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The Oxford Handbook of
FEMINIST THEORY

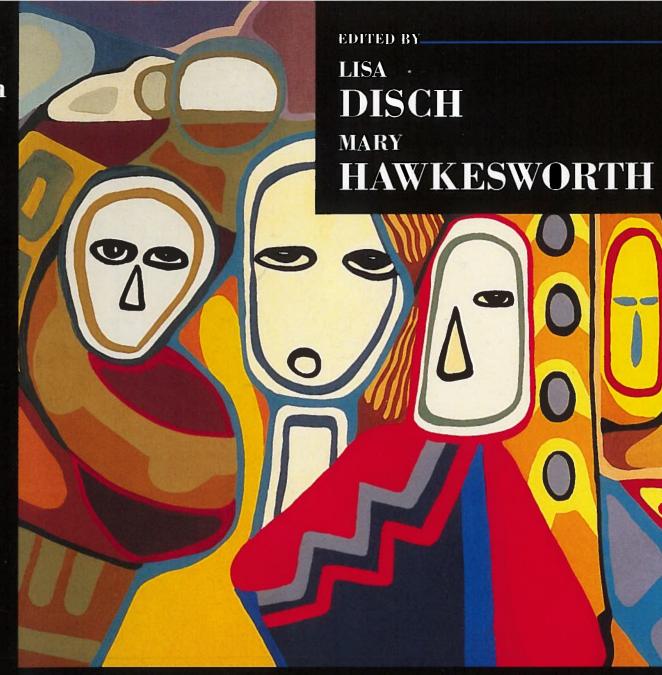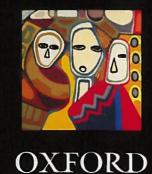The Oxford Handbook of
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The Oxford Handbook *of*
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POSTHUMAN FEMINIST THEORY

ROSI BRAIDOTTI

INTRODUCTION

IT is commonly accepted that European feminism, in its liberal as well as socialist variations, is connected to humanist values and ideals. Since the Enlightenment, the activist energy and egalitarian aspirations of women's movements have shaped multiple reforms in society, which also affected law, morals, academic knowledge, and scientific production in order to reflect more adequately the experience and concerns of women. The political passions and innovative epistemologies of feminist movements, however, were never indexed solely on the interests of women, but rather contained explicit blueprints for the improvement of the human condition as a whole. In so doing, women's movements renewed the shared understanding of the basic unit of reference for our common humanity. This made them humanist at an almost visceral level, positing women's liberation as human liberation.

That intrinsic connection to humanism, however, was never without critical distance (Soper 1986). Especially since the second feminist wave of the 1970s, feminist interdisciplinary knowledge production took to task the universalism, the binary structure of thought, and the teleological vision of progress that are built into the humanist project of human emancipation. Over the last thirty years in particular, under the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction, an anti-humanist wave has redefined the relationship between feminism and humanism.

The argument I want to defend here is that both the humanist legacy and the anti-humanist reaction are very important genealogical sources for posthuman feminism, but by no means the only ones. The posthuman turn is triggered by the convergence of feminist anti-humanism, on the one hand, and anti-anthropocentrism, on the other. Both these strands enjoy strong support in feminism, but they refer to different genealogies and traditions. Anti-humanism focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal of

"Man" as the universal representative of the human, while anti-anthropocentrism criticizes species hierarchy and advances ecological justice. The term *posthuman feminist theory* marks the emergence of a new type of discourse that is not merely a culmination of these two strands of thought, but is also a qualitative leap in a new and more complex direction. This shift of perspective also moves feminist debates away from the explicit anti-humanism supported by poststructuralist theories since the 1980s and inaugurates an array of different posthumanist perspectives circulating in the current era. In other words, the genealogical timelines of the posthuman are neither linear nor sequential.

In this chapter, I will first illustrate feminist attempts to emancipate feminism from classical humanism; then I will explore the multiple roots of posthuman feminism, and in conclusion, I will outline the key features of posthuman feminist theory today.

Feminism Is Not (Only) a Humanism

Even before the emergence of the posthuman, the second feminist wave entered a series of radical negotiations with the legacy of humanism, which had provided its historical grounding. This means that the contemporary outburst of scholarship on the posthuman is by no means the first or the most original critique of humanism available in critical theory. This movement rather needs to acknowledge the pioneering efforts accomplished by feminist theory and to give it credit for developing concepts and methods that have encouraged critical distance from humanism.

For instance, in her watershed 1983 text, Alison Jaggar produced one of the very first taxonomies of feminist philosophy: *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. She introduced a classification of the main schools of feminist thought: socialist, Marxist, liberal, and radical and explored their respective redefinitions of what and who counts as human. Although the actual term *humanism* does not occur very often in that canonical work, the idea of overcoming received notions of the human is built into Jaggar's political and theoretical program.

The monumental work of Simone de Beauvoir (1973), which was first published in English in 1953, had already positioned feminist humanism as a secular tool of critical analysis, the source of moral responsibility and the motor of political freedom. Influenced by, but moving beyond a Marxist philosophy of history and liberation, Beauvoir remained a rationalist at heart. She never questioned the validity of universal reason but rather upheld humanistic universalism—in a socialist frame—and used its conceptual tools to critique the treatment of the depreciated "others," starting from the second sex but ultimately addressing humanity as a whole. This generous humanistic universalism, combined with Beauvoir's finer phenomenological analyses of women's lived experience, based on social constructivist premises, laid the grounds for feminist political ontology in the twentieth century. The key ideas are the feminist humanist principle that "woman is the measure of all things" and the notion that to account for herself, the feminist philosopher needs to take into account the situation of *all* women.

A female humanity thus emerges, endowed with universal valence. This produces theoretically a nondialectical vision of self-other relations and politically a bond of solidarity among women, which the second feminist wave in the 1960s turned into the principle of political sisterhood.

Allegiance to socialist humanism was also a feature of anticolonial thinkers, postcolonial theory, and race theory in the first half of the twentieth century. It played a significant role in national liberation movements throughout the world, notably in Africa and Asia, as testified by Andre Malraux's (1934) seminal text *Man's Fate (La Condition Humaine)* and, more recently, by Nelson Mandela's (1994) life and work. A fairly consistent non-European school of liberatory humanism emerges from Toussaint Louverture (2011, first published in 1794–1798), Franz Fanon (1967), Aimé Césaire (1955) in the previous century, and in the work of Edward Said (2004), Paul Gilroy (2000), Vandana Shiva (1988), and others today. I shall return to them later.

In my critical assessment, the achievement of humanist feminism was twofold: it invented a new genre of both academic and public writing, and it introduced fundamental new concepts. Crucial among the latter is a new brand of materialism, of the embodied and embedded kind (Braidotti 1991, 2013). Focus on embodied female subjects establishes the premises for new and more accurate analyses of power. Being-women-in-the-world is the starting point for all critical reflection on the status of humanity and for a jointly articulated political praxis (Harding 1986; Haraway 1988). These are based on the radical critique of masculinist universalism and are dependent on an activist and equality-minded brand of feminist Humanism.

As for the new genre, the motif that women's liberation is also human liberation produces a mixture of critique and creativity, negative criticism and utopian imagination. Joan Kelly (1979) labeled it "the double-edged vision of feminist theory," which infuses oppositional consciousness with empowering creativity, combining reason with the imagination. This highly imaginative tradition of thinking also fueled the production of a new literary genre: feminist science-fiction, which, as I will argue later on, set a different genealogical line for posthuman feminism.

The immediate result of this new alliance between critical reason and the creative imagination was a change of paradigm, which resulted in a proliferation of new feminist scholarship. By the end of the 1980s, the epistemologist Sandra Harding (1991) and the philosophers Genevieve Lloyd (1984) and Jean Grimshaw (1986) were in a position to adopt more specific and original categories of thought to do justice to the theoretical creativity of the new feminist movement (Eisenstein 1983). References to human nature and the human were replaced with original feminist concepts that reflected the multifaceted specificities of the female condition in all its diversity but kept a firm focus on women's lived experience. The clearest expression of this focus is "standpoint feminist theory" (Harding 1986), which stresses women's embodiment, experience, and the collective nature of feminist knowledge production. Standpoint theory not only covers a broader range of feminist positions on difference by privileging the diversity of lived experiences by marginal subjects, but also intersects productively with postcolonial and anti-racist thought (Harding 1993; Collins 1991; Alcoff and Porter 1993).

By 1998, Alison Jaggar and Iris Young had so much original feminist material at hand that they could edit a full-fledged companion to feminist philosophy, covering every major school and tradition of philosophical thought, all monotheistic and a few other religions, and the different theoretical constituencies within feminism itself. This shift and expansion of theoretical and methodological perspective took barely a decade, and it left a great deal of humanist aspirations behind, prioritizing instead the concept of radical difference and the diversity of women's experience.

But this narrative cannot be linear, as I noted at the outset. In the midst of these developments, singular dissonant texts stand out on their own, disrupting new master narratives and sowing the seeds of unprogrammed futures. One of these is without doubt Shulamith Firestone's 1970s masterpiece *The Dialectic of Sex*, the first feminist techno-utopia of the twentieth century.[1] Like all thinkers of her generation, including Beauvoir herself (to whom, incidentally, Firestone's book is dedicated), Firestone rests on a Marxist view of revolution built on a Hegelian philosophy of history. Contrary to the humanist feminists, however, she consistently pushes the program for women's liberation to its logical Marxist conclusion—namely, the making of a new humanity that will be technologically enhanced and freed from natural needs. First and foremost among the natural chains that need to be broken is the duty to procreate biblically and women's sole social responsibility for the rearing of children. Firestone actively calls for reproductive technologies to intervene as the factor that could break up the nuclear bourgeois family and liberate women and men for better and more productive aims—namely, the building of a socialist system and a new shared sense of what it means to be humans in a classless, sex-egalitarian, and anti-racist society. Covering the issue of racism as well as sexism, Firestone also engages with ecology and environmentalism, arguing for the need of a radically different approach to our natural and built habitat. In this regard Firestone combines the two defining features of posthuman thought that I indicated at the start of the chapter: the feminist critique of humanism, on the one hand, and a postanthropocentric approach to ecology and animal rights, on the other.

The stunning originality of this almost prophetic vision is, moreover, expressed in a style that combines incisive analytical insights with soaring flights of the imagination, establishing the feminist genre I mentioned earlier. Shulamith Firestone stands alone, in some ways contextually bound, and in others, way ahead of her time, in foreseeing what technology was about to become in our world. It would take almost thirty years for this posthumanist, pro-technology but also radical ecological message to be heard. In this respect Firestone counts single-handedly as one of the initiators of posthuman feminist thought.

FEMINIST ANTI-HUMANISM

Anti-humanism is linked to humanism by rejection. As a movement of thought, it developed throughout the 1980s thanks to the new social movements and the youth cultures of the day: feminism, decolonization and anti-racism, antinuclear and environmental movements. In the context of the Cold War, they challenged both the unfulfilled promises of Western democracies, notably, their claim to respect universal human rights, and the utopias of the Marxist tradition. Edward Said pointed out (2004) that in the United States anti-humanism grew out of revulsion for and resistance to the Vietnam War.

Anti-humanism constitutes the core of the feminist critiques of "Man" as the alleged "measure of all things," for being androcentric, exclusionary, hierarchical, and Eurocentric. Feminists differed, however, on what strategies to adopt in order to deal with the checkered legacy of European humanism. The radical wing resolutely rejected humanism, while other critical feminists (Benhabib and Cornell 1987) charged that the West did not live up to this ideal and produced a highly selective and exclusionary version of humanism, which needed to and could be corrected.

Two notions have driven anti-humanism forward since the 1980s: the rejection of universalism and the critique of hierarchical binary thinking. Faith in the unique, self-regulating, and intrinsically moral powers of human reason is the core of the humanistic creed, which asserts European superiority as a standard for both individuals and their cultures, while upholding the exceptionalism of the human species. Anti-humanists maintain that, its pretense to universality notwithstanding, humanism historically developed into a hegemonic civilizational model, which shaped the idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason. In addition, they argue that the alleged universalism of the Eurocentric paradigm of "Man" rests on entrenched dualisms. It implies the dialectics of self and other, and a binary logic of identity and otherness that distributes differences along a scale of asymmetrical power relations. This reduces the notion of "difference" to pejoration: it spells inferiority and social and symbolic disqualification for those who get branded as "others." They are the human and nonhuman referents of negative difference: the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, which is to say women and LGBT; blacks, postcolonial and non-Europeans; but also animals, plants, and earth others—who are reduced, both socially and symbolically—to the less than human status of disposable bodies.

The dominant norm of the subject—the former "Man" of classical Humanism—was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference.[2] This norm is used to justify the deployment of rational epistemic and social violence that marks "others," whose social and symbolic existence is unprotected. This makes Eurocentrism into more than just a contingent matter of attitude: it is a structural element of our cultural practice, which is also embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practices (Braidotti 2013).

The lessons of race and postcolonial theories (Brah 1996; Hall 1996; Harding 1993; hooks 1990; Ware 1992; Crenshaw 1995; Spivak 1999; and Young 2004) are of the greatest importance to add political inflection as well as higher degrees of complexity to this philosophical understanding of difference. Because the history of these "others" in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these "others" raise crucial issues of power, domination, and exclusion.

On this point the intersections between feminism and race or postcolonial theory are intense and mutually enriching, though not without tensions. Crucial to both political

movements is the recognition of the historical limitations of the emancipatory programs that were postulated on the humanist principle of human progress through the deployment of universal and social and scientific practices. We shall see later, however, how race and postcolonial theorists hold onto some aspects of humanism as an unfulfilled project relocate it outside the Western tradition, and develop its subversive and anti-racist potential. This neo-humanist tradition is in dialogue but also in disagreement with the posthuman turn.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM

The "death of Man," announced by Foucault (1970) formalized an epistemological and moral crisis that went beyond binary oppositions, cutting across different poles of the political spectrum. Poststructuralist theorists called for insubordination from received humanist ideals. They targeted the humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the center of world history and, more specifically, the implicit assumption that what is "human" about humanity is connected to a sovereign ideal of "reason" as Enlightenment-based rationality and science-driven progress. Even Marxism, under the cover of a master theory of historical materialism, continued to define the subject of European thought as unitary and hegemonic and to assign him (the gender is no coincidence) a royal place as the motor of human history.

Poststructuralist feminism is a precursor of posthuman theory in that it proposes a radical form of anti-humanist thought. Feminists such as Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) pointed out that the allegedly abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome, and able-bodied. Feminist critiques of patriarchal posturing through abstract masculinity (Hartsock 1987) and triumphant whiteness (hooks 1981; Ware 1992) argued that this Humanist universalism is objectionable not only on epistemological but also on ethical and political grounds (Lloyd 1984, 1996). Feminist phenomenologists reject universalism (Young 2004; Sobchack 2004) by emphasizing the carnal nature of thought and hence its embedded and embodied structure (Braidotti 2011a, 2011b).

Anticolonial thinkers adopted a similar but distinct critical stance by questioning the primacy of whiteness in the humanist ideal as the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic canon of perfection. Regrounding such lofty claims in the history of colonialism, anti-racist and postcolonial thinkers explicitly questioned the relevance of the Humanistic ideal in view of the obvious contradictions imposed by its Eurocentric assumptions, but at the same time, they did not entirely cast it aside. In an immanent critique of humanism, they held Europeans accountable for the uses and abuses of this ideal by looking at colonial history and the violent domination of other cultures, but still upheld its basic premises. Frantz Fanon, for instance, wanted to rescue humanism from its European perpetuators, arguing that we have betrayed and misused the humanist ideal. As Sartre astutely put it in his preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), the future of humanism lies outside the Western world, bypassing the limitations of Eurocentrism. The "bellicose dismissiveness" of other cultures and civilizations is exposed, following Edward Said, as "self-puffery, not humanism and certainly not enlightened criticism" (2004, 27). As Paul Gilroy (2000) noted, the reduction to subhuman status of nonWestern others was a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad faith for the dominant subject who is responsible for the epistemic as well as social dehumanization of the "others" they produced. By extension, the claim to universality by scientific rationality was challenged on both epistemological and political grounds (Spivak 1999), all knowledge claims were recognized as expressions of Western culture and of its drive to mastery. This position results in a critical form of neo-humanism that refers to non-Western sources and tends to strike a skeptical note in relation to posthuman theory, though it often intersects with it.

Feminist philosophies of sexual difference (Irigaray [1984] 1993; Cixous 1997) embraced the concept of difference with the explicit aim of making it function differently.[3] Reading through the spectrum of the critique of dominant masculinity, they also stressed the ethnocentric nature of European claims to universalism. They advocated the need to open up to the "others within" (Kristeva 1991) in such a way as to relocate diversity and multiple belongings to a central position as a structural component of European subjectivity (Braidotti 1991). They recast political subjectivity along a more complex line of interrogation that includes class, race, sexual orientation, and age, targeting the main tenets of equality-minded feminism. Irigaray's provocative question, "equal to whom?" (1994), could be taken as the war cry for the following generation that refused to take equality as homologation or reduction to a masculine standard of Sameness.

As a consequence, poststructuralist feminist philosophers were anti-humanist in that they critiqued from within all the unitary identities predicated upon phallologocentric, Eurocentric, white supremacist and standardized views of what constitutes the humanist ideal of "Man." They also argued, however, that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about women, indigenous peoples, and other marginal subjects (Johnson 1998). The emphasis falls instead on issues of diversity and differences among them and on the internal fractures of each category.

This militant anti-humanism intersects productively with postcolonial and critical race perspectives, which hold humanism accountable for its racist connotations and racialized bias. They reject the universalist pretense of white supremacy (hooks 1990), and propose instead non-Western forms of radical neohumanism (Shiva 1997; Collins 1991; Narayan 1989) that allow us to look at the "human" from a more inclusive and diverse angle: new recompositions of humanity after humanism. This does not however necessarily make them posthuman in the postanthropocentric sense of the term.

PLANET HARAWAY

But again, this narrative cannot be linear. Disruptive voices challenged and complicated emerging paradigms. The most prominent in the 1980s was Donna Haraway's *Primate*

Visions (1990), followed by her path-breaking "Manifesto for Cyborgs," (1985) the first feminist postanthropocentric social theory text of the twentieth century. Haraway is a non-nostalgic posthuman thinker: her conceptual universe is the high-technology world of informatics and telecommunications and a postanthropocentric universe of companion species (2003). First and foremost among 's insights is that contemporary technologies (1997) are enacting a qualitative shift in our understanding of how the human is constituted in its interaction with nonhuman others, which opens up postanthropocentric premises in feminist theory.

Haraway (2006) moves beyond the legacy of both humanism and feminist antihumanism and sets a new agenda. She builds on the poststructuralist critique of binary oppositions and challenges specifically the long-standing association of female with nature (Ortner 1974), introducing instead a nature-culture continuum. Although she does not rely on a linguistic frame of reference and thus does not engage in deconstructive methods, she makes the unique move of initiating a crossover dialogue between science and technology studies, socialist feminist politics, and feminist neomaterialism through the figure of the cyborg. A hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg is a connection-making entity, a figure of interrelationality, receptivity, and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine, nature/culture, male/female, Oedipal/non-Oedipal). The cyborg exemplifies how Haraway combines competence in contemporary biosciences and information technologies with a firm program of social justice and critique of capitalist abuses.

As Haraway's representation of a generic feminist humanity, the cyborg answers the question of how feminists reconcile the radical historical specificity of their embodied experience with the insistence on constructing new values that can benefit humanity as a whole. The cyborg is both a postanthropocentric and postmetaphysical construct that offers a new political ontology, taking into account technological mediation while staying focused on the project of constructing an ecologically accountable, feminist, classless, sex-egalitarian, and anti-racist society. The stunning originality of Haraway's vision, combining analytical insights with striking images and formulations, added a glorious new page to the feminist techno-utopia genre. As such, Haraway too counts as one of the singular initiators of posthuman feminist thought.

THE POSTANTHROPOCENTRIC TURN

By the late 1990s, it begins to be possible to speak of the posthuman turn in feminist theory as a strand of work that pays increasing attention to postanthropocentric perspectives. A feminist consensus is reached about the seemingly simple notion that there is no "originary humanicity" (Kirby 2011, 233). This turn occurred in response to political developments, including growing public awareness of the climate-change issue; the accompanying notion that we have entered a new geologic era (the Anthropocene), where human activities are having world-changing effects on the earth's ecosystem; and

the limitations of economic globalization (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). The postanthropocentric is situated at the intersection of different and at times disconnected strands of feminist thought.

The main strand involved the theoretical fallout from the poststructuralist antihumanist generation. The key notion of embodiment gets reworked on the basis of neomaterialist understandings of the body, drawn from the neo-Spinozist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Embracing their version of vital bodily materialism, while rejecting the dialectical idea of negative difference, this theoretical approach changes the frame of reference. It differs from the more linguistically oriented branch of poststructuralism that relies on semiotics, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction to undo gender (Butler 2004). A more complex vision of the subject is introduced in a materialist process ontology that foregrounds an open, relational self-other entity framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy, and desire as core qualities. Social constructivist binary oppositions were replaced by a nature-culture continuum that, following but also moving beyond Foucault (1977), envisaged power as both a restrictive (*potestas*) and productive (*potentia*) force.

The shift to a monistic ontology resulted in overcoming the classical opposition "materialism/idealism" and moving toward a dynamic brand of materialist vitalism and "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010). Deleuzian feminists built on monistic philosophy to spell out a "vital politics," premised on the idea that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing and not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but rather continuous with them (Braidotti 1994; Grosz 1994; Colebrook 2000, 2004; MacCormack 2008). They explored the potential of contemporary vital thought, arguing for feminist reappraisals of contemporary technoscientific culture in a nonreductive frame. The switch to vital material definitions of "matter" as a self-organizing force stresses processes, vital politics, and nondeterministic evolutionary theories (Grosz 2011).

This approach helps us update the feminist politics of location in terms of radical immanence, with special emphasis on the embedded and embodied, affective and relational structure of subjectivity (Braidotti 2006, 2013). By extension, it helps redefine old binary oppositions, such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman, paving the way for a nonhierarchical and hence more egalitarian relationship to the species. The emphasis on rational and transcendental consciousness—one of the pillars of humanism and the key to its implicit anthropocentrism—is replaced by process ontology. This shift also supports a collaborative vision of the evolution of species that rests on the displacement of anthropocentrism.

A younger generation of scholars generated a wave of materialist scholarship on the body as a dynamic process of embodied interactions that emphasize the relational nature of the subject. Their explorations of embodied materialism led to a serious reconsideration of what counts as "matter" for materialist feminist thought, which produced many interrelated strands of posthuman feminist theory. "Matter-realist" feminists (Fraser, Kember, and Lury 2006) developed alongside neomaterialist feminism (Braidotti 1991; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Kirby 2011).

This neomaterialist line of thought also developed transversal nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 1991, 1994) as well explicit discourses about the nonhuman in terms of the animal and the earth (Grosz 2004) but also technological others (Haraway 1985), and thus furthered the nonanthropocentric strand of feminist thought. Thus, feminist philosophy in this period opens up a number of perspectives, which I consider to be the stepping stones to feminist posthumanism.

A second genealogical strand emerges from the convergence of feminist science studies with cultural studies and media theory. Feminist epistemology and science studies had always been strong (Haraway 1990; Stengers 1997) and by the turn of the millennium, joined forces with cultural studies (McNeil 2007) to assess the impact of new technologies on social relations of power (Terranova 2004), focusing specifically on the effects of the fast-growing field of reproductive technologies on women (Braidotti 1994; Rapp 2000). These sociocultural analyses of science and technology gathered momentum as priority research areas, producing a discursive boom in feminist theory of political subjectivity (Bryld and Lykke 1999; Smelik and Lykke 2008; Parisi 2004; Colebrook 2014a, 2014b; Alaimo 2010; Hird and Roberts 2011). At the same time, comparative literature ceased to be the main forum for these debates, as Spivak (2003) lucidly noted.

New media and global cultural studies, under the impact of the ethical turn (Zylinska 2009; MacCormack 2012), provided related genealogical sources. As the Birmingham school of cultural studies mutated into a new generation of British scholars, Marxist humanism was slowly replaced by more complex materialist approaches that registered the transformations induced by contemporary science and technology. The understanding of "Life" as a symbiotic system of codependence and coproduction (Margulis and Sagan 1995) also alters the terms of human interaction with what used to be called "matter," which now needs to be approached as a self-organizing vital system. Insofar as advanced capitalism has grasped this logic of exploitation of living matter (Rose 2007), as well as the high degrees of mediation humans are caught in today, it has become capable of unprecedented forms of the manipulation of life. This has important implications for feminist science studies, which converge with media and cultural studies to produce sharper analyses of the political economy of globalized capital. For instance, Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000) and Smelik and Lykke (2008), in response to these fast-changing circumstances, map out the new convergence between science and media, producing a wave of scholarship that contributes to a de facto displacement of the centrality of the human, through studies of molecular biology (Fox-Keller 2002; Franklin 2007) and computational systems (Lury, Parisi, and Terranova 2012). These studies are marked by a new methodology that replaces the critiques of representation, which were canonical in feminist cultural studies throughout the 1990s, with a more materialist orientation, approaching technology as a social and scientific practice as well as a cultural phenomenon (McNeil 2007; Stacey 2010; Ferrando 2013).

Ecofeminists (Plumwood 1993, 2003) had already pioneered geo-centered perspectives (Mies and Shiva 1993), and now this perspective takes off across a broader interdisciplinary field. Animal studies begins from the mid-1990s to be a serious topic, questioning the metaphorical use and abuse of animals in literature and culture, as well

as their ruthless economic and physical exploitation (Midgley 1996). Ecofeminists also draw a structural analogy between the exploitation of human females and that of other species, calling for a transspecies process of liberation from capitalist male aggression. Vegetarian and animal rights activists (Adams 1990; Donovan and Adams 1996, 2007) evolve into radical vegan activism (MacCormack 2014), while a more liberal feminist line develops in support for the human rights of animals and other living species (Nussbaum 2006).

Parallel to these developments, feminist scholars' interest in Darwin, which had been scarce (Beer 1983), starts to grow proportionally by the end of the millennium (Rose and Rose 2000; Carroll 2004; Grosz 2011). Again, multiple strands of research develop like variations on a posthuman theme. For instance, new studies of primatology (de Waal 1996, 2009) stressed the gendered nature of social virtues, such as solidarity and empathy, emphasizing the positive role of females in evolutionary history.

Explicit references to the posthuman condition begin to circulate in feminist texts from the 1990s on (Braidotti 1994; Balsamo 1996; Hayles 1999; Halberstam and Livingston 1995). The advantages of this change of perspective for a theory of feminist subjectivity become evident with the advent of what has become known as the "ontological" or "onto-epistemological" turn, which allows the inclusion of nonhuman agents in the constitution of subjects of knowledge and politics. Exemplary of this development is the work of Barad (2003, 2007), who coins the term "agential realism" to signify this enlarged and, in my terms, postanthropocentric vision of subjectivity.

The "affective turn" emerges in a series of feminist critical variations, firstly in conjunction with Derridian deconstruction (Wolfe 2003, 2010; Kirby 2011) and then within phenomenology (Ahmed 2006) and psychoanalysis (Clough 2007), but also with neo-Spinozist and Deleuzian monism (Lloyd 1994; Gatens and Lloyd 1999; Braidotti 2002; Massumi 2002; Protevi 2009; Grosz 2011). These perspectives converge on the notion that it is now both possible and desirable to expand the relational capacity of humans to all other species, in a planetary embrace that allows feminists theorists to address global issues like climate change, while pursuing the struggle for equality and social justice. The politics of the affective turn is debated as a crucial issue and special emphasis is placed on the specific materiality of race and ethnicity within feminist neomaterialism (Ahmed 2004; Hemmings 2011). The next and somehow obvious step in this discursive expansion is "Anthropocene feminism" (Grusin forthcoming) that becomes more prominent as posthumanism comes into its own.

What these new developments make possible is sustained reflection on the human-nonhuman continuum not only at the theoretical and methodological levels, but also institutionally. Coinciding with the reorganization of universities along neoliberal economic lines (Braidotti 2013), the question of what vision of the human is implicit in the academic practice of the humanities results in the formation of new transdisciplinary alliances between, for instance, ecofeminism and social history. These perspectives displace the traditional institutional location of gender and women's studies in the humanities and social science faculties, reopening the issue of the relationship between the "two cultures" within feminism itself. The immediate consequence of

the formulation of these new posthumanistic and postanthropocentric perspectives is a renewal of meta-methodological studies on inter- and transdisciplinarity itself as the preferred hybrid feminist approach (Buikema, Lykke, and Griffin 2011; King 2011, 2012; Birke, Bryld, and Lykke 2004; Asberg and Lykke 2010).

Postanthropocentric feminist theory is on firm ground in contesting the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the "exceptionalism" of the Human as a transcendental category, but it also has to confront some crucial issues, notably human agency in ethical and political terms and the specificity of human language. This shift of perspective involves, in fact both methodological and political consequences. Methodologically, posthuman feminist theory abandons the social constructivist approach and the deconstructive political strategies of poststructuralism and embraces monism and vitalist ontologies (Ansell Pearson 1999). Postmodernist theory, while still relying to a certain extent on a social constructivist method, did acknowledge the importance of nonhuman or inhuman factors (Lyotard 1989) in the constitution of subjectivity, as evidenced by psychoanalytic accounts of the unconscious. It seldom questioned, however, the centrality of anthropomorphic subjects in processes of subjectivation that involve negotiations with social and symbolic systems.

Politically, postanthropocentrism produces a different scheme of militant engagement and a nondialectical politics of human liberation. It assumes that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and that, in the pursuit of countersubjectivities, it may rely on process ontologies. The emphasis on the politics of autopoiesis, the coproduction of self-organizing systems and collective self-styling, involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and, hence, also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti 2006). I have argued for an activist embrace of *zoe*: nonhuman life as a way forward. Becoming-earth (geocentered) or becoming-imperceptible (*zoe*-centered) approaches are more radical breaks with established patterns of thought resting on the pejorative naturalization of differences. They introduce a radically imminent planetary dimension that defines difference positively as a virtual and vital resource (Bonta and Protevi 2004; Grosz 2011).

Disloyalty to our species, moreover, is no easy matter. The real difficulty in releasing our bond to Anthropos and developing critical postanthropocentric forms of identification is affective. How one reacts to taking distance from our species depends to a large extent on the terms of one's engagement with it, as well as one's assessment of and relationship to contemporary technological developments. In my work I have always stressed the technophilic dimension (Braidotti 2002) and the liberating and even transgressive potential of these technologies, in contrast to those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile, or to a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates hyperconsumeristic possessive individualism (Macpherson 1962). But loyalty to one's species has some deeper and more complex affective roots, which cannot be shaken off at will. It involves an anthropological exodus that is especially difficult emotionally, and it can entail a sense of loss and pain. This effort however cannot be dissociated from an ethics and politics of inquiry that demands respect for the complexities of the real-life world we are living in.

The Posthuman Condition and Feminist Politics

These theoretical shifts do not occur in a vacuum, but rather resonate with fast-changing conditions in advanced capitalism. Foremost among them are the high degrees of technological mediation that shake up established mental habits, as Donna Haraway put it, the machines are so alive, whereas the humans are so inert! (Haraway 1985).

The displacement of the centrality of human agency through massive interventions of network systems and increasingly intrusive technologies is one of the factors that make capitalism into a postanthropocentric force. It also accounts for its inhumane aspects (Agamben 1998) and structural injustices, including increasing indebtedness (Deleuze and Guattari 1977). The "global obscenities" (Eisenstein 1998) of an economic system that relies on "bio-piracy" (Shiva 1997) also engenders a "necro-political" governmentality (Mbembe 2003) through technologically mediated wars and counterterrorism.

As I have argued elsewhere (Braidotti 2002, 2006), advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification and consumption. It is a multiplier of deterritorialized differences and a producer of quantitative options. Global consumption knows no borders and a highly controlled flow of consumer goods, information bytes, data, and capital constitutes the core of the perverse mobility of this system (Braidotti 2002, 2006). Capitalism poses as a nomadic force, while it controls the space-time of mobility in highly selective ways.

The contemporary global economy has a technoscientific structure, built on the convergence between previously differentiated branches of technology, notably, nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science. This aspect involves research and intervention upon animals, seeds, cells, and plants, as well as humans. In substance, advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives. This context produces a paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of postanthropocentrism on the part of market forces, which happily trade on Life itself. Life, as it happens, is not the exclusive prerogative of humans.

The opportunistic political economy of biogenetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species, when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals, and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity. The uniqueness of Anthropos is intrinsically and explicitly displaced by this equation.

But the complexity is even greater, as I argued before. What constitutes capital value today is the informational power of living matter itself, transposed into data banks of biogenetic, neural, and mediatic information about individuals, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. These practices reduce bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources, or vital capacities, and thereby levels out other categorical differences. The focus is on the accumulation of information

itself, its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. "Data mining" includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as specific strategic targets for capital investments, or as risk categories. The capitalization of living matter produces a new political economy, which Melinda Cooper (2008) calls, "Life as surplus." It introduces discursive and material political techniques of population control of a very different order from the administration of demographics, which preoccupied Foucault's work on biopolitical governmentality (1997). Today, we are undertaking "risk analyses" not only of entire social and national systems but also of whole sections of the population in the world risk society (Beck 1999). Informational data is the true capital today, supplementing but not eliminating classical power relations (Livingston and Puar 2011).

The theoretical insight is clear: living "matter" is a process ontology that interacts in complex ways with social, psychic and natural environments, producing multiple ecologies of belonging (Guattari 2000). A change of paradigm about the human is needed to come to terms with these new insights. Human subjectivity in this complex field of forces has to be redefined as an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of all these factors (Braidotti 1991, 2011a). The relational capacity of the post-anthropocentric subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all nonanthropomorphic elements: the nonhuman, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*.[4] It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centered egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the postanthropocentric feminist turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded, and unsentimental response to the opportunistic transspecies commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism, which Haraway (2014) recently labeled: "capitalocene."

Queer science studies, in response to these contemporary challenges, propose a radical transversal alliance between humans and other species. This is the case for instance of Alaimo (2010), who theorizes transcorporeal porous boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies, while Hayward calls for "humanimal relations" (Hayward 2011), that is to say, transcorporal connections between humans and nonhumans, and for "transspeciated selves" (Hayward 2008). This approach makes the most of monistic ontology and argues for absolute species equality, in a very radical form of postanthropocentric thought that gives renewed energy and relevance to the ecofeminist agenda.

In the midst of such conceptual and methodological fervor, the specific genre pioneered by feminist theory—the mixture of theoretical sophistication with literary imagination—not only persisted but actually gained strength. A significant alliance between queer theorists and the science-fiction horror genre constitutes a fast-growing posthuman feminist strand. Since the 1970s, feminist writers and literary theorists of science fiction (Kristeva 1980; Barr 1987, 1993; Haraway 1992; Creed 1993) had supported the alliance between women, as the others of Man, and such other "others" as non-whites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous, and hybrid subjects) and nonhumans (animals, insects, plants, tress, viruses, and bacteria). This "Gothic" tradition of feminist theory, which generated some staggeringly original work, has a distinct posthumanist but also postanthropocentric slant, as evidenced by the ease with which it proposes relational

bonds between different species and across classes of living entities. It also expresses passionate resistance to Oedipal power relations, celebrating what I have labeled "the society of undutiful daughters" (Braidotti 2012), who betray the patriarchal social contract and prefer to run with wolves (Pinkola Estès 1992).

Queer theorists, ever alert to the opportunity of exiting the Oedipalized sexual binary system, have equated the posthuman with post-gender and proposed an explicit alliance between extraterrestrial monsters and freaks, social aliens, and queer political subjects (Halberstam 1995, 2012). Queering the nonhuman is now in full swing, in a series of variations that include rethinking sexual diversity based on animal and other organic systems (Giffney and Hird 2008). An array of alternative sexualities and multiple gender systems have been proposed, but also degrees of sexual indeterminacy or indifferentiation, often modeled on the morphology and sexual systems of nonhuman species, including insects (Grosz 1995; Braidotti 1994, 2002). Post-gender sexualities have also been postulated in a radical form of postanthropocentric reflection on the extinction of the current form of human embodiment (Colebrook 2014b).

Ever mindful of the fact that the "human" is not a neutral term but rather one that indexes access to privileges and entitlements, postcolonial feminist theorists have made a strong intervention in this debate. They warn that feminists cannot mindlessly embrace the equation between the "posthuman" and post-gender without taking into account serious power differentials (Livingston and Puar 2010). New assemblages or transversal alliances need to be negotiated carefully and not taken for granted. Another significant development in this area is the recasting of disability studies in the affirmative mode of proposing "otherwise enabled" bodies that defy the expected standards of normality not merely in terms of gender normativity (Braidotti and Roets 2012).

The emphasis on living matter—including embodied human flesh—as intelligent and self-organizing offers another level of transversal theoretical alliances. By foregrounding the radical immanence of embodiment and embeddedness, posthuman feminism is in a position to strike an alliance also with extended mind theories (Clarke 1997, 2008), with distributed cognition models inspired by Spinoza via Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Damasio 2003) and with special emphasis on distributed affectivity (Wilson 2011). It can also strike productive dialogues with qualitative neuro-philosophies of perception and cognition (Stafford 2007; Churchland 2011), redefining sexual difference in relation to the plasticity of the brain (Malabou 2011).

The crucial question however remains: What can be the feminist political stand in relation to the productive paradoxes engendered by the posthuman condition? To what extent does the convergence of the posthumanistic and postanthropocentric perspectives complicate the issues of human agency and feminist political subjectivity? My argument is that it actually enhances it by offering an expanded relational vision of the self, and it recasts a posthuman theory of the subject as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, biotechnologically mediated bodies are capable of doing. Mindful of the structural injustices and massive power differentials at work in the globalized world, I rely on the feminist method of the politics of locations as the preferred form of radical immanence to produce more accurate accounts of the

multiple political economies of subject-formation at work in our world. These cartographies enable nonprofit accounts of contemporary subjectivity and actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature-culture continuum, which is technologically mediated and opposed to the spirit of contemporary capitalism. They refuse to turn Life/*zoe*—that is to say, human and nonhuman intelligent matter—into a commodity for trade and profit.

SEXUALITY BEYOND GENDER

The neomaterialist branch of poststructuralist feminist philosophy had emphasized the crucial notion that sexuality is an integral part of the embodied structure of the subject: one is always already sexed. Deleuzian feminists had argued against the sex-gender distinction (Gatens 1991), suggesting that sexuality is conceptualized as a general life force, which cannot be adequately contained within the dichotomous view of gender defined as the social construction of differences between the sexes. Social constructivism is also called to task by the ontological shift to a monistic view of sexuality as part of a vital materialist autopoietic system. Whereas high poststructuralist feminist theory was solidly ensconced in social constructivist methods and political strategies, thinkers of the next generation affirm and explore the ontological aspects of sexuality and sexual difference, and not only its constructed elements.

Returning sexuality to its polymorphous perversity (here in the sense of playful and nonreproductive) as an ontological force, in opposition to a gender system that privileges binary opposition and heterosexual reproductive sex, raises further questions. What happens to gender identities if sexuality is not based on oppositional terms? What happens when there is sexuality without the possibility of either heterosexual or homosexual union?

When sexuality is not theorized as caught in the sex-gender binary, it enjoys more transversal, structural, and vital connotations. Sexuality as life force provides a non-essentialist ontological structure for the organization of human affectivity and desire. This notion clearly opposes the position of the linguistic mediation school (Butler 1991), which argues that the discursive structure of gender functions as a coercive grid that constructs social relations and identities. Sexuality does get caught in gender's captive mechanisms, but it remains a constitutive force that is always already present and hence prior to gender, though it intersects with it in constructing functional subjects in the social regime of biopolitical governmentality.

Postanthropocentric feminists advocate a vision of the body as a sexually preconstituted, dynamic bundle of relations and explore the transformative potential of a different concept of the political. They (Braidotti 1994; Grosz 1994; Gatens 1996; Olkowski 1999) stress that the political advantage of this monistic and vital approach is that it provides a more adequate understanding of the fluid and complex workings of power in advanced capitalism and hence can devise more suitable forms of resistance.

In other words, sexuality as human and nonhuman precedes and exceeds the normative social apparatus of gender, which is a form of governance that can be disrupted through processes of becoming-minoritarian/becoming-woman/becoming-animal (Braidotti 2002, 2006). This implies that sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institutions (Braidotti 1994, 2011a, 2011b). Combined with the idea of the body as an incorporeal complex assemblage of virtualities, this approach posits the ontological priority of difference and its self-transforming force, bypassing social constructivist approaches. They are the transformative counteractualizations of the multiple, always-already sexed bodies we may sustain and what they may be capable of doing.

This is what I have called the feminist becoming-woman (Braidotti 1991, 1994), then the "virtual feminine" (Braidotti 2002, 2006). On this point all vital materialist feminists concur: Grosz refers to it as "a thousand tiny sexes" (2004); Colebrook labels it "queer passive vitalism" (2014a, 2014b); Patricia MacCormack (2008, 2012) similarly draws attention to the need to return to sexuality as a polymorphous and complex visceral force, and to disengage it from both identity issues and all dualistic oppositions. Luciana Parisi's innovative adaptation of Guattari's schizo-analysis and Lynn Margulis's concept of "endosymbiosis" (Margulis and Sagan 1995) produces a schizo-genesis of sexual difference as an organic variable of autopoesis (Parisi 2004). Posthuman feminists look for subversion, not in counteridentity formations, but rather in pure dislocations of identities via the disruption of standardized patterns of sexualized, racialized, and naturalized interaction. Feminist posthuman politics is an experiment with intensities beyond binaries, that functions by "and, and," not by "either-or."

In other words, we need to experiment with intensity in order to find out what posthuman bodies can do. Because the gender system captures the complexity of human sexuality in a binary machine that privileges heterosexual family formations and literally steals all other possible bodies from us, we no longer know what our sexed bodies can do. We therefore need to rediscover the notion of the sexual complexity that marks sexuality in its human and posthuman forms. A postanthropocentric feminist approach makes it clear that bodily matter in the human as in other species is always already sexed and hence sexually differentiated along the axes of multiplicity and heterogeneity.

These experiments with what sexed bodies can do, however, do not amount to saying that in the social sphere pejorative differences no longer matter or that the traditional power relations have been resolved. On the contrary, on a world scale, extreme forms of polarized sexual difference are stronger than ever. They get projected onto geopolitical relations between the West and the rest, creating belligerent gendered visions of a "clash of civilizations" that is allegedly predicated in terms of women's and LGBT people's rights. We need to adopt a multilayered feminist politics: contain and resist the negative aspects while continuing to experiment with intensities. Posthuman feminists pursue sexuality beyond gender as the epistemological but also political side of contemporary vitalist materialism after anthropocentrism.

Conclusion: For Critical Posthuman Feminism

The strength of posthuman feminist thought is in developing affirmative ethical and political perspectives. In my work, I have proposed cross-species alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its nonhuman aspects (Braidotti 2002, 2006). This relational ontology is *zoe*-centered and hence nonanthropocentric, but it does not deny the anthropologically bound structure of the human. This shift of perspective towards a *zoe* or geocentered approach requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to be human, which however needs to be qualified by grounded analyses of power relations and structural inequalities in the past and present.

Starting from philosophies of radical immanence, vital materialism, and the feminist politics of locations, I have also argued against taking a flight into an abstract idea of a "new" pan-humanity, bonded in shared vulnerability or in species supremacy. What we need instead is embedded and embodied, relational and affective cartographies of the new power relations that are emerging from the current geopolitical and post-anthropocentric order. Class, race, gender, and sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness are more than ever significant markers of human "normality." They are key factors in framing the notion of and policing access to something we may call "humanity." Yet, considering the global reach of the problems we are facing today, in the era of that "Anthropocene," it is nonetheless the case that "we" are in *this* together. Such awareness must not however obscure or flatten out the power differentials that sustain the collective subject ("we") and its endeavor (*this*). There may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the recomposition of "humanity" right now. Posthuman feminist and other critical theorists need to resist hasty and reactive recompositions of cosmopolitan bonds, especially those made of fear. It may be more useful to work toward multiple actualizations of new transversal alliances, communities and planes of composition of the human: many ways of becoming-world together.

I have argued forcefully that the posthuman is not postpolitical. The posthuman condition does not mark the end of political agency, but a recasting of it in the direction of relational ontology. This is all the more important as the political economy of biogenetic capitalism is postanthropocentric in its very structures, but not necessarily or automatically more humane, or more prone to justice.

Last but not least, posthuman feminists advocate a vision of the body as a dynamic and sexed bundle of relations and rest on it to explore the transformative potential of a different concept of the political. They state the primacy of sexuality as ontological force, in opposition to a majoritarian or dominant line of territorialization—the gender system—that privileges heterosexual, familial, reproductive sex. Sexuality beyond gender is the epistemological but also political side of contemporary vitalist neomaterialism. It consolidates a feminist genealogy that includes creative deterritorializations,

intensive and hybrid cross-fertilizations and generative encounters with multiple human and nonhuman others. The counteractualization of the virtual sexualities—of bodies without organs that we have not been able to sustain as yet—is a posthuman feminist political praxis.

Notes

1. *Sketch of The Analytical Engine Invented by Charles Babbage* by Ada Lovelace (1842) has to be quoted here as an equally anomalous and untimely text from the nineteenth century.
2. Deleuze calls it "the Majority subject" or the Molar center of being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Irigaray calls it "the Same," or the hyperinflated, falsely universal "He" (Irigaray 1985b, 1993); whereas Patricia Hill Collins calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of this particular subject of humanistic knowledge (Collins 1991).
3. The most significant works in this tradition are the Milan's Women Bookshop elaboration of *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Socio-Symbolic Practice*. This was developed into an original critique of the history of philosophy by Adriana Cavarero in *In Spite of Plato*. In German, the significant contribution are Herta Nagl-Docekal and Herlinde Pauer-Studer, ed., *Denken der Geschlechterdifferenz: neuen fragenund perspektiven des feministische philosophie*; and Andrea Maihofer, *Geschlecht als Existenzweise. Macht, Moral, Recht und Geschlechterdifferenz*. In Spanish, the pioneering work is done by Celia Amorós in *Hacia una crítica de la razón patriarchal* and by Maria Santa Cruz, Marie-Luisa Femenias, and Anna-Maria Bach on *Mujeres y filosofia* in Latin America.
4. This is radically different from the negative definition of *zoe* proposed by Giorgio Agamben (1998), who has been taken to task by feminist scholars (Cooper 2009; Colebrook 2009; Braidotti 2013) for his erasure of feminist perspectives on the politics of natality and mortality and for his indictment of the project of modernity as a whole.

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