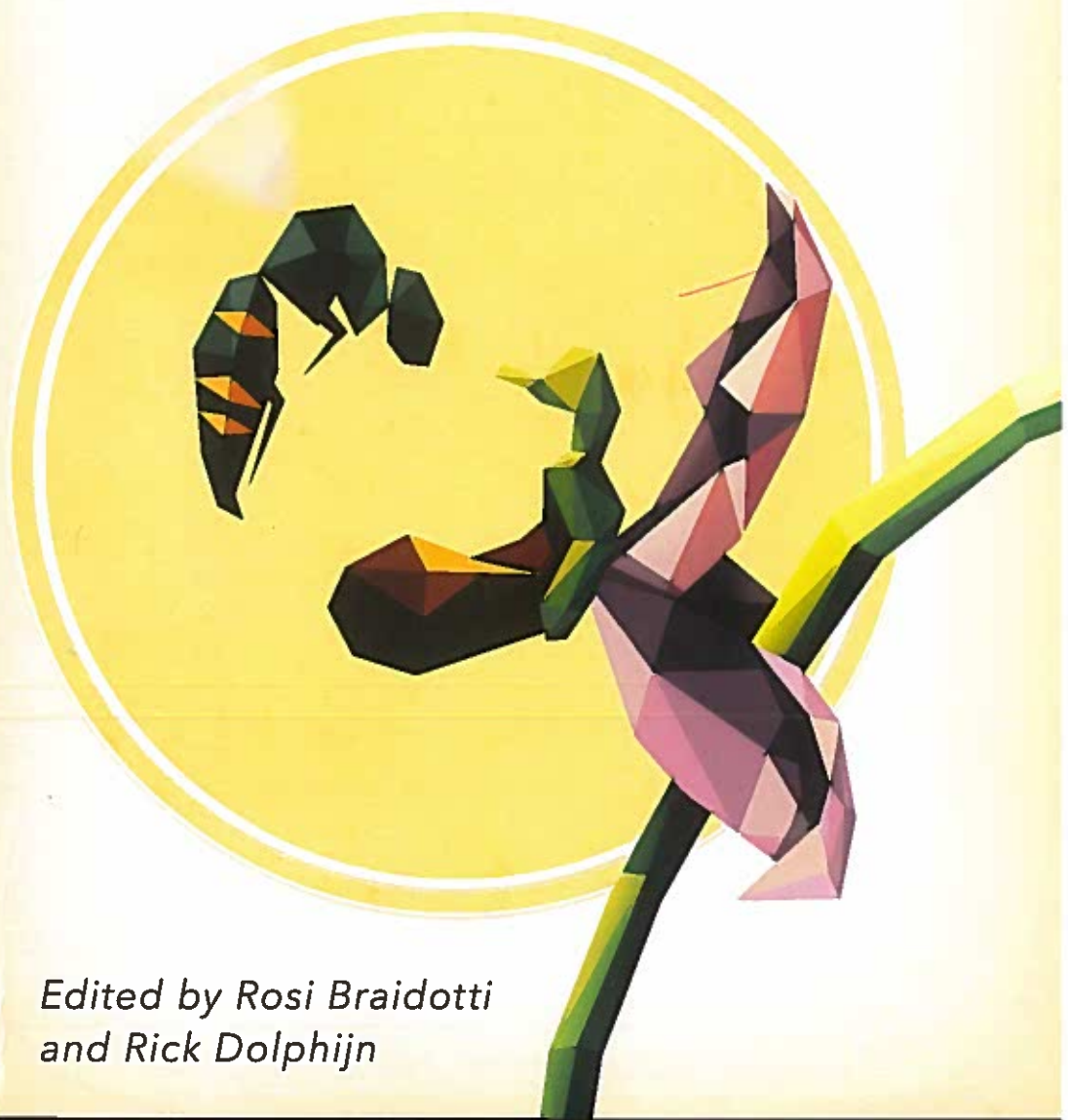


# *Philosophy After Nature*



*Edited by Rosi Braidotti  
and Rick Dolphijn*

# Philosophy After Nature

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David Gauthier and Neil DeOnofrio

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*Chapter One*

**Introduction**

*After Nature*

Rosi Braidotti and Rick Dolphijn

**MODERNITY AND NATURE**

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of 'world history' – yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.<sup>1</sup>

The quote above is the opening paragraph of an early text from Friedrich Nietzsche. It is a text that has been interpreted in many different ways throughout the past century. Yet, as we are rereading it in light of the crises that mark today's world, its take on (post)humanity, on human 'knowledge' and above all its take on how human knowledge positions (and repositions) nature, strikes a startling relevant note. This text from 1873 provides a perfect framework for unfolding the different analyses presented in this book. Our volume deals with the contemporary state of discussions about nature in philosophy and the humanities. More specifically it addresses our collective dis/in/ability, in/capability and ir/responsibility in relation to this issue.

We come after nature in so many ways. First, because 'we', the dwellers of the Anthropocene, are facing the disastrous consequences of our reckless exploitation of the planetary resources. Second, we come after nature in understanding the role played by our capitalist culture and market economy in both unsettling the nature–culture divide and in complicating it further through all-pervasive technological mediation. Let us develop these points further.

In the framework of the shared anxiety about the future of the human species, which is now officially recognized as living in the era of the Anthropocene,<sup>2</sup> it has become somewhat more acceptable to speak in terms

of a nature–culture continuum. The categorical separation between the non-human habitat and human deeds has been challenged by a combination of elements: the climate change on the one hand and the limitations of economic globalization on the other. We can safely state that all the contributors to this volume foreground the impact of capitalism as one of the main factors in the current crisis, which has been ironically called the ‘Capitalocene’ (Jason W. Moore), the ‘Chthulucene’ and the ‘Plantationocene’ (Donna Haraway) and the ‘Anthroscene’ (Jussi Parikka).<sup>3</sup>

This volume adopts a materialist approach, which assumes that the *actual* motor of the historical development of modernity, with its emphasis on progress through science and technology (and resting on the Enlightenment ethos of emancipation *through* reason), is capitalism itself. The logic of advanced capitalism that we want to defend in this volume is drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s pertinent analyses of capitalism as schizophrenia. Extremely simple at some level, this system can be defined as a never-ending search for ever-growing profit. This axiom is so evident that its loyal believers assimilate it to human nature, thereby elevating greed and self-interest to the height of an evolutionary human trait. We follow the critical Spinozism of Deleuze and Guattari in two parallel ways: We question the possessive individualism hypothesis and its aggressive view of evolution and then propose to replace it with a monistic ontology that supports a cooperative vision of human relationality and its evolutionary capacity.

The profit motive is the unquestionable axiom of capitalism. Traversing the territorial order that stratified the earth in affiliative circles, in fixed hierarchical regimes, the capitalist motor has deterritorialized these patterns for more than two centuries now – decoded them rigorously. It did so not according to a rational monetary logic based on trade and commodities but according to the irrational flows of capital as a desiring machine.

In order to secure the flows of capital (i.e. in order to minimize the resistance against these flows), the project of modernity makes use of the simplest dualisms, often absolutizing ancient presuppositions and hierarchies. This dualistic device opposes male to female, white to black and the West to the rest. It is important to note that in the end, *for capitalism*, it is *not* the actual content of the terms that matters as much as their sustained opposition. Capitalism is the negative of society, of culture, of any kind of social formation. Or as Deleuze put it in one of his lectures:

Capitalism is constituted on the failure of all the pre-existent codes and social territorialities. If we admit this, what does this represent: the capitalist machine, it is literally demented. A social machine that functions on the basis of decoded, deterritorialized flows, once again, it is not that societies did not have any idea of this; they had the idea in the form of panic, they acted to prevent this – it was the overturning of all the social codes known up to that point.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, capitalism is not interested in any one specific, let alone 'dominant', code; it only works by decoding, which means that it does not come with any specific *form* of knowledge. Rather, it practices a serial dis/re-organization of information in order to secure the flows of capital. The multiple racisms and the sexism and all other dualisms find their basis in what we can call a 'culturalism', an organization of the world that more and more alienates itself from nature, which it constructs as its extreme limit. This social constructivist method, however, begs the question of grasping the shifting relationship between nature and culture, which is currently reshaped by the flows of deterritorialization of advanced capitalism. The transcendent force needed for the capitalist machine to keep on producing *rests* on the systemic *undoing* of the ties that bind the clever animal – Anthropos – to nature. This disconnection allows for the undoing of the territorial, planetary as well as social ties that have enabled life in the first place.

This 'undoing' of the bonds between human life and nature postulated rational consciousness as the flight into transcendence, projecting the burden of physical materiality – and consequently the natural world order – unto the bodies of the 'others' of the European subjects. These sexualized, racialized and non-human 'others' have paid a heavy price, in both material and symbolic terms, for their supposed association with the natural order. The closer to nature, the further from social and legal rights, from the cultural and social entitlements and from the future that 'the clever animal' had in mind. And this is actually what Nietzsche himself was noticing when he discussed 'the problem of the actor' (in *The Gay Science*)<sup>5</sup>: He mentions Jews and women (which were, along with 'natives', the 'others' of the nineteenth-century discourse) in particular, as people *obliged to act*, to play a social role, to adapt themselves to a 'truth' that was never theirs.

Even the great emancipatory projects that emerge from the interstices of modernity postulate human freedom as the emancipation from our collective dependence upon a natural order. Long before Nietzsche, in the eighteenth century and in the aftermath of the French revolution, both Wollstonecraft and Toussaint Louverture embraced the Enlightenment project as the possibility of a general human liberation from servitude, oppression and dependency. They severely critiqued the orders that build upon a dismissal of nature (moving away from the allegedly inferior nature of women towards the abstract technicities of culture). This uniformizing ideal of progress, as it moved the western world away from nature, blinded us to the immanence of life. It also alienated us from the different futures that were not in line with the Enlightenment ideals. It is these alternative future scenarios that are becoming more feasible and necessary in the era of the Anthropocene, and which are emerging as new paths of becoming.

With capitalism as its motor and nature as its extreme limit, modernity has introduced a highly segregated non-cohesive and schizoid society that acts according to the flows of capital. Modernity has by now realized much of the future it had anticipated, including a massive ecological crisis that may have revealed itself only recently but is definitely here to stay. The financial inequalities of globalization since 2008, notably the crisis that hit Wall Street (and the rest of the world), also increase the disenchantment with the project of modernity as does the necro-political governmentality of our terror-infested times. When Félix Guattari published his *Three Ecologies* in 1989, he foresaw integrated world capitalism, the post-media age, the decline of social cohesion and companionship. He argued forcefully that such a situation demanded a rethinking of what he called *ecosophy*: an ethico-aesthetico-politico challenge to Enlightenment philosophy as a whole. Guattari encourages us to rethink modernism as a whole in order to understand the many crisis that had been announcing themselves for so long.<sup>6</sup> With similar visionary claims as Nietzsche, Guattari foresees the interweaving of the convulsive social and political crises that, by now, have made Donald Trump the forty-fifth president of the United States:

More than ever today, nature has become inseparable from culture; and if we are to understand the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere, and the social and individual universes of reference, we have to learn to think 'transversally'. As the waters of Venice are invaded by monstrous, mutant algae, so our television screens are peopled and saturated by 'degenerate' images and utterances. In the realm of social ecology, Donald Trump and his ilk – another form of algae – are permitted to proliferate unchecked. In the name of renovation, Trump takes over whole districts of New York or Atlantic City, raises rents, and squeezes out tens of thousands of poor families. Those who Trump condemns to homelessness are the social equivalent of the dead fish of environmental ecology.<sup>7</sup>

As stated above: Traversing the territorial order that stratified the earth in affiliative circles, in fixed hierarchical regimes, the capitalist motor has deterritorialized these patterns for more than two centuries now – decoded them rigorously. It did so *not* according to money and commodities but according to *the flows of capital*.

## BEYOND DUALISM

At a deeper conceptual level, therefore, 'we' come after nature in understanding the limitations of dualism as both a principle of political economy and as a system of thought that for centuries has dichotomized the relationship



between mind and body, nature and culture, human life (bios) and non-human life (*zoe*).

As the careful readers of the history of philosophy know, however, the awareness – both cognitive and moral – of the continuity between the poles of these false dichotomies has been emphasized before. Insights and explicit warnings about the nature–culture continuum can be found back at the dawn of western modernity, in another year of turbulent transition. They are best represented in the impressive corpus of Frederick Nietzsche. Nietzsche's writings brilliantly bring together the timely and the untimely when it comes to the relation that we have with the earth. Contrary to the dominant philosophers in Western tradition (like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant), Nietzsche never considered knowledge to be *our* ability to understand everything that surrounds us. Nietzsche did not think in terms of mind versus matter, nor did he subscribe to any of the dualisms that define modernity up until today. But he did see how the 'modernist' humanism, implicit in the opposition of mind versus matter, not only dominated our thinking (especially since the early nineteenth century), but actively gave form to our world, realizing its own gospels by alienating our ideas from the world that surrounds us.

For Nietzsche, then, knowledge is about the organization of information, and this is by all means a territorial organization that organizes the face of the earth and the people along with it. For Nietzsche, knowledge equals administration, and it is something very different from thinking and wisdom. Knowledge is about building up of consensus and, as such, it mendaciously distorts the way we think about otherness, about the earth and, in the end, about 'life'. Nietzsche's doubled reading of 'knowledge' is spot on. It proves that even at the turn of the last century, at a time marked by the greatest successes of the modernist project and its technological apparatus, a time in which the dark sides of progress did not yet show its devastating effects on geology, one did not *have* to be blind to the consequences of our reckless belief in this progress.

Nietzsche shows us that it was possible to see, from the very beginning, that the speeding-up of the capitalist machines will alienate us from the earth and lock us up in our territories far away from the soils to which we, in the end, always have to return. This is the project which today, in many ways, urgently needs rethinking. Now, more than ever, we need a philosophy that is *after* nature, after how we have been struggling with this concept in the history of thought, how we need to rethink it now that we have come to realize that our previous philosophies of nature so blatantly failed. We need a philosophy that is able to read the undercurrents in thought, in the earth, giving rise to another earth – the earth on the other side of thought.

Rereading the general critique on humanity (human knowledge) that Nietzsche expresses, and keeping in mind that he claimed to write for a new earth and a future people, it is tempting to read his ideas as if directed at the peoples living in

our days. As if we – living on an earth that has been suffering more than enough from these mendacious ideas more than a century later – would have understood the devastating consequences of dualist thinking by now. The very serious warnings that Nietzsche gives the reader are still poorly understood by the master narratives of our time. Perhaps the situation is even far more serious than that; perhaps the many crises that rule the world today (ecological, financial, and political) proves that we have grown blind to the consequences that these dualisms had, for us, for our thinking, for technology and for the earth.

The pertinent question is, then, this: How is this ‘knowledge’ that we have called modernity capable of continuously realizing itself? How come its rigid dualisms keep disturbing the earth and all of the relations in which we have to live our lives? The answer to this question is as simple as it is haunting: It is because of capitalism.

Nietzsche’s tragic joy in both asserting the flaws of western modernity and pointing to brand new paths in thinking resonates with the contributions in this volume. First and foremost among them is the work of Michel Serres, who stresses that it is time we start accepting this new truth – that we exist *after* nature and that this condition, far from being a crisis, opens up new perspectives for critical thinking. We need to ask ourselves, ‘How did we *inevitably* end up here?’ Serres brilliantly summarizes this as follows:

From reading a thousand history books, we also naively believe that the past behavior of the Roman people continuously clamoring for *panem et circenses*, bread and games, was the *result* of their decadence – or at least its manifestation. Not at all: it was the *cause*. To believe that a society can solely live on bread and games, the economy, spectacles, consumption, banks and television, as we do today, is such a fundamental misunderstanding of any collectivity’s real functioning, that this exclusive and erroneous choice will simply hurl it to its demise, as we saw in Rome.<sup>8</sup>

Being so caught up in the systems of consumption, and thus unable to see the vast desertification induced by the capitalist machineries for the last two centuries, one wonders whether this clever animal has not vacated the stage for some time. Maybe the exacerbated sense of subjectivity and worldliness that capitalism continues to sell is just like one of those bright stars that we see glittering in the sky but that in reality had ceased to exist long ago.

the bond that connects us to the world, the one that binds the time passing and flowing to the weather outside, the bond that relates the social sciences to the sciences of the universe, history to geography, law to nature, politics to physics, the bond that allows our language to communicate with mute, passive, obscure things – things that, because of our excesses, are recovering voice, presence, activity, light. We can no longer neglect this bond.<sup>9</sup>

How to open our eyes to the relations that incorporate us in the world, that connect everything but were simply left out of the equation by capitalism? Again, Serres in the quote above comes up with a practical program that not only connects the different ecologies to one another but also shows that in order to take up responsibility for the crisis of today, academia, as well, has to get rid of the modernist-capitalist oppositions that have *splintered* the university into completely separated faculties, departments, research groups and chairs that increasingly seem to have little to do with one another. Or to phrase it very cynically, the only thing that unifies the university these days has nothing to do with shared social values or any other form of united content; what unites them is the search for financial funding. Indeed, within the university, as anywhere else, the capitalist machinery has had deep and devastating consequences.

### AND AFTER?

It is also the case, however, in a reversal that may appear paradoxical, that we are going after nature in many different ways: first, in taking seriously our ethical responsibilities towards the Anthropocene; second, in applying rigorously a materialist, vital, monistic process ontology as the philosophical point of reference and third, in rethinking the process of naturalization. An ecosophical, monistic position implies a different, that is to say, non-unitary, vision of the knowing subject – an autopoietic understanding of matter and the inclusion of technological apparatus within this monistic system ('machinic autopiesis').

This is what Guattari was writing about all along when he emphasized that any ecology had to be written by taking into account the 'post-media age', as he coined it. As early as 1985, in lectures in Tokyo and Paris (January 1986), Guattari foresaw how philosophy after nature has to experiment with what technology can do. In a later publication, Guattari explains:

The emergence of these new practices of subjectification of a post-media era will be greatly facilitated by a concerted reappropriation of information and communication technologies in so far as they will increasingly authorize: (1) the promotion of innovative forms of consultation and collective action, and in the long run, a reinvention of democracy; (2) the miniaturization and personalization of apparatuses, a resingularization of mediatized means of expression. One may assume, in this respect, that it is the extension into a network of databanks that will have the biggest surprises in store for us; (3) the multiplication to infinity of 'existential shifters' permitting access to creative mutant Universes.<sup>10</sup>

This new era, in which the hegemonic power of the media so powerful in fascist, communist and capitalist propaganda is behind us, offers many new possibilities to *perform* anti-capitalist and (therefore) ecosophical resistance *with* technology and *after* nature.

Last but not least, we are going after nature in following the lead of what some call the contemporary 'neo-naturalistic' turn, not only in the life sciences but also in philosophy and critical theory. Methodologically, this translates in a switch from a social constructivist method, which relies on the dualistic oppositions mentioned above, to the intensive methodology of vital materialism. The latter privileges cartographies of power – in its dual inception as both negative (*potestas*) and positive (*potentia*) – and the actualization of virtual alternatives. Expressionism, rather than constructivism, is the approach that best captures the vital flow of differential becoming, which is the core of a monistic understanding of matter as intelligent and self-organizing. Contemporary genomics and algorithmic cultures are also going 'after' nature in their pursuit of the complexity and self-organizing capacity of living matter and in trying to account for it in adequate theoretical terms.

In many different ways, this volume aims to open our eyes to the many relations that have been structural components of our world for a long time but those which critical theory in the humanities failed to see. They are bonds between natures and cultures, or 'naturecultures' as Haraway calls them, which today have become 'medianatures'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the authors in this book aim to rewrite the ties between different times and different traditions in philosophy (between continental and analytic thinking, for instance) and also in academia as a whole (between physics and media studies, for instance). They do so, as philosophers and critical thinkers, by rereading the concepts developed by major thinkers in the past, revealing the radical (monistic) *ontographies* that are of relevance today. Dualism itself has to be rethought radically after nature, especially the dualisms that support the mental, social and environmental realities of our subjectivity. They have been structured according to the powers of modernity and the interest of the capitalist machinery.

This volume argues passionately that the most elementary of all dualisms, the opposition between culture and nature, needs our full attention today. Practicing the media–nature–culture continuum, doing philosophies of nature across ages and traditions, the different contributions to this book express materialist thinking at its finest. What needs to be done in times of severe crisis is to affirmatively search for a new earth and people to come, a missing 'we' which can be collaboratively brought about – actualized – in thinking together against the grain and speaking truth to the powers of our times.

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense'. In *On Truth and Untruth: Selected Writings*. Trans. Taylor Carman, New York: Harper Collins, 2010: 15.
2. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer. 'The "Anthropocene"'. *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (May 2000): 41–42.
3. See Jason W. Moore (Ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, PM Press, 2016; Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin', *Environmental Humanities*, 6 (2015): 159–165, Duke University Press; Jussi Parikka, *The Anthropocene*, Minnesota University Press, 2015.  
For a full overview, see: R. Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (Eds.), *The Posthuman Glossary*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, forthcoming 2017.
4. Gilles Deleuze, 'Capitalism, Flows, the Decoding of Flows, Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Psychoanalysis, Spinoza'. *Lecture, Cours de Vincennes*, 16 November 1971.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
6. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 1989. Trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, Athlone Press, 2000.
7. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*: 135.
8. Michel Serres, *The Natural Contract*, 1990. Trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, University of Michigan Press, 1995.
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10. Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*. Trans. Andrew Goffey. London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 42.
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'What have we done? Why did we do it? Against cynicism, the philosophers in this volume stand out for the originality of their analyses of our ties to nature. They encourage us to seek solutions beyond greed, spectacle and division. The strongest thread running through this impressive collection is that we can think innovatively; we can work together with nature'. —James Williams, Professor of Philosophy, Deakin University

'*Philosophy after Nature* provides an indispensable introduction and guide to current transformative thinking about nature today. In the context of climate change, globalisation and a logic of advanced capitalism, it brings together a number of outstanding contributions, in which components from the history of philosophy are retrieved from neglect. These components are then deployed to help make sense of an unprecedented crisis in the relation between human beings and the context they have become used to thinking of as "natural". —Joanna Hodge, Professor, Manchester Metropolitan University

'When philosophy talks about nature, too often it is only through its own idea of nature – the physical, living, world is forced to fit the ends of philosophy. In *Philosophy after Nature*, we see a radical inversion being performed, one where the idea must follow nature, where philosophy is forced to think alongside matter in all its vital unruliness'.

—John Ó Maoilearca, Professor, Film and Television Studies, Kingston University

**T**HE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES THAT HAVE DOMINATED THE SOCIAL AND the scientific world over the last thirty years have brought about upheavals and critical reappraisals that have proved quite positive in fostering twenty-first-century thought. *Philosophy after Nature*, an interdisciplinary collection of state-of-the-art essays, offers innovative and thought-provoking insights concerning contemporary philosophical and cultural reflection on the nature-culture interaction. Starting from the assumption that the binary opposition between the two terms has been replaced by a continuum of the two, this volume explores both the terms of this new interaction and its implications.

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