

Relational Architectural Ecologies

Architecture, nature and subjectivity

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Chapter 1

Posthuman relational subjectivity and the politics of affirmation

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This chapter deals with the discursive and analytic conditions that frame contemporary subjectivity which, I will argue, is both posthuman and relational. At the core of new subject formations there is a double shift from the anti-humanism of the post-structuralist generation, to a post-anthropocentric approach. This shift takes place within globalized advanced capitalism that is marked by high levels of technological mediation, internally contradictory temporalities and necro-political governmentality, or governance by fear. The posthuman indicates the shifting locations of the human in the era that is also known as the anthropocene. Throughout the chapter I will take feminist theory and praxis as the main point of reference, stressing the transformative and affirmative character of feminist politics.

Posthumanism

The critique of humanism by post-structuralists, including the feminists, is a fundamental starting assumption. Their dynamic brand of social constructivism combines the analysis of techniques of subjectivation with the creation of empowering new ontologies of the self, and of self–other relations. Post-structuralists' vital materialism emphasizes the sexualized nature of human embodiment and inscribes relationality as the ontological feature of the human. By the same token, it positions the radical immanence of power relations at the core of the

debate in a Foucauldian perspective, for instance, power is not only negative or confining (*potestas*), but also affirmative (*potentia*) or productive of alternative subject positions and social relations.

Theoretically, this embodied and embedded brand of materialist philosophy of the subject introduces a break from the pillars on which the classical Cartesian vision of the rationalist subject rested, namely: universalism and dualism. The generation of Foucault, Derrida, Irigaray and Deleuze rejected universalist claims to a subject position that allegedly transcends spatio-temporal and geopolitical specificities and therefore is abstract in the sense of disembodied and dis-embedded. For feminists, the mindset of universalism, best exemplified in the notion of 'transcendent reason' (Lloyd 1985), 'abstract masculinity' (Hartsock 1987) and 'triumphant whiteness' (Ware 1992), is objectionable not only on epistemological, but also on ethical grounds. Situated feminist perspectives lay the preconditions for ethical accountability for one's own implications with the very structures one is analysing and opposing politically.

Post-structuralism marks the switch from Cartesian dualism to a Spinozist monistic philosophy that stresses the unity and self-organizing viability of matter, and redefines the binary relationship between self and other. Post-structuralists point out that the notion of 'otherness' functions through dualistic oppositions that confirm the dominant vision of 'sameness' by positing subcategories of difference and distributing them along asymmetrical power relations. In other words, the dominant apparatus of subjectivity is organized along a hierarchical scale that rewards the sovereign subject as the zero-degree of difference. Deleuze and Guattari call it 'the Majority subject' or the Molar centre of being (1980). Irigaray calls it 'the Same', or the hyper-inflated, falsely universal 'He' (Irigaray 1974, 1977), whereas Hill Collins calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of the subject of humanistic knowledge (Hill Collins 1991).

Furthermore, this insight counts not only for individuals, but also for their cultures. Thus, in European philosophy, this 'difference' has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion: to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than'. In the dualistic scheme of thought, difference or otherness is a constitutive axis which marks off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth). These others, however, are constitutive in that they are expected to confirm the same in His superior position and thus they are crucial to the assertion of the power of sameness.

To say that the structural Others of the modern subject re-emerge in postmodernity amounts to making them into a paradoxical and polyvalent site. They are simultaneously the symptom of the crisis of the subject, and for conservatives even its 'cause', but they also express positive, that is

non-reactive, alternatives. It is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the resurgent 'others': the women's and gay rights movements; the anti-racism and decolonization movements; the anti-nuclear and pro-environment movements are the voices of the structural Others of modernity. They also inevitably mark the crisis of the former 'centre' or dominant subject-position. In the language of philosophical nomadology, they express both the crisis of the majority and the patterns of becoming of the minorities. The aim of critical theory consists in providing both the methodological navigational tools and an ethical compass to allow us to tell the difference between these different flows of mutation.

According to the deeply seated anti-humanism of these philosophies, the fact that the dominant axes of definition of the humanistic subject of knowledge contribute to fixing the axes of difference or of otherness, has another important implication. Post-structuralist anti-humanism undoes from within the unitary identities indexed on phallogocentric, Eurocentric and normative standardized views of what constitutes the humanist ideal of 'Man'. It engenders, simultaneously, the processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization of those who are marginalized or excluded, but also the active production of half-truths, or forms of partial knowledge about these others. Power produces through exclusion: the others are included in this script as the necessary outside of the dominant vision of what it means to be human. Now, however, more specifically, we need normative distinctions between reactive, profit-oriented differences on the one hand and affirmative empowerment of alternative differences on the other. The criterion by which such difference can be established is ethical, and its implications, political.

Post-anthropocentrism

The insights of the posthumanist generations are currently developing in the direction of post-anthropocentrism. Spectacular developments, notably in neural sciences, the study of the earth and ecological systems and bio-genomics, as well as information digital technologies, have altered our shared understanding of what counts as the basic unit of reference for the human. The extent to which competing views about the human are central to contemporary scientific enquiry cannot fail to affect feminist practice, notably the terms and theoretical framework that shape our shared understanding of a feminist political subject. In the geological era that is already known as 'anthropocene' – that is to say a chronological time in which human activity is having a significant impact on the Earth's ecosystem and on our collective capacity to survive – we have moved towards a more complex relationship to our planetary destiny. This shift also affects the status of theory: is the anthropocene the era in which

critical theorists, including feminists, need to re-examine received ideas about the political subject? Doing this means taking some critical distance from the method of social constructivism, which has been endemic to European and North Atlantic feminist politics since Mary Wollstonecraft's passionate refutation of J.J. Rousseau's naturalization of inequalities between the sexes.

To advance the argument further, we need to consider the perverse multiple temporalities of globalized advanced capitalism. This system is a 'difference engine' that promotes the marketing of pluralistic differences and the commodification of the existence, the culture, the discourses of 'others', for the purpose of consumerism. As a consequence, the global system of the post-industrial world produces scattered and poly-centred, profit-oriented power relations. In our post-Cold War era, power functions not so much by binary oppositions, but in a fragmented and all-pervasive manner. This rhizomatic or web-like structure of contemporary power and its change of scale, however, do not alter fundamentally its terms of application. If anything, power relations in globalization are more ruthless than ever.

Late post-industrial societies have proved far more flexible and adaptable towards the proliferation of differences than the classical Left expected. These 'differences' have been however, turned into and constructed as marketable, consumable and often disposable 'others'. Popular culture – from music to cinema, new media, fashion and gastronomy – is a reliable indicator of this trend, which sells 'world music', or a savvy mixture of the exotic and the domestic, often in the mode of neocolonial appropriation of multicultural others.

In other words, advanced capitalism functions as the great nomad, the organizer of the mobility of commodified products. A generalized practice of 'free circulation' pertains, however, almost exclusively to the domain of goods and commodities, regardless of their place of origin, provided they guarantee maximum profit. But people do not circulate nearly as freely (Virno 2004, Lazzarato 1996). It is therefore crucial to expose the perverse nominalism of a logic of economic exploitation that equates capitalist flows and flux with profit-minded circulation of commodities. Given that technologies – more specifically the convergence of information and bio-technologies – are intrinsic to the social and discursive structures of post-industrial societies, they deserve special attention. The most critical aspect of the technological apparatus is the issue of access and participation. Considering the inequalities in the availability of electricity supplies, let alone telephone lines and modems, well may one wonder about the 'democratic' or 'revolutionary' potential of the new electronic and biogenetic frontiers. Thus, access and participation to the new high-tech world is unevenly distributed worldwide, with gender, age and ethnicity acting as major axes of negative differentiation (Eisenstein 1998).

In his political analysis of the historical condition of postmodernity, Brian Massumi (1998) describes global capitalism as a profit-oriented

mix-and-match system that vampirizes everything. His system rests on the paradox of the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory trends. On the one hand the globalization of the economic and cultural processes engenders increasing conformism in life-style, tele-communication and consumerism. On the other hand, the fragmentation of these processes, with the concomitant effects of increased structural injustices, the marginalization of large sections of the population, and the resurgence of regional, local, ethnic and cultural differences not only between the geo-political blocks, but also within them (Eisenstein 1998).

Given that the political economy of global capitalism consists in multiplying and distributing differences for the sake of profit, it produces ever-shifting waves of genderization and sexualization, racialization and naturalization of multiple 'others'. It has thus effectively disrupted the traditional dialectical relationship between the empirical referents of Otherness – women, natives and animal or earth others – and the processes of discursive formation of genderization/racialization/naturalization.

The spasmodic concurrence of these phenomena is the distinctive trait of our age. The commodification of differences turned the 'others' into objects of consumption, granting them alternatively a familiar and a threatening quality that bypasses the doors of the dialectics. We have entered into a zigzagging pattern of dissonant nomadic subjects. How to overcome the dualistic mode that has become so entrenched to our way of thinking remains the main challenge.

The posthuman turn pushes this dislocation further. It can also be described as a sort of 'anthropological exodus' from the dominant configurations of the human (Hardt and Negri 2000: 215) – a massive hybridization of the species which topples the anthropocentric Human from the sovereign position it has enjoyed for so long. This sovereign position was represented in a universal mode as Man, but this pseudo-universal has been widely criticized (Lloyd 1985) precisely because of its partiality. Universal Man, in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity: hardly a universal position.

Massumi refers to the posthuman as 'Ex-Man', 'a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human' and undergoing significant mutations: 'species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter' – bodily materialism dis-gregating (Massumi 1998: 60). Haraway puts it like this: 'this is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand' (1997: 74). What emerges from this is the vital politics of life, as non-human energy and self-organizing matter.

Feminist theory looks carefully at the dislocation of the dialectical relationships between the traditional axes of difference (sexualization/racialization/

naturalization) and attempts to come to terms with this challenge. A methodological challenge arises as a result: the advanced, bio-genetic structure of capitalism as a schizophrenic global economy does not function in a linear manner, but is web-like, scattered and poly-centred. It is not monolithic, but an internally contradictory process, the effects of which are differentiated geopolitically and along gender and ethnicity lines, to name only the main ones. This creates a few methodological difficulties for the social critic, because it translates into a heteroglossia of data. We need to adopt *non-linearity* as a major principle and to develop cartographies of power that account for the paradoxes and contradictions of the era of globalization, and which do not take shortcuts through its complexities.

Considering the extent to which contemporary capitalist economies depend on the commodification of life itself, there is an opportunistic form of posthuman condition emerging from the very post-anthropocentric opportunism of advanced capitalism. The bio-genetic structure of advanced capitalism is such that it is not only geno-centric (Fausto-Sterling 2000: 235), but also ruthlessly and structurally unjust. The epistemological analysis intersects with the political one: because the self-replicating vitality of living matter is targeted for consumption and commercial exploitation of bio-genetic culture, environmentally based political struggles have evolved into a new global alliance for sustainable futures. Haraway recognizes this trend and pays tribute to the martyred body of onco-mouse (Haraway 1997), as the farming ground for the new genetic revolution and manufacturer of spare parts for other species. Vandana Shiva (1997) also stresses the extent to which the bodies of the empirical subjects who signify difference (woman/native/earth or natural others) have become the disposable bodies of the global economy. Contemporary capitalism is 'bio-political' in that it aims at controlling all that lives: it has already turned into a form of biopiracy in that it aims at exploiting the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. This means that human and anthropomorphic others are relocated in a continuum with non-anthropomorphic or 'earth' others. The categorical distinction that separated the Human from his naturalized others has shifted, taking the humanist assumptions about what constitutes the basic unit of reference for the 'human' into a spin.

Let's take, for example, Dolly the sheep as the main figuration for the perverse temporalities and contradictions that structure our technological culture. Dolly is that sex which is not one – a collective entity repackaged as a bounded self. She/it is simultaneously the last specimen of her species – descended from the lineage of sheep that were conceived and reproduced as such – and the first specimen of a new species: the electronic and bio-genetic sheep that Phillip Dick dreamed of, the forerunner of the android society of *Blade Runner*. Cloned, not conceived sexually, heterogeneous mix of organism and machine, Dolly simply changes the name of the game. Severed from

reproduction and hence divorced from descent, Dolly is no daughter of any member of her/its old species – simultaneously orphan and mother of her/itself. Copy made in the absence of one single original, Dolly pushes the logic of the postmodern simulacrum to its ultimate perversion. She/it brings Immaculate Conception into a bio-genetic third-century version. The irony reaches a convulsive peak when we remember that Dolly died of a banal and all too familiar disease: rheumatism. After which, to add insult to injury, she/it suffered a last indignity: taxidermy. She/it was embalmed and exhibited in a science museum as a scientific rarity (shades of the nineteenth century) and a media celebrity (very twentieth century!). Dolly is simultaneously archaic and hyper-modern, she/it is a compound of multiple anachronisms, situated across different chronological axes, she/it inhabits different and self-contradictory time zones. Like other contemporary techno-teratological animals or entities (onco-mouse comes to mind), Dolly shatters the linearity of time and exists in a continuous present. This techno-electronic timeless time is saturated with a-synchronicity, that is to say, it is structurally unhinged.

Thinking about Dolly blurs the categories of thought we have inherited from the past – she/it stretches the longitude and latitude of thought itself, adding depth, intensity and contradiction. Because she/it embodies complexity, this entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is THE philosophical problem of today.

I refer to these bio-mediated practices of bodily materialism as 'matter-realism', radical neo-materialism or posthuman nomadic feminism. Central to them is the changing conceptual structure of matter itself, under the impact of contemporary bio-genetics and information technologies. I believe that a monistic political ontology that stresses processes, vital politics and non-deterministic evolutionary theories, is helpful in coming to terms with these new scientific developments. Politically, the emphasis falls on the micro politics of relations, and on posthumanist ethics that traces transversal connections among human and non-human agents. This high degree of transversality actualizes an ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, which values non-human or a-personal Life. This is what I call zoe itself (Braddott 2006).

Necro-political governmentality

If insights about the possibility of ending life on earth were a common nightmare in the nuclear era, the post-nuclear condition extends the horizon of extinction to most species and is now able to set a date to it. This inaugurates a negative or reactive form of pan-human planetary thinking, which recomposes humanity around a commonly shared threat. We are all humans, though some are definitely more mortal than others, and we share this vulnerability with animals

and plants. Thanatology or necro-politics is central to our political economy. Michel Foucault's essential insight into bio-power remains valid in so far as it also concerns the necro-political aspects. Bio-power is as much about letting some die as it is about actively working towards the survival of others.

The emphasis on the politics of life itself and especially the shifting boundaries between life and death add a necro-political dimension to contemporary debates on power, with emphasis on the destructive consequences of bio-genetic capitalism (Foucault 1976, 1984a, 1984b), in terms of species extinction and environmental disasters. 'Life' can be a threatening force, as evidenced by new epidemics and environmental catastrophes that blur the distinction between the natural and the cultural dimensions. 'The politics of life itself' makes technologically mediated 'life' into a contested political field (Rose 2001). Living matter itself becomes the subject and not the object of enquiry. These concerns have both the neo-liberal (Fukuyama 2002) and the neo-Kantian thinkers struck by high levels of anxiety about the sheer thinkability of human future (Habermas 2003).

The main field of necro-political research concentrates on the brutality of the new wars, the governance by fear, and the renewed expressions of violence which refers not only to the government of the living, but also to multiple practices of dying. Bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin, as Mbembe (2003) brilliantly argues. The post-Cold War world has seen not only a dramatic increase in warfare, but also a profound transformation of the war instance as such in the direction of a more complex management of survival and of extinction. 'Necro-politics' defines power essentially as the administration of death: 'the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population' (Mbembe 2003: 19). And not only human.

The implications of this approach to bio/necro-power are radical: it is not up to the rationality of the Law and the universalism of moral values to structure the exercise of power, but rather the unleashing of the unrestricted sovereign right to kill, maim, rape and destroy the life of others. This same power, following Agamben (1998), structures the attribution of different degrees of 'humanity' according to hierarchies that are disengaged from the old dialectics and unhinged from any political rationality. They fulfil instead a more instrumental, narrow logic of opportunistic exploitation of the life in you, which is generic and not only individual. The colonial plantation as the prototype of this political economy of detention, confinement and ultimate destruction turns the slave into the prototype of 'homo sacer'.

Contemporary necro-politics has taken the form of the politics of death on a global and regional scale. The new forms of industrial-scale warfare rest upon the commercial privatization of the army and the global reach of conflicts, which de-territorialize the use of and the rationale for armed service.

Reduced to 'infrastructural warfare' (Mbembe 2003), and to a large-scale logistical operation (Virilio 2002), war aims at the destruction of all the services that allow civil society to function: roads, electricity lines, airports, hospitals and other necessities. It also aims at protecting mineral extraction and other essential geo-physical resources needed by the global economy. In this respect, the 'new' wars look more like guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks than the traditional confrontation of enlisted and nationally indexed armies. One thinks specifically of the case of suicide bombers in the war on terror.

As a result, the 'population' as a political category, has also become disaggregated into 'rebels, child soldiers, victims or refugees, or civilians incapacitated by mutilation or massacred on the model of ancient sacrifices, while the "survivors", after a horrific exodus, are confined to camps and zones of exception' (Mbembe, 2003: 34). Aijun Appadurai (1998) has also provided incisive analyses of the new 'ethnocidal violence' of the new forms of warfare which involve friends, kinsmen and neighbours. He is appalled by the violence of these conflicts: 'the focus here is on bodily brutality perpetrated by ordinary persons against other persons with whom they may have – or could have – previously lived in relative amity' (Appadurai 1998: 907). Clearly, this exercise of violence cannot be adequately described in terms of disciplining the body, or even as the society of control – we have rather entered the era of orchestrated and instrumental massacres, a new 'semiosis of killing', leading to the creation of multiple and parallel 'death-worlds' (Mbembe 2003: 37).

The social reality of refugees and asylum seekers also becomes an emblem of the contemporary necro-power. Diken (2004) argues that refugees are the perfect instantiation of the disposable humanity of 'homo sacer' and thus constitute the ultimate necro-political subject. The proliferation of detention and high-security camps and prisons within the once civic-minded space of the European City is a further example of the loss of credibility of the rational bio-political order. The camps – 'sterilized, monofunctional enclosures' (Diken 2004: 91) – stand as the symbol of the indictment of liberal Western democracies. The link to colonialism is clear: de-colonization created nation-states whose people, once enslaved, are now free to circulate globally. These people constitute the bulk of the unwanted immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are contained and locked up across the developed world. In a twist not deprived of ironical force, world migration is perceived as a particular threat in Europe precisely because it endangers Europe's main infrastructure: the welfare state.

How does the necro-political dimension intervene in the discussion about feminist politics of affirmation? What are its implications for the practice of critical theory? Bio-power since Foucault led to a more sophisticated understanding of practices that latch onto 'life' as the main target. But death as a concept remains simultaneously central to political theory – in the form of the

horizon of mortality and the concern for human vulnerability – and unspoken. Death as a concept remains unitary and undifferentiated, while the bios-zoe horizon proliferates and diversifies.

My point is that the new necro-political practices mobilize not only generative forces, but also new and subtler degrees of extinction. This type of vitality, unconcerned by clear-cut distinctions between living and dying, composes the notion of 'zoe' as a non-human yet paradoxically affirmative life force. This vitalist materialism rests solidly on a neo-Spinozist political ontology of monism and radical immanence. Nomadic theory's main contribution to this debate rests on the concepts of radical immanence and non-deterministic vitalism, which unfold onto an affirmative ethics of bio-egalitarianism. Bio-centred egalitarianism is a philosophy of radical immanence and affirmative becoming, which activates a nomadic subject into sustainable processes of transformation. The zoe-centred embodied subject is shot through with relational linkages of the symbiotic, contaminating/viral kind which interconnect it to a variety of others, starting from the environmental or eco-others.

The transformative and affirmative character of feminist politics

How can we engage in affirmative politics, which entails the creation of sustainable alternatives geared to the construction of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which implies resistance to the present? This is one of the issues Deleuze and Guattari discuss at length, notably in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), in the relationship between creation and critique. It is however a problem that has confronted all activists and critical theorists: how to balance the creative potential of critical thought with the dose of negative criticism and oppositional consciousness that such a stance necessarily entails.

Central to this debate is the question of how to resist the present, more specifically the injustice, violence and vulgarity of the times, while being worthy of our times, so as to engage with them in a productive, albeit oppositional and affirmative manner. I shall return to this issue in the final section of this chapter. There is a contextual and a conceptual side to this problem and I will discuss each one of these and then examine some of their implications.

This engagement with the present – and the spirit of the times – sets the political agenda in a variety of realms, ranging from sexuality and kinship systems to religious and discursive practices. The analyses of these themes are transmitted through narratives – mythologies or fictions – which I have renamed as 'figurations' (Brandom 2002, 2006), or cartographies of the present. A cartography is a politically informed map of one's historical and social locations, to

enable the analysis of situated formations of power and hence the elaboration of adequate forms of resistance. Michel Foucault (1975) worked extensively on the notion of genealogy or counter-memories as a tool to draw the 'diagrams of the present' in his analysis of the microphysics of power in post-industrial societies. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980) also stressed the importance of immanent analyses of the singular actualizations of concrete power formations.

Feminism also pioneered the practice of the politics of locations (Rich 1985) as a method for grounding activism. It also perfected the strategy of positive renaming and re-signification of the subject. A location is an embedded and embodied memory: it is a set of counter-memories, which are activated by the resisting thinkers against the grain of the dominant social representations of subjectivity. A location is a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-productions of the subjects in their diversity. Accounting for this complexity is therefore anything but an instance of relativism. Locations provide the ground for political and ethical accountability. Rememberance, cartographies of locations, political (dis-)identifications and strategic reconfigurations are the tools for consciousness-raising which were devised by transformative epistemologies such as feminism and race theory (Passerini 1988; Haraway 1990; West 1994).

Both my practice and my concept of the political therefore pay tribute to this tradition of radical politics at a point in history where the general tendency is to dismiss it or deride it as a failed historical experiment. The main thesis I want to defend is that one of the most significant theoretical innovations it introduced is what later became known as 'radical immanence' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). This includes the notions of political passions, affirmative ethics and the rigorous vision of affectivity, which they entail.

Oppositional consciousness

The conceptual case of my argument rests on the rejection of the traditional equation between political subjectivity and critical oppositional consciousness, and the reduction of both to negativity. There is an implicit assumption that political subjectivity or agency is about resistance, and that resistance means the negation of the negativity of the present. A positive is supposed to be engendered by this double negative. Being against implies a belligerent act of negation, the erasure of present conditions.

This assumption shares in a long-constituted history of thought, which in Continental philosophy is best exemplified by Hegel. The legacy of Hegelian-Marxist dialectics of consciousness is such that it positions negativity as a necessary structural element of thought. This means that the rejection of conditions or premises that are considered unsatisfactory, unfair or offensive – on either ethical or political grounds – is the necessary pre-condition for their

critique. A paradoxical concurrence is thus posited between the conditions which one rejects and the discursive practice of critical philosophy and subsequent actions. This paradox results in establishing negativity as a productive moment in the dialectical scheme which fundamentally aims at overturning the conditions that produced it in the first place. Thus, critical theory banks on negativity and, in a perverse way, even requires it. The corollary of this assumption is that the same material and discursive conditions that create the negative moment – the experience of oppression, marginality, injury or trauma – are also the condition of their overturning. The material that damages is also that which engenders positive resistance, counteraction or transcendence (Foucault 1975). The process of consciousness-raising is crucial to the process of overturning or over-coding the negative instance. What triggers and at the same time is engendered by the process of resistance is collective oppositional consciousness. There is consequently a political necessity to elaborate adequate understandings and suitable representations of our real-life conditions. The negative experience can be turned into the matter that critical theory has to engage with. In this process, it turns into the productive source of counter-truths and values, which aim at over-coding the original negative instance. Epistemology therefore clears the ground for the ethical transformation that sustains political action.

This process is too often rendered in purely functional terms as the equation of political creativity/agency with negativity, or unhappy consciousness. I want to suggest, however, that much is to be gained by adopting a non-Hegelian analysis that foregrounds instead the creative or affirmative elements of this process. This shift of perspective assumes philosophical monism and the recognition of an ethical and affective component of subjectivity; it is thus both an anti-dualistic and an anti-rationalist position. A subject's ethical core is not his/her moral intentionality, as much as the effects of power (as repressive – *potestas* – and positive – *potentia* his/her actions are likely to have upon the world. It is a process of engendering modes of becoming (Deleuze 1968). Given that in this neo-vitalist view the ethical good is equated with radical relationality aiming at affirmative empowerment, the ethical ideal is to increase one's ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others. The oppositional consciousness and the political subjectivity or agency it engenders are processes or assemblages that actualize this ethical urge. This position is affirmative in the sense that it actively works towards the creation of alternatives by working through the negative instance, and by cultivating the relations that are conducive to the ethical transmutation of values.

What this means practically, is that the conditions for political and ethical agency are not dependent on the current state of the terrain. They are not oppositional and thus not tied to the present by negation; instead they are affirmative and geared to creating possible futures. Ethical and political

relations create possible worlds by mobilizing resources that have been left untapped, including our desires and imagination. The work of critique must focus on creating the conditions for the overturning of negativity precisely because they are not immediately available in the present. Moving beyond the dialectical scheme of thought means abandoning oppositional thinking, so as to index activity in the present upon the task of sustainable possible futures. The sustainability of the future rests on our ability to mobilize, actualize and deploy cognitive, affective and ethical forces that had not been activated so far. These driving forces concretize in actual, material relations and can thus constitute a network, web or rhizome of interconnection with others. We have to learn to think differently about ourselves. To think means to create new conceptual tools that may enable us to both come to terms and actively interact with empowering others. The ethical gesture is the actualization of our increased ability to act and interact in the world.

To disengage the process of subject formation from negativity, and to attach it to affirmative otherness means that reciprocity is redefined not as mutual recognition, but rather as mutual definition or specification. We are in this together in a vital political economy of becoming that is both trans-subjective in structure and trans-human in force. Such a nomadic vision of the subject, moreover, does not restrict the ethical instance within the limits of human otherness, but also opens it up to interrelations with non-human, posthuman and inhuman forces. The emphasis on non-human ethical relations can also be described as a geo-politics or an eco-philosophy, in that it values one's reliance on the environment in the broadest sense of the term. Felix Guattari's idea of the three ecologies⁵, the social, the psychic and the environmental, is very relevant to this discussion. Considering the extent of our technological development, my emphasis on the eco-philosophical aspects is not to be mistaken for biological determinism. It rather posits a nature-culture continuum (Haraway 1997, Guattari 1995, 2000) within which subjects cultivate and construct multiple ethical relations. The concepts of immanence, multiple ecologies and of neo-vital politics become relevant here.

I have argued so far that oppositional consciousness is central to political subjectivity, but it is not the same as negativity so that, as a consequence, critical theory is about strategies and relations of affirmation. Political subjectivity or agency therefore consists of multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit for ourselves and for future generations. As Rich put it in her recent essays, the political activist has to think 'in spite of the times' and hence 'out of my time', thus creating the analytics – the conditions of possibility – of the future (Rich 2001: 159). Critical theory occurs somewhere between the no longer and the not yet, not looking for easy reassurances but for evidence that others are struggling with the same questions. Consequently, 'we' are in *this* together indeed.

Affirmative politics

What is positive in the ethics of affirmation is the fact that it activates the relational powers of the subject and indexes them to the transformation of negative into affirmative affects. This implies a dynamic view of all affects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror or mourning. The slightly depersonalizing effect of the negative or traumatic event involves a loss of ego-indexes perception, which allows for energetic forms of reaction. Clinical psychological research on trauma testifies to this, but I cannot pursue this angle here today. Diasporic subjects of all kinds express the same insight. Multi-locality is the affirmative translation of this negative sense of loss. Following Glissant (1990), the becoming-nomadic marks the process of positive transformation of the pain of loss into the active production of multiple forms of belonging and complex allegiances. Every event contains within it the potential for being overcome and overtaken – its negative charge can be transposed. The moment of the actualization is also the moment of its neutralization. The ethical subject is the one with the ability to grasp the freedom to depersonalize the event and transform its negative charge. Affirmative ethics puts the motion back into emotion and the active back into activism, introducing movement, process, becoming. This shift makes all the difference to the patterns of repetition of negative emotions. It also reopens the debate on secularity, in that it actually promotes an act of faith in our collective capacity to endure and to transform.

What is negative about negative affects is not a normative value judgement but rather the effect of arrest, blockage, rigidification, that comes as a result of a blow, a shock, an act of violence, betrayal, a trauma or just intense boredom. Negative passions do not merely destroy the self, but also harm the self's capacity to relate to others – both human and non-human others, and thus to grow in and through others. Negative affects diminish our capacity to express the high levels of interdependence, the vital reliance on others that is the key to both a non-unitary vision of the subject and to affirmative ethics. Again, the vitalist notion of Life as 'zoe' is important here, because it stresses that the Life I inhabit is not mine, it does not bear my name: it is a generative force of becoming, of individuation and differentiation, a-personal, indifferent and generative. What is negated by negative passions is the power of life itself – its *potentia* – as the dynamic force, vital flows of connections and becoming. And this is why they should neither be encouraged nor should we be rewarded for lingering around them too long. Negative passions are black holes.

In affirmative ethics, the harm you do to others is immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself, in terms of loss of *potentia*, positivity, capacity to relate and hence freedom. Affirmative ethics is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather about transcending the resignation and passivity that ensue from being hurt, lost and dispossessed. One has to become ethical,

as opposed to applying moral rules and protocols as a form of self-protection: one has to endure

Endurance is the Spinozist code word for this process. Endurance has a spatial side to do with the space of the body as an enflashed field of actualization of passions or forces. It evokes affectivity and joy, as in the capacity for being affected by these forces, to the point of pain or extreme pleasure. Endurance points to the struggle to sustain the pain without being annihilated by it. Endurance has also a temporal dimension, about duration in time.

Being worthy of what happens to us

One of the reasons why the negative associations linked to pain, especially in relation to political processes of change, is ideologically laden. It has to do with the force of habit. Starting from the assumption that a subject is a molar aggregate, that is to say, a sedimentation of established habits, these can be seen as patterns of repetitions that consolidate modes of relation and forces of interaction. Habits are the frame within which non-unitary or complex subjects get re-territorialized, albeit temporarily. One of the established habits in our culture is to frame 'pain' within a discourse and social practice of suffering which requires rightful compensation. Equally strong is the urge to understand and empathize with pain. People go to great lengths in order to ease all pain. Great distress follows from not knowing or not being able to articulate the source of one's suffering, or from knowing it all too well, all the time. The yearning for solace, closure and justice is understandable and worthy of respect.

This ethical dilemma was already posed by J. F. Lyotard (1983) and, much earlier, by Primo Levi about the survivors of Nazi concentration camps. Namely that the kind of vulnerability we humans experience in face of events on the scale of small or high horror is something for which no adequate compensation is even thinkable. It is just incommensurable: a hurt, or wound, beyond repair. This means that the notion of justice in the sense of a logic of rights and reparation is not applicable. For the post-structuralist Lyotard, ethics consists in accepting the impossibility of adequate compensation – and living with the open wound.

This is the road to an ethics of affirmation, which respects the pain but suspends the quest for both claims and compensation and resists the logic of retribution of rights. This is achieved through a sort of *depersonalization of the event*, which is the ultimate ethical challenge. The displacement of the 'zoe'-indexed reaction reveals the fundamental meaninglessness of the hurt, the injustice or injury one has suffered. 'Why me?' is the refrain most commonly heard in situations of extreme distress. This expresses rage as well as anguish at one's ill fate. The answer is plain: actually, for no reason at all. Examples of this

are the banality of evil in large-scale genocides like the Holocaust (Arendt 1963), the randomness of surviving them. There is something intrinsically senseless about the pain, hurt or injustice. Lives are lost or saved for all and no reason at all. Why did some go to work in the WTC on 9/11 while others missed the train? Why did Frida Kahlo take that tram which crashed so that she was impaled by a metal rod, and not the next one? For no reason at all. Reason has nothing to do with it. That's precisely the point. We need to delink pain from the epistemological obsession that results in the quest for meaning and move beyond, to the next stage. That is the path to transformation of negative into positive passions.

This is not fatalism, and even less resignation, but rather a Nietzschean ethics of overturning the negative. Let us call it *armor fati*: we have to be worthy of what happens to us and rework it within an ethics of relation. Of course repugnant and unbearable events do happen. Ethics consists, however, in reworking these events in the direction of positive relations. This is not carelessness or lack of compassion, but rather a form of lucidity that acknowledges the meaninglessness of pain and the futility of compensation. It also reasserts that the ethical instance is not that of retaliation or compensation, but it rather rests on active transformation of the negative.

In other words, the 'worthiness' of an event – that which ethically compels us to engage with it, is not its intrinsic or explicit value according to given standards of moral or political evaluation, but rather the extent to which it contributes to conditions of becoming. It is a vital force to move beyond the negative.

This requires a double shift. First, the affect itself moves from the frozen or reactive effect of pain to proactive affirmation of its generative potential. Second, the line of questioning also shifts from the quest for the origin or source, to a process of elaboration of the questions that express and enhance a subject's capacity to achieve freedom through the understanding of its limits. Affirmative ethics assumes, following Nietzsche, that humanity does not stem from freedom, but rather that freedom is extracted out of the awareness of limitations. Affirmation is about freedom from the burden of negativity, freedom through the understanding of our bondage.

Conclusion

The real issue about the ontological relationality of the posthuman subject is conceptual: how do we develop a new post-unitary vision of the subject, of ourselves, and how do we adopt a social imaginary that does justice to the complexity? Shifting an imaginary is not like casting away a used garment, but more like shedding an old skin. How do changes of this magnitude take place? It happens often enough at the molecular level, but in the social it is a

painful experience, given that identifications constitute an inner scaffolding that supports one's sense of identity. Part of the answer lies in the formulation of the statement: 'we' are in *this* together. This is a collective activity, a group project that connects active, conscious and desiring citizens. It points towards a virtual destination, post-unitary nomadic identities, floating foundations and so on, but it is not utopian. As a project it is historically grounded, socially embedded and already partly actualized in the joint endeavour, that is, the community, of those who are actively working toward it. If this be utopian it is only in the sense of the positive affects that are mobilized in the process: the necessary dose of imagination, dreamlike vision and bonding without which no social project can take off.

The ethical process of transforming negative into positive passions engenders a politics of affirmation, in the sense of creating the conditions for endurance and hence for a sustainable future. Virtual futures grow out of sustainable presents and vice versa. Transformative politics takes on the future as the shared collective imagining that endures in processes of becoming. The ethical-political concept here is the necessity to think with the times and in spite of the times, not in a belligerent mode of oppositional consciousness, but as a humble and empowering gesture of co-construction of social horizons of hope.

The final aspect of affirmative politics I want to spell out is that of the generational timelines, in the sense of the construction of social horizons of hope, that is, of sustainable futures.

The future today is no longer the self-projection of the modernist subject or the gloom of the postmodern one. It is a rather humble act of faith in the possibility of endurance (as duration or continuity) that honours our obligation to the generations to come. It involves the virtual unfolding of the affirmative aspect of what we manage to actualize in the here and now. Virtual futures grow out of sustainable presents and vice-versa. This is how qualitative transformations can be actualized and transmitted along the genetic/time line. Posthuman relational ethics takes on the future affirmatively, as the collectively shared project of becoming. Futurity is non-linear evolution, an ethics that moves away from the paradigm of reciprocity and the logic of recognition, and that installs a rhizomatic relation of mutual affirmation.

Sustainability expresses the desire to endure, in both space and time. In Spinozist-Deleuzian political terms, this sustainable idea of endurance is linked to the construction of possible futures, in so far as the future is the virtual unfolding of the affirmative aspect of the present. An equation is therefore drawn between the radical politics of dis-identification, the formation of alternative subject positions and the construction of social hope in the future. This equation rests on the strategy of transformation of negative passions into affirmative and empowering modes of relation to the conditions of our historicity.

In order to appreciate the full impact of this idea, we need to think back to the perverse temporality of advanced capitalism, with which I started

this chapter. In so far as the axiomatic of capitalism destroys sustainable futures, resistance to it entails the collective endeavour to construct social horizons of endurance, which is to say of hope and sustainability. It is a political practice of resistance to the present, which activates the past into producing the hope of change and the energy to actualize it. Doing so processes negative forces and enlists them to the empowering task of engaging with possible futures. Hope is an anticipatory virtue that activates powerful motivating forces: counter-memories, imagination, dreamwork, religion, desire and art. Hope constructs the future by opening up the spaces to project active desires onto; it gives us the force to process the negativity and emancipate ourselves from the inertia of everyday routines. It is a qualitative leap that carves out active trajectories of becoming and thus can respond to anxieties and uncertainties in a productive manner and negotiate transitions to sustainable futures.

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