

## CHAPTER 5

# Posthuman Feminism and Gender Methodology

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### GENDER AS A CARTOGRAPHIC TOOLBOX

**G**ENDER IS A META-METHODOLOGICAL TOOL, A NAVIGATIONAL instrument – gender is as gender does. In this chapter I apply gender as methodology to provide a cartography of the intersections between feminism and the posthuman predicament by arguing that feminism is not only a humanism; it needs to overcome anthropocentrism and embrace non-human life and entities.

A cartographic method aims to draw some meta-patterns in contemporary knowledge production processes, using gender as the navigational tool. In this chapter the field I want to survey is the posthuman convergence of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other. Both these critical lines have established traditions within feminist and gender studies, but they refer to distinct genealogies and often result in different politics. Posthumanism focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the universal representative of the human, while anti-anthropocentrism criticizes species hierarchy and pleads for environmental justice. The term ‘posthuman feminism’ emerges at the confluence of these critical traditions and points to multiple ways out of dominant understandings of the human. The genealogical timelines of the posthuman are neither linear nor sequential, but mark the emergence of a new type of discourse that is not a synthesis or culmination of these two strands of critical

thought, but a qualitative leap in new and more complex directions. The posthuman, therefore, is not a term that refers to a futuristic, let alone utopian dimension, but is rather an indicator of our present historical condition.

A cartography is a materialist method that combines the analysis of texts and theoretical representations with that of concrete factors such as capital, social structures and institutions (Braidotti, 2011b, 2013; 2019). It is therefore a situated – that is, historical and site-specific – analysis of the emergence of discursive and institutional instances that shape processes of subject formation and the social regulation of living subjects. Gender-driven critical cartographies express the experience and insights of marginalized subjects, the ways in which they both speak truth to power and document what they already know through the experience of social and symbolic exclusion. Cartographies are collective, crowd-sourced exercises in assessing both the documents (discursive production) and the monuments (material structures) that construct our present conditions. Composing and negotiating with others a gender-driven critical cartography – politically infused and theoretically framed – is a way of reaching an adequate understanding of the negative conditions of our historicity.

The task of providing an adequate account of one's locations and experiences and to explore their consequences in terms of knowledge production also constitutes the core of the feminist method of the politics of locations. It is a materially grounded empirical method that takes gender as the indicator of embodied and embedded understandings of the knowing subjects. The primary location for any gender analysis is the body, not as a biological given, nor as a mere social construction, but rather as an ontological site of becoming. Intersectionally positioned across multiple axes – sexuality, gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, able-bodiedness – the body is never one unitary entity. It is rather a field of intersecting forces, better understood in terms of carnal materialism, or embodied empiricism.

Adriene Rich coined the term politics of locations (1987, 2001) as a testimonial to the deep wisdom generated on the margins of patriarchal culture. The term received a thorough scientific reexamination as feminist epistemology entered the academic realm, resulting in ‘standpoint theory’ (Harding, 1986, 1991, 1993; Hartsock, 1987). This is a materialist approach that is situated and accountable, and hence immanent, intersectional in its practical application and knowledge-driven in that it grants epistemological privilege to the experiences and insights of marginal groups. It argues that there is greater objectivity on the margins than at the centre of social systems, because the marginal and oppressed have a more direct experience, and hence a more lucid perception, of how power works. Being less self-interested, the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’, as Paulo Freire argues ([1970] 2005), is better placed to speak truth to power and therefore offers higher degrees of objectivity. Generated by feminist materialist and intersectional theories (Smith, 1978; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Carby, 1982), the method expands to claim alternative ways of doing scientific research, notably by including the analysis of the racialized economy of science (Hill Collins, 1991; Harding, 1998). It also expresses a yearning for knowledge that cannot be contained within mainstream institutional frames (hooks, 1990).

After the poststructuralist intervention and the challenge to the unitary character of identities and the self-evidence of categories of thought such as objectivity, science and truth, the politics of locations becomes more formalized. It becomes consolidated into the epistemological practice of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), contingent foundations (Butler, 1991, 1993) and minor or nomadic becoming (Braidotti, 1991, 1994).

Gender cartographies are necessarily localized, situated and perspectivist because they account for specific historical and geopolitical conditions. As such, they express grounded complex singularities, not universal claims. To be situated and yet in process or transition may well sound like a contradiction, but it is one that is produced by the historical conditions of advanced, or ‘cognitive’

capitalism (Moulier Boutang, 2012). Thus, it is a way of locating the real-life subjects in time as well as space. A location is also an embedded and embodied memory, activated against the grain of the dominant representations of life and of living beings – the social imaginary – of capital-driven patriarchy. It is the memory of events that may not have happened to us directly, but which we forgot to forget. For gender theorists and critical feminist thinkers, it is mostly the echo of the pain of others. Something like a resonance keeps on recurring, which forces feminists to think through, again, the eternal return of the pain of exclusion, violence and the injustice of disqualification. The politics of locations and its perspectivist epistemology therefore is anything but an instance of relativism or fragmentation. It is rather a robust neo-foundational materialist epistemology that reconstructs subjectivity along alternative lines.

A cartographic account works by selecting a few significant probes that authorize alternative knowledge claims and devise alternative figurations of the kind of knowing subjects that ‘we’ can become. Gender cartographies are navigational tools that enable us to trace a critical path through the complexities of the present. Figurations are projective anticipations that express the virtual potential of materially embedded and embodied locations, to actualize affirmative alternatives (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2019). They are neither loose metaphors nor mere statistical data. Figurations are rather materially embedded and embodied signposts that anticipate emergent patterns of dissonant subject formations, within creative processes of collective becoming.

The function of figurations consequently is to both support and operationalize the cartographic accounts of power to reflect and respect the complexity of the differential, materially embedded subject positions. As a feminist philosopher, I see my task as providing a survey of the gender meta-patterns emerging from these cartographies. In addition, I also want to help provide the ontological grounding for the subject formation that makes it possible to say “we” are in *this* together’ with a degree of ethical

credibility, because we acknowledge from the start that ‘we-are-not-One-and-the-Same’. Different scales and perspectives are built into these materially embedded feminist critical cartographies.

### POSTHUMAN FEMINISM AS FIGURATION

As a creative figuration, gender cartographies of the posthuman aim at constituting new communities of activist knowledge-producers. As a theoretical and ethical proposition, the posthuman is an anticipation of what we aspire to become (through *potentia*): it is both the actual and the virtual. The temporality of this process is non-linear and generative, based on collaborative efforts at enacting affirmative ethics of becoming.

In other words, posthuman feminism as both empirically grounded and speculatively orientated aims at achieving adequate understanding of ongoing processes of dealing with the human, with focus on the dehumanized others and the non-human entities caught in the posthuman convergence. As a methodological tool, it enables us to track the emergence of conflicting discourses about the posthuman predicament and its possible outcomes, that combine familiar patterns of exclusion with grandiose projects of human enhancement through technological intervention. The tension between these poles – extinction and evolutionary leap, marginalization and enhancement – frames the political economy of posthuman times.

A gender-driven cartography enables a posthuman brand of feminism, generated at the intersection of critiques of humanism and of anthropocentrism by subjects who were excluded from full humanity to begin with. The viewpoints or perspectives of marginal subjects about posthuman transformations are seldom acknowledged or taken seriously by the policy-minded experts who now dominate the field of posthuman scholarship and institutional practice. I would like to redress that balance.

But the posthuman convergence also challenges feminist practice: to what extent does the convergence of posthumanistic and

post-anthropocentric perspectives complicate the issues of ethical human agency and gendered political subjectivity? To even begin to address that question, we need to explore how ‘we’ are in *this* posthuman convergence together, while ‘we’ are not-One-and-the-Same. My argument is that the posthuman turn can result in a renewal of subjectivities and practices by situating gender analyses productively in the present. I defend the posthuman feminist subject accordingly as an ongoing collective experiment with what contemporary bodies are capable of becoming.

### FEMINISM IS NOT ONLY A HUMANISM

The first building block of posthuman feminism is that the notion of humanism needs to be reviewed critically. The version of humanism that plays out in the posthuman convergence is the Enlightenment-based ideal of Man as ‘the measure of all things’. This European humanist ideal positions the universalizing powers of a sovereign notion of ‘reason’ as the basic unit of reference to define what counts as human. Just as importantly, it also defines who is excluded from this dominant category. This hegemonic idea of ‘Man’ as coinciding with universal reason also claims exclusive rights to self-regulating rational judgment, moral self-improvement and enlightened governance for European subjects. The human thus defined is not so much a species as a marker of European culture, society, and its scientific and technological apparatus.

The humanist idea of the ‘Man of reason’ (Lloyd, 1984) positions the European subject as the motor of human evolution. Deleuze calls it ‘the Majority subject’ or the Molar centre of being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Irigaray calls it ‘the Same’, or the hyper-inflated, falsely universal ‘He’ (Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b); Hill Collins calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of this particular subject of humanistic knowledge (1991). Sylvia Wynter calls this ‘Man1’, ready to unfold into the imperialist European, or ‘Man2’ (2015).

This dominant vision positioned hierarchically all other classes of beings as the ‘others’, defined as the negative counterpart of the dominant human norm. They are actually ‘other than’, that is to say ‘different from’ Man and are perceived as ‘worth less than’ Man. Such epistemic and symbolic violence is no abstraction: it translates into ruthless violence for the real-life people who happen to coincide with categories of negative difference. They are the women and LGBTQ+ people (sexualized others), Black and indigenous people (racialized others) and the earth-entities (naturalized others). Humanism was used as a pretext to justify the deployment of rational epistemic and social violence against these ‘others’, whose social and symbolic existence was denied. This violent deletion made the ‘others’ disposable and unprotected, raising crucial issues of power, domination and exclusion.

The power of ‘Man’ as a hegemonic civilizational model was instrumental to the project of Western modernity and the colonial ideology of European expansion. ‘White Man’s burden’ as a tool of imperialist and patriarchal governance assumed that Europe is not just a geo-political location, but rather a universal attribute of human consciousness that can transfer its quality to any suitable subjects, provided they comply with the required discipline. Europe as universal consciousness posits the power of reason as its distinctive characteristic and humanistic universalism as its particularity, in a relentless pursuit of hegemony (Weheliye, 2014). The de-selected others uphold by negation the power of the master-subject that Wynter defines as ‘over-represented’ (2015). This makes Eurocentrism a systemic trait, rather than a matter of attitude: it is a structural element of European masculine self-representation (Plumwood, 1993, 2003; Braidotti, 1994; Rose, 2004). As such, it is also crucial to the implementation of institutional and discursive ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck, 2007), an exclusionary practice quite common in scientific humanism.

There is no underestimating, however, the historical ties that bind Western feminism, in its liberal struggle for equality or the

socialist revolutionary variables, to Enlightenment-based humanism. Humanism is the backbone of the feminist emancipation project carried out alternatively in the name of classical liberalism and universal human rights, or in the name of socialist humanism and universal workers' rights. The Enlightenment project of emancipation channelled the aspirations to equality of the minorities, triggering revolutionary forms of activism among women, LBGTQ+, indigenous and colonized peoples, claiming equal rights. Criticism of the idea of a common, undifferentiated humanity and the claim to humanist universalism, were raised from the eighteenth century onwards, for instance by Olympe de Gouges ([1792] 2018) on behalf of women and Toussaint Louverture ([1791] 2011) on behalf of colonized people. They both reacted against the flagrant violation of the very human rights asserted in the French Universal Declaration of 1789, by criticizing the exclusion of women from civic and political rights, and the inhumane violence of slavery and colonial dispossession. All claims to universalism lose credibility when confronted by such abuses of power.

As the chosen targets of patriarchal violence, homo- and transphobia, colonial expropriations and mass killings, sexualized and racialized others have borne a disproportionate percentage of human suffering. We are not all human in the same way, and some categories of humans are definitely more mortal than others. Therefore, it is politically impossible not to support the ongoing efforts to extend human rights across all categories, in a more equitable manner. At the same time, however, it has also become urgent to question the alleged self-evidence of the idea of the human at work in the very humanist concept of universal human rights. I think that such an idea needs to be treated with critical care.

While the philosophical poststructuralist generation developed its own brand of anti-humanism, a radical feminist wave, anti-racist critical theory, environmental activists, disability rights advocates and LBGTQ+ theorists have questioned the scope, the founding

principles and the achievements of European humanism and its role in the project of Western modernity and colonialism. These social and theoretical movements questioned the idea of the human that is implicit in the humanist ideal, which skilfully combines high standards of physical, intellectual and moral perfection with civilizational standard. Michel Foucault (1970) – a master of anti-humanism – linked this ideal to a sovereign notion of ‘reason’ that has framed everything European culture holds dear. The humanist ‘Man’ claims exclusive access to self-reflexive reason for the human species, thus making it uniquely capable of self-regulating rational judgement. These qualities allegedly qualify our species for the pursuit of both individual and collective self-improvement following scientific and moral criteria of perfectibility. The boundless faith in reason as the motor of human evolution ties in with the teleological prospect of the rational progress of humanity through science and technology.

The ‘death of Man’, announced by Foucault (1970) formalized the epistemological and political crisis of the humanistic habit of placing ‘Man’ at the centre of world history. Philosophical anti-humanism de-links the human from this universalistic posture, calling the humans to task, so to speak, on their concrete actions. Different and sharper analyses of power relations become possible, once the obstacle of the dominant subject’s delusions of grandeur has been removed. A more adequate self-understanding emerges, once it has become clear that no one body is actually in charge of the course of historical progress. Thanks to feminist and postcolonial analyses, we have come to regard the human standard which was posited in the universal mode of ‘Man of reason’ as inadequate precisely because of its parochial partiality.

In response to this normative model, feminist, anti-racist and other social movements, notably the environmental and peace movements since the 1970s, developed their own variations of activist anti-humanism or radical, reparative or methodological neo-humanism. Their criticism is focused on two inter-related

ideas: the self–other dialectics on the one hand and the notion of difference as pejoration on the other. Dialectically redefined as ‘other than’, difference is inscribed in a hierarchical scale that spells inferiority. Such epistemic violence acquires ruthless connotations for the real-life people who happen to coincide with categories of negative difference: women, native and earth others. They are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized ‘others’, whose social and symbolic existence is disposable and unprotected. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these ‘others’ raise crucial issues of power, domination and exclusion. As Donna Haraway put it (1985), some differences are playful, but others are poles of world-historical systems of domination. Feminist epistemology is about knowing the difference.

The anti-humanist feminist generation embraced the concept of difference with the explicit aim of making it function differently. Irigaray’s provocative question ‘Equal to whom?’ (1994) is emblematic of this switch away from homologation or reduction to a masculine standard of Sameness. Feminist critiques of abstract masculinity (Hartsock, 1987), hegemonic whiteness (hooks, 1981; Ware, 1992), colonial posture (Spivak, 1999) and hegemonic able-bodiedness (Braidotti & Roets, 2012), added further criticism. The allegedly universal ideal of ‘Man’ is brought back to his historically contingent roots and exposed as very much a male of the species: it is a *he* (Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b; Cixous & Clement, 1986). Class, race and gender never being too far apart from each other, in the intersectional mode pioneered by feminist race theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Brah, 1996). Indigenous feminists were especially vocal in pointing out the racialization of the categories of the excluded (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Black feminists criticized the whiteness of feminist theory and academic feminism (Tuana, 2008; Alcoff & Porter, 1993; Wekker, 2016). This particular vision of the human as male and white is moreover assumed to be European, a full citizen of a recognized polity, head of a heterosexual family and legally responsible for its children

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1987). And further, ‘He’ is also able-bodied and handsome, according to the Renaissance parameters of Vitruvian symmetry and aesthetic perfection (Braidotti, 2013), as critical disability studies point out (Shildrick, 2012; Goodley, Lawthorn & Runswick, 2014). Feminists en bloc refuse to reduce feminism to homologation or integration into this Eurocentric masculine standard of Sameness and offer more situated and hence more accurate analyses of power relations upheld by the humanist paradigm.

Another relevant strand of neo-humanist discourse emerges within environmental activism, and it combines the critique of the epistemic and physical violence of modernity with that of European colonialism. The eco-feminist and environmental ‘green politics’ asserts the need for both bio- and anthropodiversity (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Other examples of this ecological and situated cosmopolitan humanism are: Avtar Brah’s diasporic ethics (1996); Vandana Shiva’s anti-global neo-humanism (1997); African humanism or Ubuntu is receiving more attention, from Patricia Hill Collins (1991) to Drucilla Cornell (2002). In a more nomadic vein, Edouard Glissant’s poetics of relations (1997) inscribed multi-lingual hybridity and the poetics of relation at the heart of the contemporary posthuman condition.

Thus feminism is resolutely humanist in its pursuit of emancipation, or equality, but it is also proto-posthumanist in its critique of the exclusionary use made of the category of the human. Appeals to the ‘human’ are always discriminatory: they create structural distinctions and inequalities among different categories of humans. Humanity is a quality that is distributed according to a hierarchical scale centred on that humanistic idea of Man as the alleged measure of all things – and of all reified or thing-like entities. This subject is the Man of reason that feminists, anti-racists, Black, indigenous postcolonial and ecological activists have been criticizing for decades.

Stressing that humanity is not a neutral term but rather one that indexes access to specific powers, values and norms, rights and

visibility, critics of Enlightenment humanism criticized the moral imperialism and anthropocentric exceptionalism of that tradition. After all, the categories of excluded ‘others’ whose humanity was denied and withheld have been arguing for the right to be human for several centuries already, in the name of their own cultural traditions and competences. Their calls for an autonomous definition of what it means to be human have met with mixed success at best and have seldom been integrated in the dominant idea of the human that informs Western human rights. Is that Western universal ideal still credible? And how does the urgency of the posthuman convergence affect their ongoing struggle?

#### ANTHROPOS IS OFF-CENTRE

The debate on the limitations of humanism, pioneered by feminist, postcolonial and race theorists, appears to be a simpler task than displacing anthropocentrism itself. ‘Man’ is now called to task as the representative of a hierarchical and violent species whose centrality is challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns in contemporary, technologically mediated knowledge production systems. The de-centring of *anthropos* challenges also the separation of *bios*, as exclusively human life, from *zoe*, the life of animals and non-human entities. What comes to the fore instead is a human/non-human continuum, which is consolidated by pervasive technological mediation. Massumi refers to this phenomenon as ‘Ex-Man’: ‘a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human’ (1998: 60); an immunity system out of joint (Esposito, 2008) and as such undergoing significant mutations. This shift marks a sort of ‘anthropological exodus’ from the dominant configurations of the human (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 215) – a colossal hybridization of the species.

The political implications of this shift are significant. If the revisions of humanism advanced by feminist, queer, anti-racist, ecological and postcolonial critiques empowered the sexualized

and racialized – but still human – ‘others’, the crisis of *anthropos* enlists the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants, cells, bacteria, in fact the planet and the cosmos are turned into a political arena (Braidotti, 2013). The social constructivist habit of thought that reduces nature to the source of social inequalities is revised, in the light of methodological naturalism and neo-materialism. The case is being argued by ‘matter-realist’ feminist scholarship (Fraser, Kember & Lury, 2006) which emphasizes ‘inventive’ life and ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010), while different kinds of neo-materialist feminism are in full swing (Braidotti, 1991; Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012; Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Coole & Frost, 2010; Kirby, 2011). There is consequently a further meta-discursive level of difficulty in the post-anthropocentric turn, due to the fact that anti-humanism is essentially a philosophical, historical and cultural movement and that the bulk of feminist, queer and post-colonial theories are based in the humanities and the social sciences. The critique of anthropocentrism, on the other hand, requires a dialogue with the life sciences, genomics and information technologies.

The posthuman convergence accelerates the crisis of the humanities, exposing their constitutive anthropocentrism, which has historically entailed a conflictual relationship with science and technology. The problem is complicated by an issue of scale – both temporal and spatial: how can gender studies in the humanities and social science disciplines – history, literature, philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology – develop planetary and long-term perspectives in a geo-centred and not anthropocentric frame? How will the humanities react to ‘destroying the artificial but time honoured distinction between natural and human histories’ (Chakrabarty, 2009: 206)? Is it feasible to contemplate – in a secular and rigorous manner – the idea of human extinction without losing sight of the aims and purposes of academic feminism?

Over the last thirty years, gender, feminist, queer studies have conducted a rigorous analysis of both dominant and marginal

subject positions and their respective entitlements and knowledge production economies. They belong to a generation of critical ‘studies’ fields that have provided new concepts and methods, which proved inspirational for both the academic world and society. These ‘studies’ areas have targeted Eurocentrism, sexism, racism, methodological nationalism and species-ism implicit in the humanist ideals of reason. Acknowledging the compatibility of rationality and violence, however, does not mean that the critical ‘studies’ areas uniformly oppose humanism (Foucault, 1970; Said, 1978). It is rather the case that they create alternative visions of what it means to be human.

The current post-anthropocentric, or posthuman turn, cannot fail to affect the very ‘studies’ areas that – contrary to the field of science and technology studies – may have perfected the critique of humanism but not necessarily relinquished anthropocentrism. A widespread suspicion of the social effects of science and technology seems to pertain to the classical feminist tradition, and its Marxist roots. Shulamith Firestone’s technological utopia (1970) strikes a rather lonely note in combining a passionate embrace of technology – including new reproductive technologies – with a strong environmental consciousness. The towering work of Donna Haraway in the mid-1980s – in the ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’ (1985) – set an entirely new agenda and established a feminist tradition of politicized science and technology studies integrated with feminist body politics, critical race theory and transnational environmental justice. She replaced anthropocentrism with a set of relational links to human and non-human others, including technological artifacts. Challenging specifically the historical association of females/non-Europeans with nature (Haraway, 1990), Haraway stressed the need for feminist and anti-racist critiques that rest on a technologically mediated vision of the nature–culture continuum. Donna Haraway offers figurations such as the cyborg, onco-mouse, companion-species, the modest witness (1997) and other hybrids as figures of radical interspecies relationality. They blur categorical distinctions (human/non-human; nature/culture; male/female;

Oedipal/non-Oedipal; European/non-European) in attempting to redefine a programme of feminist social justice.

From there on, the collective feminist exit from *anthropos* began to gather momentum and explicit references to the post-human appear in feminist texts from the 1990s (Braidotti, 1994; Balsamo, 1996; Halberstam & Livingston, 1995; Hayles, 1999). The post-anthropocentric turn takes off as an internally fractured converge: climate change or Sixth Extinction (Kolbert, 2014), which, as Naomi Klein claims (2014), changes everything, including the analytic strategies of feminist and postcolonial studies. The second is the fourth Industrial Revolution (Schwab, 2015) led by advanced technologies and the high degree of global mediation they entail. These challenges open up new global, eco-sophical, posthumanist and post-anthropocentric dimensions of thought. Feminist theory and gender analyses are right in the middle of this reconfiguration of knowledge production.

Displacing *anthropos* liberates a great deal of epistemological energy. The vitality is especially strong in cultural studies of science and technology (McNeil, 2007; Tsing, 2015), and media theory (Smelik & Lykke 2008; Parisi, 2004; Clarke, 2008; Fuller, 2005; Parikka, 2010). Feminist science studies goes planetary (Stengers, 1997; Franklin, Lury & Stacey, 2000; Lury, Parisi & Terranova, 2012) and displaces the centrality of the human, through sophisticated analyses of molecular biology (Margulis & Sagan, 1995; Fox Keller, 2002; Franklin, 2007) and computational systems (Lury, Parisi and Terranova, 2012). Eco-feminists (Plumwood, 1993, 2003), who always advocated geo-centred perspectives, now expand into all elements (Alaimo, 2010; Neimanis, 2017); animal studies becomes 'human-imal studies' (Hayward, 2011), as cross-species allegiances take hold (Hird & Roberts, 2011). The politics of meat (Adams, 1990, 2018) turns to radical veganism (MacCormack, 2014). Feminist theories of non- and posthuman subjectivity embrace non-anthropomorphic animal or technological others (Bryld & Lykke, 2000; Parisi, 2004; Braidotti, 2006, 2013; Alaimo,

2010), prompting a posthuman ethical turn (Braidotti, 2006; MacCormack, 2012). Even feminist interest in Darwin, which had been rare (Beer, 1983), grows (Rose & Rose, 2000; Carroll, 2004; Grosz, 2011).

It follows therefore that, both institutionally and theoretically, the gender, feminist and queer 'studies' areas, which historically have been the motor of both critique and creativity, innovative and challenging in equal measure, have an inspirational role to play also in relation to the posthuman context we inhabit. Contemporary feminist, gender, queer, postcolonial and anti-racist studies are all the more effective and creative as they have allowed themselves to be affected by the posthuman condition. This turn towards the critical posthumanities (Braidotti, 2013; Åsberg, 2018; Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018) marks the end of what Shiva (1993) called 'monocultures of the mind' and it leads feminist theory to pursue the radical politics of location and the analysis of social forms of exclusion in the current world-order of 'biopiracy' (Shiva, 1997); 'global obscenities' (Eisenstein, 1998); necro-politics (Mbembe, 2003) and world-wide dispossession (Sassen, 2014). The posthuman feminist knowing subjects are a complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking. But they remain committed to social justice and, while acknowledging the fatal attraction of global mediation, are not likely to forget that one-third of the world population has no access to electricity.

Posthuman bodies are co-constructed through relations with non-human agents and practices of the organic kind – *zoe* (animals, plants, other species) – but also with planetary or terrestrial forces (*geo*) and with non-organic (techno-mediated) factors through links to networks, platforms, algorithms, etc. It bears repeating that there is no foregone conclusion about what posthuman subjects constructed in *zoe-geo-techno-mediated* alliances are capable of becoming. Those patterns of transformation need to be discussed and negotiated collectively.

## GENDER ANALYSIS AS META-METHODOLOGY

Taking critical distance from anthropocentrism, however, raises also a number of affective difficulties: how one reacts to the practice of disloyalty to one's species depends to a large extent on the terms of one's engagement with it, as well as one's relationship to contemporary technological developments. The practice of defamiliarization is a key gender methodological tool to support the post-anthropocentric turn. That is a sobering process of disidentification from humanistic and anthropocentric values, to evolve towards a new frame of reference, which in this case entails becoming relational in a complex and multi-directional manner. Disengagement from dominant models of subject formation has been pioneered in a critical and creative manner (Kelly, 1979) by feminist theory. It activates the sexualized (women, LGBTQ+ people), racialized (indigenous, decolonial, Black people) 'others' towards alternative patterns of becoming. The post-anthropocentric turn further challenges the anthropocentric habits of thought, by foregrounding the politics of the 'naturalized' (non-human and earth) 'others'. It thus requires a more radical break from the assumption of human uniqueness.

New materialism is the philosophy that supports the feminist intervention upon the posthuman convergence. It proposes species egalitarianism which opens up productive possibilities of cross-species relations, alliances and inter-dependence. (Braidotti, 1994; Grosz, 2001; Bennett, 2010; Colebrook, 2014; Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). Such a vitalist approach to living matter (Ansell-Pearson, 1999; Protevi, 2013; Braidotti, 2013) displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life as *zoe* (Braidotti, 2006, 2011b), which stands for generative vitality. As embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of something we used to call 'nature', in spite of transcendental claims made for human consciousness. *Zoe*-centred life is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and

domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of life that is the logic of advanced capitalism (Cooper, 2008).

The urgent feminist questions are: how to combine the decline of anthropocentrism with issues of social justice? Can a post-anthropocentrism come to the rescue of our species? The sense of insurgency in contemporary posthuman scholarship is palpable in the ‘capitalocene’ era (Moore, 2013), that Haraway recently labelled: *chthulucene* (2016). Does the posthuman – in its post-humanistic and post-anthropocentric inceptions – 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, as a heterogeneous transversal assemblage (Braidotti, 1994, 2002, 2006) engendered by the cumulative effect of multiple relational bonds. The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements, starting from the very air we breathe.

Living matter – including embodied human flesh – is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life and connects to the animal and the earth (Grosz, 2004). Feminist philosophy of radical immanence foregrounds embodiment and embeddedness, not disconnection from the thinking organism. We think with the entire body, or rather we have to acknowledge the embodiment of the brain and the embrainment of the body (Marks, 1998). In this respect, it is important accordingly not to work completely within the social constructivist method, but rather to emphasize process ontologies which reconceptualize the connection to the non-human, vital forces, that is, *zoe*.

There is no question that contemporary feminist theory is productively posthuman, as evidenced by the work of Barad (2007), who coined the terms ‘posthumanist performativity’ and

'agential realism'. Queer science studies is especially keen on a transversal alliance between humans and other species; thus Alaimo (2010) theorizes trans-corporeal porous boundaries between human and other species, while Livingston and Puar (2011) call for interspecies or 'transspeciated selves' (Hayward, 2008). Queering the posthuman is in full swing (Giffney & Hird, 2008). A techno-ecological (Hörl, 2013), posthuman turn is at work which combines organic auto-poiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1972) with machinic self-organizing powers, as announced by Felix Guattari (1995, 2000) in his pioneering work on our eco-technologically mediated universe. The consensus is that there is no 'originary humanicity' (Kirby, 2011: 233) but only 'originary technicity' (MacKenzie, 2002).

To those who fear that emphasizing the posthuman aspects of our current conjuncture may result in short circuiting the process of emancipation of those who were not considered human to begin with, I reply that I share their concern, but also add that it is becoming painfully clear that those who are marked negatively as 'others', the dehumanized and marginalized others, are currently missing out on the profits and advantages of the fourth Industrial Revolution, while being excessively exposed to the ravages of the Sixth Extinction. This is the cruel imbalance that posthuman feminism wants to address, stressing that the posthuman condition is not post-power, nor post-injustice. The emphasis on 'post' in the posthuman rather implies that we move it forward, beyond traditional understandings of the human, so that the analyses of power and knowledge become an essential part of the feminist posthuman project.

As not all humans are the same to begin with, this conjuncture brings out deep structural inequalities and historically recurring forms of social and symbolic disqualification. Posthuman feminism analyses them in terms of hierarchies of sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences and the ontological disqualifications that have supported the dominant vision of the human.

The posthuman feminist position calls for a new political praxis, as a practical empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing in the radical immanence of their respective locations. Mindful of the structural injustices and massive power differentials at work in the globalized world, feminist theory needs to sharpen its gender navigational tools to steer a course that addresses the posthuman convergence in its complexity. Combining adequate accounts of the multiple locations of power at work in our world, feminist thought needs to actualize the virtual possibilities of becoming posthuman, starting from the position of those who were not fully human to begin with. In this respect posthuman feminism is not a new generic category but rather a navigational tool that can assist us in coming to terms with the gendered complexities of our times.

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