics. The horizon of mortality overrules any positive potential in zoe. This reduction, combined with a cross-reference to the political theology of Carl Schmidt results, among other things, in the indictment of the project of modernity. As I indicated earlier, I find this over-emphasis on mortality both unwarranted and inadequate in relation to the positive potential of zoe as non-human life, read with Nietzsche, Spinoza and Deleuze.

A fourth significant community of scholars works within a Spinozist framework, and includes Deleuze (*Difference; Logic*; “L’immanence”; Deleuze and Guattari,

*A Thousand Plateaus*), Guattari, Glissant, Gatens and Lloyd, Hardt and Negri, Balibar, Colebrook, Grosz, and myself. The emphasis here falls on the politics of life itself as a relentlessly generative force and on the interrogation of the shifting inter-relations between human and non-human forces. Let me expand on this position.

As I stated before, the key to the biogenetic shift is the overturning of anthropocentrism. Post-structuralism initiated this critique by declaring, with Foucault, the “death” of the humanistic subject of knowledge. We are experiencing a further stage in this process and, as the rhizomic philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari point out, we are forced to confront the inbuilt anthropocentrism, which prevents us from relinquishing the categorical divide between *bios* and *zoe*, and thus makes us cling to the superiority of discursive power, rational consciousness, and human agency. The monist political ontology of Spinoza, revisited with contemporary concerns and frames of reference, can rescue us from this contradiction, by providing a continuum through the theory of radical immanence. Accordingly, Deleuze dissolves and re-grounds the subject into an eco-philosophy of intensive becoming. This takes the form of a strong emphasis on the pre-human or even non-human elements that compose the web of forces, intensities and encounters that contribute to the making of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses; Transpositions*). *Zoe* refers to the endless vitality of life as continuous becoming. Guattari refers to this process as a transversal form of subjectivity or “trans-individuality.” This mode of diffuse yet grounded subject position achieves a double aim: firstly, it critiques individualism and, secondly, it supports a notion of subjectivity in the sense of qualitative, transversal, and group-oriented agency.

Let me emphasize a number of features of this neo-vitalist, anti-essentialist cartography that takes life as the subject of critical theory. The first point is that the technological subject is, in fact, an ecological unit. This *zoe*-techno-body is marked by the interdependence with its environment through a structure of mutual flows and data transfer that is best configured by the notion of viral contamination (Pearson, *Viroid*), or intensive symbiotic inter-connectedness. This nomadic eco-philosophy of belonging is complex and multi-layered.

Secondly, this environmentally-bound, bio-genetically constituted subject is a collective entity, moving beyond the parameters of classical humanism and anthropocentrism. The human organism is an in-between that is plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces. As such, it is useful to define it as a machine, which does not mean anything with a specifically utilitarian aim, but rather something that is simultaneously more abstract and more materially embedded. The minimalist definition of a body-machine is an embodied affective and intelligent entity that captures, processes, and transforms energies and forces. Being environmentally bound and territorially based, an embodied entity feeds upon, incorporates, and transforms its (natural, social, human, or technological) environment

constantly. Being embodied in this high-tech ecological manner means being immersed in fields of constant flows and transformations. Not all of them are positive, of course, although in such a dynamic system this cannot be known or judged *a priori*, but has to be experimented with and assessed *a posteriori*.

Thirdly, the specific temporality of the subject needs to be re-thought. The subjects are evolutionary engines, endowed with their own embodied temporality, both in the sense of the specific timing of the genetic code and the more genealogical time of individualized memories. If the embodied subject of bio-power is a complex molecular organism, a bio-chemical factory of steady and jumping genes, an evolutionary entity endowed with its own navigational tools and an in-built temporality, then we need a form of ethical values and political agency that reflects this high degree of complexity.

Lastly, this ethical approach cannot be dissociated from considerations of power. The *bios-zoe*-centered vision of the technologically mediated subject of post-modernity or advanced capitalism is fraught with internal contradictions. Accounting for them is the cartographic task of critical theory.

This relocation of the subject also entails a number of methodological consequences about the status of social and political theory itself. The key idea of transposition as a method is that it allows us to leap from one discursive code to another, re-telling, re-configuring, and re-visiting the concept, phenomenon or event one is analyzing, as if from different locations. It is related to Spinozist perspectivism (Gatens and Lloyd), but infuses it with a nomadic spin, which establishes multiple connections and lines of argument. Resolutely non-linear, it works by the eternal return of multiple differences, not of Sameness: it is a creative mimesis, not static repetition. Re-visiting the same idea, project or location from different angles is therefore not merely a quantitative multiplication of options, but rather a qualitative leap of perspective. This leap takes the form of a hybrid mixture of codes, genres, or modes of intellectual apprehension. A higher degree of interdisciplinary effort is needed in social and political thought: more akin to transversality and boundary-crossings among a range of discourses.

Because transposition is a way of reworking the interrelation among different differences (sexualization, racialization, naturalization), it is grounded in critical theory and, more specifically, in transnational feminist theory, environmental thought and critical race theory. All these share a passionate commitment, not only to dislodge “difference” from its hegemonic position as an instrument of world-historical systems of domination, exclusion and disqualification. They are also determined to prevent the discursive replication of sameness under this play of differential discourses. They do so by inscribing complexity, multiplicity, and internal contradictions at the heart of the subject of knowledge, thereby showing it for the messy and makeshift assemblage it is.

A third requirement follows from the process-oriented structure of this approach, namely the emphasis on processes and interconnections. This requires an effort of our conceptual creativity in order to learn to think differently about us. Such a transformative epistemological project mobilizes more than the cognitive or epistemic qualities of a subject. It also calls for its affective or intensive resources, for the courage to negotiate the often dramatic shifts of perspective and location which are required for the implementation of a process-oriented (as opposed to concept-based and system-driven) thought. As a term that relies on both genetics and music, “transpositions” (Braidotti, *Transpositions*) is a useful tool.

### Conclusion

Far from precipitating us into an abyss of amorality, nihilism, and methodological anarchy, a bio-genetic, vitalist view of the subject fosters the possibility for more situated forms of interaction and situated micro-universals to emerge. A post-anthropocentric approach to the analysis of “life itself” is a way of broadening the sense of community by acknowledging its non-human components. For instance, contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living, creating a negative unity among humans. The Human Genome project, for instance, unifies all the human species in the urgency to organize an opposition against commercially-owned and profit-minded technologies. Franklin, Lury and Stacey refer to this situation as “pan humanity,” by which they mean a global sense of interconnection between the human and the non-human environment, as well as among the different sub-species within each category, creating a web of intricate interdependences. Most of this mutual dependence is of the negative kind: “as a global population at shared risk of global environmental destruction and united by collective global images” (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey) There are also positive elements, however, to this form of post-modern human interconnection. Franklin, *et al.* argue that this universalization is one of the effects of the global market economy.

The paradox of this new pan-humanity is not only the sense of shared and associated risks, but also affirmative elements, such as the pride in technological achievements and in the wealth that comes with them. Equally strong is the drive to elaborate systems of value that reflect these transformations. The state of the debates on these issues in fields as diverse as environmental, political, social, and ethical theories, to name just a few, shows a range of potentially creative positions. From the “world governance idea” to the ideal of a “world ethos,” through a large variety of ecological brands of feminism, the field is wide open. Powerful claims to non-Western forms of radical neo-humanism and planetary cosmopolitanism have been made by feminist and race theorists, such as Gilroy and Shiva, as a way of recomposing human ties in the global era.

In other words, we are witnessing a proliferation of locally-situated Universalist or pan-humanist ethical claims. Far from being a symptom of relativism, these claims

assert the productive force at work in contemporary subjectivity. They constitute the starting point for a web of intersecting forms of situated accountability, that is to say an ethics.

Zoe power keeps the “human” hanging between a future that cannot provide a safe guarantee and a fast rate of present change that demands one. This tantalizing situation expresses the perverse logic of bio-capitalism as a regime that points toward possible futures, while blocking and controlling access to them in such a way as to make sure that “life” never reaches the higher levels of intensity of which it is potentially capable. Working toward social relations and cultural practices that empower us to act affirmatively is the essence of a neo-Spinozist ethics of becoming.

The whole point is to elaborate sets of criteria for a new ethical system to be brought into being that steers a course between humanistic nostalgia and neo-liberal euphoria. In my view, that can only be an ethics that takes life (as *bios* and as *zoe*) as its point of reference, not for the sake of restoration of unitary norms or the celebration of the master narrative of global profit, but for the sake of elaborating sustainable modes of transformation and becoming.

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