

Chapter 2

Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species

I loved George Eliot's prose well before I even knew that she actually translated Spinoza, my favourite philosopher, into English. Mary Evans was a woman of many talents and anyone who ever identified with Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1973) or Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* (2003) may not be cognitively aware of the fact that s/he stepped – surreptitiously and fatally – into a monistic universe of intersecting affective relations that simply make the world go round. George Eliot has authored my favourite sentence in the English language:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk around well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 1973: 226)

The roar which lies on the other side of the urbane, civilized veneer that allows for bound identities and efficient social interaction is the Spinozist indicator of the raw cosmic energy that underscores the making of civilizations, societies and their subjects. Vitalist materialism is a concept that helps us make sense of that external dimension, which in fact enfold within the subject as the internalized score of cosmic vibra-

tions (Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). It also constitutes the core of a posthuman sensibility that aims at overcoming anthropocentrism.

Let me spell out some of these rather dense ideas. A ‘monistic universe’ refers to Spinoza’s central concept that matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition. The obvious target of criticism here is Descartes’ famous mind–body distinction, but for Spinoza the concept goes even further: matter is one, driven by the desire for self-expression and ontologically free. The absence of any reference to negativity and to violent dialectical oppositions caused intense criticism of Spinoza on the part of Hegel and the Marxist-Hegelians. Spinoza’s monistic worldview was seen as politically ineffective and holistic at heart. This situation changed dramatically in the 1970s in France, when a new wave of scholars rehabilitated Spinozist monism precisely as an antidote to some of the contradictions of Marxism and as a way of clarifying Hegel’s relationship to Marx.¹ The main idea is to overcome dialectical oppositions, engendering non-dialectical understandings of materialism itself (Braidotti, 1991; Cheah, 2008), as an alternative to the Hegelian scheme. The ‘Spinozist legacy’ therefore consists in a very active concept of monism, which allowed these modern French philosophers to define matter as vital and self-organizing, thereby producing the staggering combination of ‘vitalist materialism’. Because this approach rejects all forms of transcendentalism, it is also known as ‘radical immanence’. Monism results in relocating difference outside the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others.

These monistic premises are for me the building blocks for a posthuman theory of subjectivity that does not rely on classical Humanism and carefully avoids anthropocentrism. The

¹ The group around Althusser started the debate in the mid-1960s; Deleuze’s path-breaking study of Spinoza dates from 1968 (in English in 1990); Macherey’s Hegel–Spinoza analysis came out in 1979 (in English in 2011); Negri’s work on the imagination in Spinoza in 1981 (in English in 1991).

classical emphasis on the unity of all matter, which is central to Spinoza, is reinforced by an updated scientific understanding of the self-organizing or ‘smart’ structure of living matter. These ideas are supported by new advances in contemporary biosciences, neural and cognitive sciences and by the informatics sector. Posthuman subjects are technologically mediated to an unprecedented degree. For instance, a neo-Spinozist approach is supported and expanded today by new developments in the mind–body interrelation within the neural sciences (Damasio, 2003). In my view, there is a direct connection between monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity.

Global Warning

George Eliot’s work is a good lead into at least some aspects of this materialist (or, as I will argue later in the chapter, ‘matter-realist’) worldview. The support is welcome, as many of the assumptions and premises of the post-anthropocentric universe are somewhat counter intuitive, although the term has acquired widespread currency nowadays. In mainstream public debates, for instance, the posthuman is usually coated in anxiety about the excesses of technological intervention and the threat of climate change, or by elation about the potential for human enhancement. In academic culture, on the other hand, the critique of anthropocentrism has even more shattering implications than the transformative agenda of posthumanism which I analysed in the previous chapter. The post-anthropocentric turn, linked to the compounded impacts of globalization and of technology-driven forms of mediation, strikes the human at his/her heart and shifts the parameters that used to define *anthropos*.

In this chapter I want to argue that the issue of the posthuman in relation to post-anthropocentrism is of an altogether different order than in post-humanism. For one thing, whereas the latter mobilized primarily the disciplinary field of philosophy, history, cultural studies and the classical Humanities in general, the issue of post-anthropocentrism enlists also science and technology studies, new media and digital culture, envi-

ronmentalism and earth-sciences, bio-genetics, neuroscience and robotics, evolutionary theory, critical legal theory, primatology, animal rights and science fiction. This high degree of trans-disciplinarity alone adds an extra layer of complexity to the issue. The key question for me is: what understandings of contemporary subjectivity and subject-formation are enabled by a post-anthropocentric approach? What comes after the anthropocentric subject?

How one reacts to this change of perspective depends to a large extent on one's relationship to technology. Being rather technophilic myself, I am quite upbeat. I will always side firmly with the liberatory and even transgressive potential of these technologies, against those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile, or to a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates individualism. I do think that one of the most pointed paradoxes of our era is precisely the tension between the urgency of finding new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency for our technologically mediated world and the inertia of established mental habits on the other. Donna Haraway put it with customary wit: the machines are so alive, whereas the humans are so inert! (Haraway, 1985). As if to mirror this, science and technology studies nowadays is a thriving area in academic institutions, whereas the Humanities are in serious trouble.

It may be useful to start by clarifying some aspects of the globalized context in which the decentring of anthropocentrism is taking place. As I argued elsewhere (Braidotti, 2002, 2006), advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification. It is a multiplier of deterritorialized differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of 'new, dynamic and negotiable identities' and an endless choice of consumer goods. This logic triggers a proliferation and a vampiric consumption of quantitative options. Many of them have to do with cultural 'others', from fusion cooking to 'world music'. Jackie Stacey, in her analysis of the new organic food industry (Franklin et al., 2000) argues that we literally eat the global economy. Paul Gilroy (2000) and Celia Lury (1998) remind us that we also wear it, listen to it and watch it on our many screens, on a daily basis.

The global circulation of goods, data, capital, bits and bytes of information frames the interaction of contemporary subjects on a daily basis. Multiple choices confront consumers at every step, but with varying degrees of actual freedom of choice. Take for instance the transformations incurred by the formerly elementary task of making a call to the local bank. What we have grown to expect nowadays is either an automated posthuman system of replies offering subsets of numbers that connect us to a further web of pre-recorded messages. Or else we welcome the relief of hearing a real-life human voice, knowing all along that it is emanating from some call centre miles away, in one of the emerging economies of the world. The end result is that phone calls are cheaper than ever but the actual length of the calls is definitely getting longer, as the caller wades through multiple new hurdles. Of course Internet communication is replacing all this, but my point is that the spinning differential force of our economic system is such that we have to run twice as fast, across automated replies or transcontinental phone lines, just to stay in the same place.

The most salient trait of the contemporary global economy is therefore its techno-scientific structure. It is built on the convergence between different and previously differentiated branches of technology, notably the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science. The bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is especially important and central to the discussion on the posthuman. This aspect involves the Human Genome project, stem cell research and bio-technological intervention upon animals, seeds, cells and plants. 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 post-anthropocentrism on the part of market forces which happily trade on Life itself.

The commodification of Life by bio-genetic advanced capitalism, however, is a complex affair. Consider my argument: the great scientific advances of molecular biology have taught us that matter is self-organized (autopoietic), whereas monistic philosophy adds that it is also structurally relational and

hence connected to a variety of environments. These insights combine in defining intelligent vitality or self-organizing capacity as a force that is not confined within feedback loops internal to the individual human self, but is present in all living matter. Why is matter so intelligent, though? Because it is driven by informational codes, which both deploy their own bars of information, and interact in multiple ways with the social, psychic and ecological environments (Guattari, 2000). What happens to subjectivity in this complex field of forces and data flows? My argument is that it becomes an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of all these factors (Braidotti 1991, 2011a). The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements. Living matter – including the flesh – is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life. I therefore do not work completely within the social constructivist method but rather emphasize the non-human, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*.

Post-anthropocentrism is marked by the emergence of ‘the politics of life itself’ (Rose, 2007). ‘Life’, far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter 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 wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe*. *Zoe* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself (Braidotti 2006, 2011b) stands for generative vitality. It 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. It is also an affirmative reaction of social and cultural theory to the great advances made by the other culture, that of the sciences. The relationship between the two will be addressed in chapter 4.

A posthuman theory of the subject emerges, therefore, as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing. These non-profit experiments with contemporary subjectivity actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature–culture continuum and is technologically mediated.

Not surprisingly, this non-profit, experimental approach to different practices of subjectivity is not exactly the spirit of contemporary capitalism. Under the cover of individualism, fuelled by a quantitative range of consumer choices, that system effectively promotes uniformity and conformism to the dominant ideology. The perversity of advanced capitalism, and its undeniable success, consists in reattaching the potential for experimentation with new subject formations back to an overinflated notion of possessive individualism (MacPherson, 1962), tied to the profit principle. This is precisely the opposite direction from the non-profit experimentations with intensity, which I defend in my theory of posthuman subjectivity. The opportunistic political economy of biogenetic capitalism turns *Life/zoe* – that is to say human and non-human intelligent matter – into a commodity for trade and profit.

What the neo-liberal market forces are after, and what they financially invest in, is the informational power of living matter itself. 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 bio-political governmentality. The warnings are now global. 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). Data banks of bio-genetic, neural and mediatic information about individuals are the true capital today, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. ‘Data-mining’ includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as special strategic targets for capital investments. This kind of predictive analytics of the human amounts to ‘Life-

mining',² with visibility, predictability and exportability as the key criteria.

Cooper sums up lucidly the complications of this political economy (2008: 3):

Where does (re)production end and technical invention begin, when life is out to work at the microbiological or cellular level? What is at stake in the extension of property law to cover everything from the molecular elements of life (biological patents) to the biospheric accident (catastrophe bonds)? What is the relationship between new theories of biological growth, complexity and evolution and recent neoliberal theories of accumulation? And how is it possible to counter these new dogmatisms without falling into the trap of neofundamentalist politics of life (the right-to-life movement or ecological survivalism, for example)?

It is significant to note the emphasis Cooper places on the risk of neo-fundamentalist positions, like the biological determinism of 'natural law' advocates, or ecological holism. This essentialist risk is high in our current socio-political context and it requires constant critical scrutiny on the part of scholars who start instead from the posthuman idea of the nature-culture continuum.

Patricia Clough pursues a similar line in her analysis of the 'affective turn' (2008). Because advanced capitalism reduces bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources, it levels out other categorical differences, so that 'equivalencies might be found to value one form of life against another, one vital capacity against another' (Clough, 2008: 17). What constitutes capital value in our social system is the accumulation of information itself, its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. Clough provides an impressive list of the concrete techniques employed by 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier Boutang, 2012) to test and monitor the capacities of affective or 'bio-mediated' bodies: DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection and iris or hand recognition. All these are also immediately operationalized as surveillance techniques both in civil society and in the war against terror. This necro-political governmentality is the topic of the next chapter.

² With thanks to Jose van Dijck for this formulation.

For now, let me stress my main point: the opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic 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 image of Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man on a Starbucks coffee cup (see figure 2.1) captures ironically the meretricious character of the posthuman connections engendered by global capital: 'I shop therefore I am!' may well be its motto.

The global economy is post-anthropocentric in that it ultimately unifies all species under the imperative of the market and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole. A negative sort of cosmopolitan interconnection is therefore established through a pan-human bond of vulnerability. The size of recent scholarship on the environmental

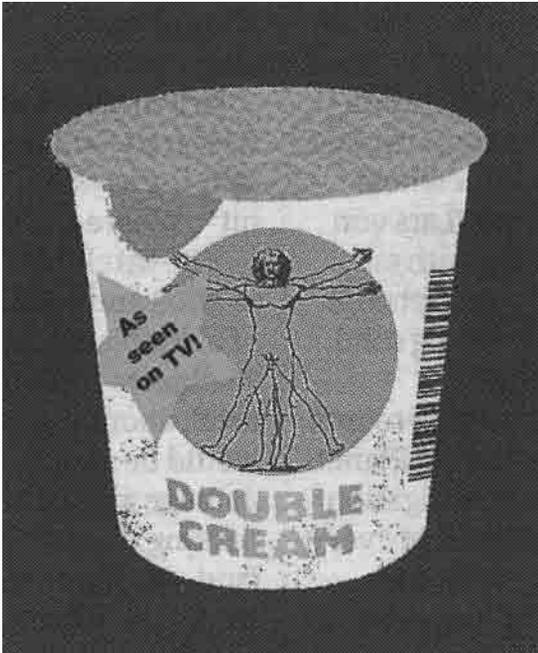


Figure 2.1 Vitruvian Man on Starbucks Coffee Cup
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crisis and climate change alone testifies to this state of emergency and to the emergence of the earth as a political agent. Post-anthropocentrism is especially thriving in popular culture and has been criticized (Smelik and Lykke, 2008) as a negative tendency to represent the transformations of the relations between humans and technological *apparatus* or machines in the mode of neo-gothic horror. The literature and cinema of extinction of our and other species, including disaster movies, is a successful genre of its own, enjoying broad popular appeal. I have labelled this narrow and negative social imaginary as techno-teratological (Braidotti, 2002), that is to say as the object of cultural admiration and aberration. This dystopian reflection of the bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is crucial to explain the popularity of this genre.

The social theory literature on shared anxiety about the future of both our species and of our humanist legacy is also rich and varied. Important liberal thinkers like Habermas (2003) and influential ones like Fukuyama (2002) are very alert on this issue, as are social critics like Sloterdijk (2009) and Borradori (2003). In different ways, they express deep concern for the status of the human, and seem particularly struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for it. I share their concern, but as a posthuman thinker with distinct anti-humanist feelings, I am less prone to panic at the prospect of a displacement of the centrality of the human and can also see the advantages of such an evolution.

For instance: once these post-anthropocentric practices blur the qualitative lines of demarcation not only among categories (male/female, black/white, human/animal, dead/alive, centre/margin, etc.), but also within each one of them, the human becomes subsumed into global networks of control and commodification which have taken 'Life' as the main target. The generic figure of the human is consequently in trouble. Donna Haraway puts it as follows:

our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally branded intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly avail-

able for the progress of science and the advancement of industry. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand. (1997: 74)

We know by now that the standard which was posited in the universal mode of 'Man' has been widely criticized (Lloyd, 1984) precisely because of its partiality. Universal 'Man', in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity (Irigaray, 1985b; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). How non-representative can you get? As if this line of criticism were not enough, this 'Man' is also called to task and brought back to its species specificity as *anthropos* (Rabinow, 2003; Esposito, 2008), that is to say as the representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose centrality is now challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns. Massumi refers to this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': 'a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human' (1998: 60) and as such undergoing significant mutations: 'species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter' (1998: 60).

These analyses indicate in my view that the political economy of bio-genetic capitalism is post-anthropocentric in its very structures, but not necessarily or automatically post-humanistic. It also tends to be deeply inhuman(e), as we shall see in the next chapter. The posthuman dimension of post-anthropocentrism can consequently be seen as a deconstructive move. What it deconstructs is species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, *anthropos* and *bios*, as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-humans, or *zoe*. What comes to the fore instead is a nature-culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self, as I argued earlier. This shift can be seen as a sort of 'anthropological exodus' from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 215) – a colossal hybridization of the species.

Once the centrality of *anthropos* is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling

down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives. Thus, if the crisis of Humanism inaugurates the posthuman by empowering the sexualized and racialized human 'others' to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master–slave relations, the crisis of *anthropos* relinquishes the demonic forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play. This places a different burden of responsibility on our species, which is the primary cause for the mess. The fact that our geological era is known as the 'anthropocene'³ stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by *anthropos* and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else.

Furthermore, the transposition of naturalized others poses a number of conceptual and methodological complications linked to the critique of anthropocentrism. This is due to the pragmatic fact that, as embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of nature, even though academic philosophy continues to claim transcendental grounds for human consciousness. How to reconcile this materialist awareness with the task of critical thought? As a brand of vital materialism, posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the 'exceptionalism' of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its non-human aspects. This requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to think at all, let alone think critically.

In the rest of this chapter I will develop this insight into a number of interrelated fields of post-anthropocentric enquiry. My focus is on the productive aspects of the posthuman predicament and the extent to which it opens up perspectives for affirmative transformations of both the structures of subjectivity and the production of theory and knowledge. I have labelled these processes as 'becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine', with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, though I am very independent in relation to them. Thus, the becoming-animal axis of transformation

³ The term was coined by Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2002 and has become widely accepted.

entails the displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of trans species solidarity on the basis of our being environmentally based, that is to say embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species (Margulis and Sagan, 1995). The planetary or becoming-earth dimension brings issues of environmental and social sustainability to the fore, with special emphasis on ecology and the climate change issue. The becoming-machine axis cracks open the division between humans and technological circuits, introducing biotechnologically mediated relations as foundational for the constitution the subject. I will conclude by advancing an idea that will be central to chapter 4, namely that we need to apply the vitalist brand of ‘matter-realism’ as the foundation for a system of ethical values where ‘life’ stands central, not only to the Life Sciences, but also to the Humanities in the twenty-first century. Let us start by looking at each of these cases in turn.

The Posthuman as Becoming-animal

Post-anthropocentrism displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for ‘Man’ as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in. This is easier done than said in the language and methodological conventions of critical theory. Is language not the anthropological tool *par excellence*? We saw in the previous chapter that the humanist image of thought also sets the frame for a self-congratulating relationship of Man to himself, which confirms the dominant subject as much in what he includes as his core characteristics as in what he excludes as ‘other’.

The subject of Humanism makes an internally contradictory claim in order to support his sovereign position. He is simultaneously an abstract universal and very much the spokesman of an elite species: both Human and *anthropos*. This logically impossible claim rests on an assumed political anatomy, according to which the counterpart of the ‘power of reason’ is the notion of Man as ‘rational animal’. As we saw in chapter 1, the latter is expected to inhabit a perfectly functional physical body, implicitly modelled upon ideals of

white masculinity, normality, youth and health. The dialectics of otherness is the inner engine of humanist Man's power, who assigns difference on a hierarchical scale as a tool of governance. All other modes of embodiment are cast out of the subject position and they include anthropomorphic others: non-white, non-masculine, non-normal, non-young, non-healthy, disabled, malformed or enhanced peoples. They also cover more ontological categorical divides between Man and zoo-morphic, organic or earth others. All these 'others' are rendered as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality. This process is inherently anthropocentric, gendered and racialized in that it upholds aesthetic and moral ideals based on white, masculine, heterosexual European civilization.

Let us look more closely at the mechanisms involved in the dialectics of negative difference, from the angle of animals. The animal is the necessary, familiar and much cherished other of *anthropos*. This familiarity, however, is fraught with perils. In a brilliant mock taxonomy, Louis Borges classified animals into three groups: those we watch television with, those we eat and those we are scared of. These exceptionally high levels of lived familiarity confine the human–animal interaction within classical parameters, namely, an oedipalized relationship (you and me together on the same sofa); an instrumental (thou shalt be consumed eventually) and a fantasmatic one (exotic, extinct infotainment objects of titillation).

Let us now analyse briefly each of these. The oedipal relationship between humans and animals is unequal and framed by the dominant human and structurally masculine habit of taking for granted free access to and the consumption of the bodies of others, animals included. As a mode of relation, it is therefore neurotic in that it is saturated with projections, taboos and fantasies. It is also a token of the human subject's sense of supreme ontological entitlement. Derrida referred to the power of the human species over animals in terms of 'carno-phallogocentrism' (Derrida, 2006) and criticized it as an example of epistemic and material violence. In their commentary, Berger and Segarra (2011) argue that Derrida's work on animality is not peripheral but quite central to his analysis of the limits of the Enlightenment project. Derrida's

attack on anthropocentrism is presented consequently as a necessary correlate of the critique of Humanism. The strong logical and historical connection between them frames a political critique of the damage inflicted by Western reason upon its multiple others. The recognition of shared ties of vulnerability can generate new forms of posthuman community and compassion (Pick, 2011). This familiar, oedipalized, and hence ambivalent and manipulative relationship between humans and animals expressed itself in a variety of ways that have become entrenched in our mental and cultural habits. The first is metaphorization.

Animals have long spelled out the social grammar of virtues and moral distinctions for the benefit of humans. This normative function was canonized in moral glossaries and cognitive bestiaries that turned animals into metaphorical referents for norms and values. Just think of the illustrious literary pedigree of the noble eagles, the deceitful foxes, the humble lambs and the crickets and bees that Livy and Moliere have immortalized. These metaphorical habits feed into the fantasmatic dimension of human–animal interaction, which in contemporary culture is best expressed by the entertainment value of non-anthropomorphic characters, ranging from King Kong to the hybrid blue creatures of *Avatar*, without forgetting Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* star-dinosaurs.

At the social level, the evidence for new human–animal interaction is strong and often it comes down to questions of representation. ‘Companion species’, as Haraway put it (2003), have been historically confined within infantilizing narratives that established affective kinship relations across the species. The most dominant spin-off of this narrative is the sentimental discourse about dogs’ devotion and unconditional loyalty, which Haraway argues against with all her mighty passion. As a nature cultural compound, a dog – not unlike other products of techno science – is a radical other, albeit a significant other. It is as socially constructed as most humans, not only through genetic screening, but also via health and hygiene regulations and various grooming practices. Who has not struggled to suppress a giggle of recognition at the news of the success of pets’ diet clinics in the glamorous suburbs of LA? Some surprising forms of material equivalence are found among different life-forms in these

posthuman days. We need to devise, therefore, a system of representation that matches the complexity of contemporary non-human animals and their proximity to humans. The point now is to move towards a new mode of relation; animals are no longer the signifying system that props up the humans' self-projections and moral aspirations. They need to be approached in a neo-literal mode, as a code system or a 'zoontology' of their own (Wolfe, 2003).

The second major manifestation of the problematic and contradictory familiarity between humans and animals is linked to the market economy and labour force. Since antiquity, animals have constituted a sort of zoo-proletariat, in a species hierarchy run by the humans. They have been exploited for hard labour, as natural slaves and logistical supports for humans prior to and throughout the mechanical age. They constitute, moreover, an industrial resource in themselves, animal bodies being primary material products starting from milk and their edible meat, but think also of the tusks of elephants, the hides of most creatures, the wool of sheep, the oil and fat of whales, the silk of caterpillars, etc.

As indicated by the figures I presented in the second vignette of the general introduction, this political economy of full-scale discursive and material exploitation continues today, with animals providing living material for scientific experiment, for our bio-technological agriculture, the cosmetics industry, drugs and pharmaceutical industries and other sectors of the economy. Animals like pigs and mice are genetically modified to produce organs for humans in xeno-transplantation experiments. Using animals as test cases and cloning them is now an established scientific practice: Oncomouse and Dolly the sheep are already part of history (Haraway, 1997; Franklin, 2007). In advanced capitalism, animals of all categories and species have been turned into tradable disposable bodies, inscribed in a global market of post-anthropocentric exploitation. As I said earlier, traffic in animals constitutes the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms but ahead of women. This creates a new negative bond between humans and animals.

At the height of the Cold War, when dogs and monkeys were being launched into orbit as part of the budding space exploration programmes and escalating competition between

the USA and the USSR, George Orwell ironically stated that 'all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others' (Orwell, 1946). At the dawn of the third millennium, in a world caught in indefinite and technologically mediated warfare, such metaphorical grandeur rings rather hollow. Post-anthropocentrism rather suggests the opposite: no animal is more equal than any other, because they are all equally inscribed in a market economy of planetary exchanges that commodifies them to a comparable degree and therefore makes them equally disposable. All other distinctions are blurred.

At the same time, the old mode of relation is currently being restructured. A *zoe*-egalitarian turn is taking place that encourages us to engage in a more equitable relationship with animals. Contemporary post-anthropocentric thought produces an anti-Oedipal animality within a fast-changing techno-culture that engenders mutations at all levels. In my view the challenge today is how to deterritorialize, or nomadize, the human–animal interaction, so as to by-pass the metaphysics of substance and its corollary, the dialectics of otherness. This also entails secularizing accordingly the concept of human nature and the life which animates it. Donna Haraway, a pioneer in post-anthropocentric thought and shrewd analyst of human–animal interaction, captured this fundamental shift in the ironical cartoons that depict companion species in the Vitruvian pose (see figures 2.2 and 2.3). Can a cat or a dog be the measure of at least some, if not exactly all things? Can it displace the genomic hierarchy that tacitly supported the humanists' self-representation? Here we see the contradictory effects of the post-anthropocentric politics of life itself, which I commented on earlier in the chapter.

The posthuman in the sense of post-anthropocentrism displaces the dialectical scheme of opposition, replacing well-established dualisms with the recognition of deep *zoe*-egalitarianism between humans and animals. The vitality of their bond is based on sharing this planet, territory or environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical, nor self-evident. This vital interconnection posits a qualitative shift of the relationship away from species-ism and towards an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human,

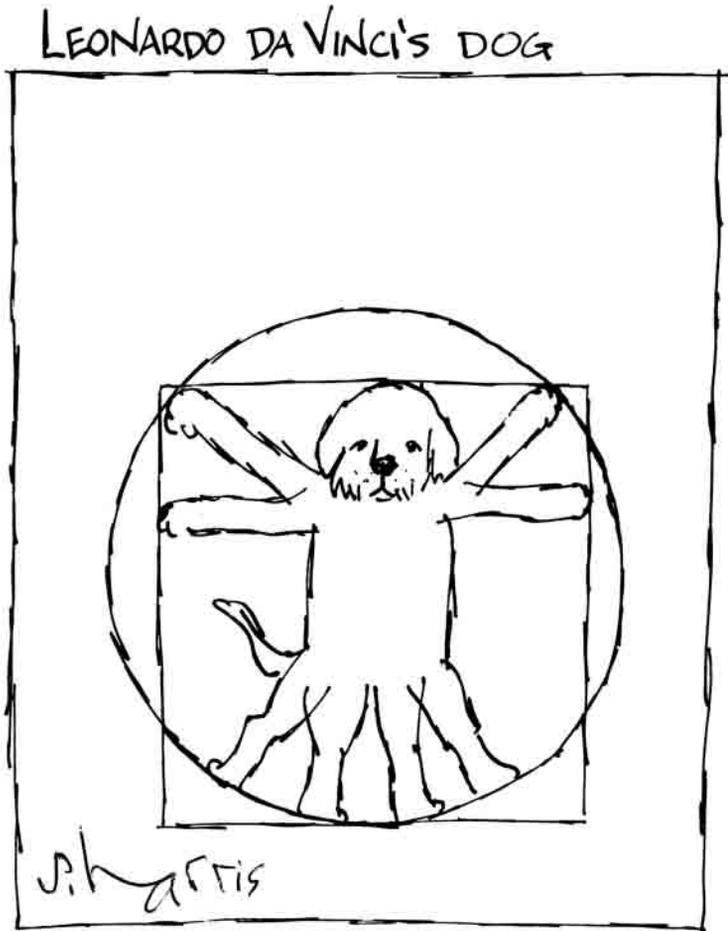


Figure 2.2 S. Harris, *Leonardo Da Vinci's Dog*

Source: www.cartoonstock.com

animal, others) can do. An ethology of forces based on Spinozist ethics emerges as the main point of reference for changing human–animal interaction. It traces a new political frame, which I see as an affirmative project in response to the commodification of Life in all its forms, that is the opportunistic logic of advanced capitalism.

This post-anthropocentric approach requires more efforts of our imagination to ground our representations in real-life

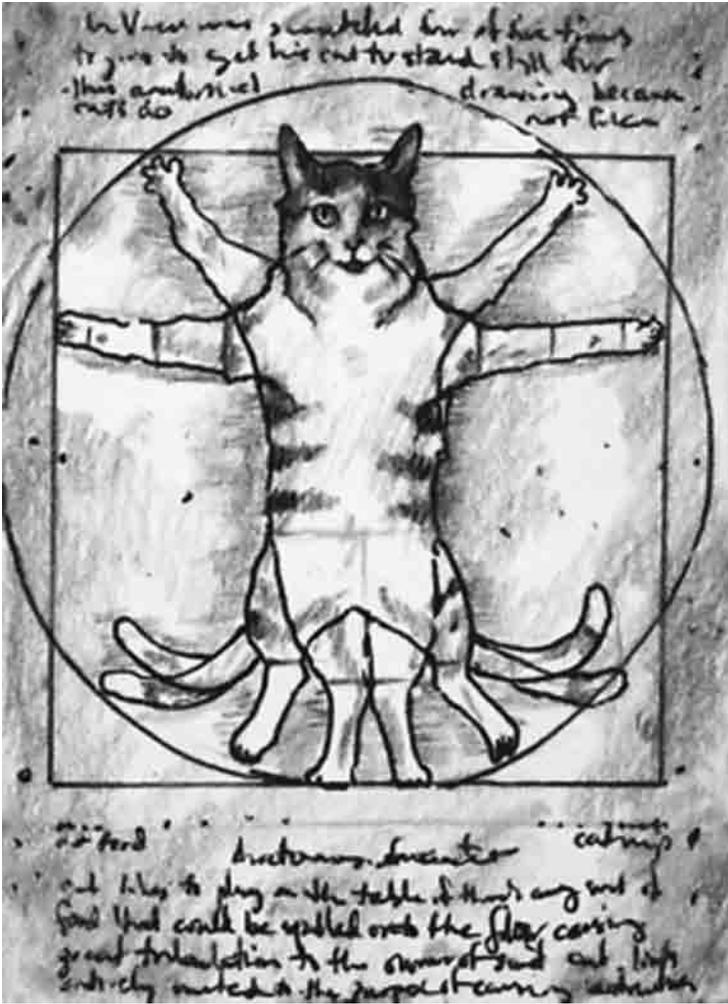


Figure 2.3 Maggie Stiefvater, *Vitruvian Cat*
 Source: Maggie Stiefvater via Flickr

conditions and in an affirmative manner. In this respect, we need to rethink dogs, cats and other sofa-based companions today as cutting across species partitions not only affectively, but also organically, so to speak. As nature-cultural compounds, these animals qualify as cyborgs, that is to say as creatures of mixity or vectors of posthuman relationality. In

many ways, Dolly the sheep is the ideal figuration for the complex bio-mediated temporalities and forms of intimacy that represent the new post-anthropocentric human–animal interaction. She/it is simultaneously the last specimen of her species – descended from the lineage of sheep that were conceived and reproduced as such – and the first specimen of a new species: the electronic sheep that Philip K. Dick dreamed of, the forerunner of the androids society of *Blade Runner* (1982). Cloned, not conceived sexually, heterogeneous mix of organism and machine, Dolly has become delinked from reproduction and hence divorced from descent. Dolly is no daughter of any member of her/its old species – simultaneously orphan and mother of her/itself. First of a new gender, she/it is also beyond the gender dichotomies of the patriarchal kinship system.

A copy made in the absence of one single original, Dolly pushes the logic of the postmodern simulacrum to its ultimate perversion. She/it spins Immaculate Conception into a biogenetic third-century version. The irony reaches a pathetic peak when we remember that Dolly died of a banal and all too familiar disease: rheumatism. After which, to add insult to injury, she suffered a last indignity, taxidermy, and was embalmed and exhibited in a science museum as a scientific rarity. She/it simultaneously inhabits the nineteenth century and as a media celebrity also strikes a chord with the twentieth century. Both archaic and hyper-modern, Dolly is a compound of multiple anachronisms, situated across different chronological axes. She/it inhabits complex and self-contradictory time zones. Like other contemporary techno-teratological animals or entities (oncomouse comes to mind), Dolly shatters the linearity of time and exists in a continuous present. This techno-electronic timeless time is saturated with asynchronicity, that is to say, it is structurally unhinged. Thinking about Dolly blurs the categories of thought we have inherited from the past – she/it stretches the longitude and latitude of thought itself, adding depth, intensity and contradiction. Because she/it embodies complexity, this entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is the icon of the posthuman condition.

Haraway also stresses the need for new images, visions and representations of the human–animal continuum. She pro-

poses to start rethinking human–animal interaction from the hybrid figuration of oncomouse. As the first patented animal in the world, a transgenic organism created for the purposes of research, the oncomouse is posthuman in every possible sense of the term. It has been created for the purpose of profit-making trafficking between the laboratories and the marketplace, and thus navigates between patenting offices and the research benches. Haraway wants to establish a sense of kinship with this transgenic animal. Calling her ‘my sibling [. . .] male or female, s/he is my sister’ (1997: 79), Haraway stresses the extent to which oncomouse is both a victim and a scapegoat, a Christ-like figure that sacrifices herself in order to find the cure for breast cancer and thus save the lives of many women: a mammal rescuing other mammals. Because the oncomouse breaks the purity of lineage, she is also a spectral figure. Not unlike Dolly, it is the never dead that pollutes the natural order simply by being manufactured and not born. S/he is a cyber-teratological apparatus that scrambles the established codes and thus destabilizes but also reconstructs the posthuman subject. Figurations like Dolly and oncomouse are no metaphors, but rather vehicles to imaginatively ground our powers of understanding within the shifting landscapes of the present.⁴

I am quite aware that my cheerful endorsement of the post-anthropocentric turn may appear as over-enthusiastic and even triumphalist to some (Moore, 2011). As I said in the previous chapter, one’s relation to the posthuman is affected in the first place by one’s critical assessment of the human. My deep-seated anti-humanist leanings show in the glee with which I welcome the displacement of *anthropos*. My posthuman enthusiasm, however, does not blind me to the cruel contradictions and the power differences at work in contemporary human–animal interaction. The old patterns of instrumental behaviour are still operative, of course, with animals being used for food, wool and skin products, labour in agriculture, industry and science. If anything, the necropolitical economy is exacerbated by the global conflicts and

⁴ In this regard, these figurations fulfil the same function as Deleuze’s *conceptual personae* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b).

by the financial crisis. In so far as advanced capitalism markets and profits from the bio-genetic structures of life itself, it contributes to the displacement of anthropocentrism. Animals are caught in a double bind: on the one hand, they are more than ever the object of inhumane exploitation; on the other hand, they benefit from residual forms of reparative humanization. This conflicting situation leads me to conclude that post-anthropocentrism is for both humans and animals a mixed blessing. Allow me to explain.

Compensatory Humanism

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the issue of 'animal rights' has gathered momentum in most advanced liberal democracies. Political parties devoted entirely to the well-being of non-anthropocentric others – Green or Animal parties – sit in many Northern European parliaments. They rest on the critique of species-ism, that is to say the anthropocentric arrogance of Man as the dominant species whose sense of entitlement includes access to the body of all others. Animal rights activists defend the end of 'anthropolatry', the assumption of human superiority, and call for more respect and priority to be given to the interests of other species and life forms.

In animal rights theory, these post-anthropocentric analytic premises are combined with neo-humanism to reassess the validity of a number of humanist values. These concern anthropomorphic selves, who are assumed to hold unitary identity, self-reflexive consciousness, moral rationality and the capacity to share emotions like empathy and solidarity. The same virtues and capabilities are also attributed to non-anthropomorphic others. The epistemological and moral assumptions that underscore this position have been in place since the Enlightenment, but were previously reserved for humans only, to the detriment of all non-human agents such as animals and plants. Animal rights people, whom I define as post-anthropocentric neo-humanists, converge on the need to uphold and expand on these values across all species.

The best known champion of 'animal rights', Peter Singer, defends a utilitarian position in favour of the moral rational-

ism of animals. A liberal humanist like Nussbaum (2006) agrees to pursue species equity. Working within the classical liberal tradition, Mary Midgley (1996) does not even trust the term 'anthropocentrism', referring to it as 'human chauvinism; narrowness of sympathy, comparable to national, or race or gender-chauvinism. It could also be called exclusive humanism, as opposed to the hospitable, friendly, inclusive kind' (1996: 105). The alternative Midgley supports is to admit that 'we are not self-contained and self-sufficient, either as a species or as individuals, but live naturally in deep mutual dependence' (1996: 9–10). In her powerful analyses of the environmental crisis of reason, Val Plumwood (2003) also calls for a new dialogical interspecies ethics based on decentring human privilege.

For radical eco-feminists, both utilitarianism and liberalism are found wanting: the former for its condescending approach to non-human others, the latter in view of the hypocritical denial of humans' manipulative mastery over animals. This critique is expanded to the destructive side of human individualism that entails selfishness and a misplaced sense of superiority, which for feminists (Donovan and Adams, 1996, 2007) is connected to male privileges and the oppression of women and supports a general theory of male domination. Meat-eating is targeted as a legalized form of cannibalism by old and new feminist vegetarian and vegan critical theory (Adams, 1990; MacCormack, 2012). Speciesism is therefore held accountable as an undue privilege to the same degree as sexism and racism. The pervasiveness of a 'sex-species' hierarchical system tends to remain unacknowledged and uncriticized even in the framework of animal rights activism. The corrective influence of feminism is valued because it emphasizes both the political importance of the collectivity and of emotional bonding.

New analytic data on the status of animals is currently being analysed through the interdisciplinary tools of anthropology, primatology, palaeontology, science and technology studies. One of the most prominent post-anthropocentric neo-humanists in this field is Frans de Waal (1996), who extends classical humanist values, like empathy and moral responsibility, to the upper primates. On the basis of rigorous empirical observation of the great apes, de Waal transformed

our thinking about evolution and evolutionary psychology by challenging the emphasis on aggression as the motor of species development. De Waal's groundbreaking work on 'our inner ape' and the bonobos located communication and sexual exchange at the core of community formation, striking also a note in support of the evolutionary role of the females of species. In his more recent work, de Waal (2009) stresses the importance of empathy as a form of emotional communication or emotionally mediated communication among non-human primates.

The emphasis on empathy accomplishes several significant goals in view of a posthuman theory of subjectivity. Firstly, it reappraises communication as an evolutionary tool. Secondly, it identifies in emotions, rather than in reason, the key to consciousness. Thirdly, it develops what Harry Kunneman has defined as 'a hermeneutical form of naturalism' which takes critical distance from the tradition of social constructivism and situates moral values as innate qualities. This is a significant addition to the theory of the nature-culture continuum. Our species, argues de Waal, is 'obligatorily gregarious' (2006: 4). Moreover, de Waal's view of the subject is materialist, as opposed to the transcendence of reason, and attracted to David Hume's approach to the emotions or passions as key to identity formation. Last but not least, I would suggest that Frans de Waal is a post-anthropocentric social democrat who is very committed to the creation of social infrastructures of generosity and reciprocal altruism and support. His idea that moral goodness is contagious is supported by the 'mirror neurons' theory of empathy. The emphasis falls on the ethical continuity between humans and upper primates, arguing that it is a bit too easy to project our aggressive tendencies onto the animals and reserve the quality of goodness as a prerogative of our species. De Waal (1996) argues that evolution has also provided the requisites for morality and attacks the 'anthropodenial' (2006: xvi) of human supremacists. Empathy as an innate and genetically transmitted moral tendency, or the naturalization of morals, is in fashion, whereas selfish genes and greed are definitely out. All these aspects are extremely relevant for a posthuman theory of the subject.

The reason why I am somewhat sceptical of post-anthropocentric neo-humanism, however, is that it is rather uncriti-

cal about Humanism itself. The compensatory efforts on behalf of animals generate what I consider as a belated kind of solidarity between the human dwellers of this planet, currently traumatized by globalization, technology and the ‘new’ wars, and their animal others. It is at best an ambivalent phenomenon, in that it combines a negative sense of cross-species bonding with classical and rather high-minded humanist moral claims. In this cross-species embrace, Humanism is actually being reinstated uncritically under the aegis of species egalitarianism.

In my work on the posthuman subject, I choose not to leave aside the critical acknowledgement of the limitations of Humanism, as outlined in the previous chapter. I am also sharply aware of the fact that we live in the era of the anthropocene, that is to say an age when the earth’s ecological balance is directly regulated by humanity. I think that at such a time of deep epistemological, ethical and political crises of values in human societies, extending the privileges of humanist values to other categories can hardly be considered as a selfless and generous, or a particularly productive move. Asserting a vital bond between the humans and other species is both necessary and fine. This bond is negative in that it is the effect of shared vulnerability, which is itself a consequence of human actions upon the environment. Is it not the case then that the humans have spread to non-humans their fundamental anxiety about the future? The humanization of non-human animals may therefore come at a price, especially at a historical time when the very category of the ‘human’ has become challenged.

Anthropomorphizing them so as to extend to animals the principle of moral and legal equality may be a noble gesture, but it is inherently flawed, on two scores. Firstly, it confirms the binary distinction human/animal by benevolently extending the hegemonic category, the human, towards the others. Secondly, it denies the specificity of animals altogether, because it uniformly takes them as emblems of the trans-species, universal ethical value of empathy. In my view, the point about posthuman relations, however, is to see the *inter-relation* human/animal as constitutive of the identity of *each*. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the ‘nature’ of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction. This is the ‘milieu’ of the human/

non-human continuum and it needs to be explored as an open experiment, not as a foregone moral conclusion about allegedly universal values or qualities. The middle ground of that particular interaction has to remain normatively neutral, in order to allow for new parameters to emerge for the becoming-animal of *anthropos*, a subject that has been encased for much too long in the mould of species supremacy. Intensive spaces of becoming have to be opened and, more importantly, to be kept open.

In an era when natural offspring are being replaced by corporate brands and manufactured and patented bio-products, the ethical imperative to bind to them and be accountable for their well-being remains as strong as ever. We need new genealogies, alternative theoretical and legal representations of the new kinship system and adequate narratives to live up to this challenge. I hope my vision of posthuman subjectivity can insert more conceptual creativity into critical theory and thus work towards an affirmative brand of post-human thought. In the universe that I inhabit as a post-industrial subject of so-called advanced capitalism, there is a great deal of familiarity and hence much in common in the way of embodied and embedded locations, between female humans, oncomouse and the cloned sheep Dolly. I owe as much to the genetically engineered members of the former animal kingdom, as to humanistic ideals of the uniqueness of my species. Similarly, my situated position as a female of the species makes me structurally serviceable and thus closer to the organisms that are willing or unwilling providers of organs or cells than to any notion of the inviolability and integrity of the human species.

I know that this may sound impatient and even reckless, but I stand by it: that in me which no longer identifies with the dominant categories of subjectivity, but which is not yet completely out of the cage of identity, that is to say that which goes on differing, is at home with *zoe*, the post-anthropocentric subject. These rebellious components for me are related to the feminist consciousness of what it means to be embodied female. As such, I am a she-wolf, a breeder that multiplies cells in all directions; I am an incubator and a carrier of vital and lethal viruses; I am mother-earth, the generator of the future. In the political economy of phallogocentrism and of

anthropocentric humanism, which predicates the sovereignty of Sameness in a falsely universalistic mode, my sex fell on the side of ‘Otherness’, understood as pejorative difference, or as being-worth-less-than. The becoming-posthuman speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never quite made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted.

The Posthuman as Becoming-earth

The displacement of anthropocentrism results in a drastic restructuring of humans’ relation to animals, but critical theory may be able to adjust itself to the challenge, mostly by building on the multiple imaginary and affective ties that have consolidated human–animal interaction. The post-anthropocentric shift towards a planetary, geo-centred perspective, however, is a conceptual earthquake of an altogether different scale than the becoming-animal of Man. This event is sending seismic waves across the field of the Humanities and critical theory. Claire Colebrook, with her customary wit, calls it a ‘critical climate change’.⁵

In the age of anthropocene, the phenomenon known as ‘geo-morphism’ is usually expressed in negative terms, as environmental crisis, climate change and ecological sustainability. Yet, there is also a more positive dimension to it in the sense of reconfiguring the relationship to our complex habitat, which we used to call ‘nature’. The earth or planetary dimension of the environmental issue is indeed not a concern like any other. It is rather the issue that is immanent to all others, in so far as the earth is our middle and common ground. This is the ‘milieu’ for all of us, human and non-human inhabitant of this particular planet, in this particular era. The planetary opens onto the cosmic in an immanent materialist dimension. My argument is that, again, this change of perspective is rich in alternatives for a renewal of subjectivity. What would a geo-centred subject look like?

⁵ This is the title of the on-line book series that Colebrook edits for the Open Humanities Press.

The starting point for me remains the nature–culture continuum, but by now we need to insert into this framework the monistic insight that, as Lloyd put it, we are all ‘part of nature’ (1994). This statement, which she frames in a monistic ontology based on Spinoza’s philosophy, is sobering as well as inspiring. It is further complicated, for us citizens of the third millennium, by the fact that we actually inhabit a nature–culture continuum which is both technologically mediated and globally enforced. This means that we cannot assume a theory of subjectivity that takes for granted naturalistic foundationalism, nor can we rely on a social constructivist and hence dualistic theory of the subject which disavows the ecological dimension. Instead, critical theory needs to fulfil potentially contradictory requirements.

The first is to develop a dynamic and sustainable notion of vitalist, self-organizing materiality; the second is to enlarge the frame and scope of subjectivity along the transversal lines of post-anthropocentric relations I outlined in the previous section. The idea of subjectivity as an assemblage that includes non-human agents has a number of consequences. Firstly, it implies that subjectivity is not the exclusive prerogative of *anthropos*; secondly, that it is not linked to transcendental reason; thirdly, that it is unhinged from the dialectics of recognition; and lastly, that it is based on the immanence of relations. The challenge for critical theory is momentous: we need to visualize the subject as a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole, and to do so within an understandable language.

Let us pause on the latter for a minute, as it raises the issue of representation, which is crucial for the Humanities and for critical theory. Finding an adequate language for post-anthropocentrism means that the resources of the imagination, as well as the tools of critical intelligence, need to be enlisted for this task. The collapse of the nature–culture divide requires that we need to devise a new vocabulary, with new figurations to refer to the elements of our posthuman embodied and embedded subjectivity. The limitations of the social constructivist method show up here and need to be compensated by more conceptual creativity. Most of us who were trained in social theory, however, have experienced at

least some degree of discomfort at the thought that some elements of our subjectivity may not be totally socially constructed. Part of the legacy of the Marxist Left consists, in fact, in a deeply rooted suspicion towards the natural order and green politics.

As if this mistrust of the natural were not enough, we also need to reconceptualize the relation to the technological artefact as something as intimate as close as nature used to be. The technological apparatus is our new 'milieu' and this intimacy is far more complex and generative than the prosthetic, mechanical extension that modernity had made of it. Throughout this change of parameters, I also want to be ever mindful of the importance of the politics of locations and keep investigating who exactly is the 'we' who is posing all these queries in the first place. This new scheme for rethinking posthuman subjectivity is as rich as it is complex, but it is grounded in real-life, world-historical conditions that are confronting us with pressing urgency.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) addresses some of these concerns by investigating the consequences of the climate change debate for the practice of history. He argues that the scholarship on climate change causes both spatial and temporal difficulties. It brings about a change of scale in our thinking, which now needs to encompass a planetary or geo-centred dimension, acknowledging that humans are larger than a biological entity and now wield a geological force. It also shifts the temporal parameters away from the expectation of continuity which sustains the discipline of history, to contemplate the idea of extinction, that is to say, a future without 'us'. Furthermore, these shifts in the basic parameters also affect the content of historical research, by 'destroying the artificial but time honoured distinction between natural and human histories' (Chakrabarty, 2009: 206). Although Chakrabarty does not take the post-anthropocentric path, he comes to the same conclusion as I do: the issue of geo-centred perspectives and the change of location of humans from mere biological to geological agents calls for recompositions of both subjectivity and community.

The geo-centred turn also has other serious political implications. The first concerns the limitations of classical Humanism in the Enlightenment model. Relying on post-colonial

theory, Chakrabarty points out that the ‘philosophers of freedom were mainly, and understandably, concerned with how humans would escape the injustice, oppression, inequality or even uniformity foisted on them by other humans or human-made systems’ (2009: 208). Their anthropocentrism, coupled with a culture-specific notion of Humanism, limits their relevance today. The climate change issue and the spectre of human extinction also affect ‘the analytic strategies that postcolonial and postimperial historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the postwar scenario of decolonization and globalization’ (Chakrabarty, 2009: 198). I would add that the social constructivist approach of Marxist, feminist and post-colonial analyses does not completely equip them to deal with the change of spatial and temporal scale engendered by the post-anthropocentric or geo-centred shift. This insight is the core of the radical post-anthropocentric position I want to defend, which I see as a way of updating critical theory for the third millennium.

Many scholars are coming to the same conclusion, through different routes. For instance, post-anthropocentric neo-humanist traditions of socialist or of standpoint feminist theories (Harding, 1986) and of post-colonial theory (Shiva, 1997) have approached the issues of environmentalism in a post-anthropocentric, or at least non-androcentric, or non-male-dominated, manner, as we saw in the previous chapter. This critique of anthropocentrism is expressed in the name of ecological awareness, with strong emphasis on the experience of social minorities like women and of non-Western peoples. The recognition of multicultural perspectives and the critique of imperialism and ethnocentrism add a crucial aspect to the discussion on the becoming-earth, but nowadays they also fall in their own internal contradictions.

Let us take, for instance, the case of ‘deep ecology’. Arne Naess (1977a, 1977b) and James Lovelock’s ‘Gaia’ hypothesis (1979) are geo-centred theories that propose a return to holism and to the notion of the whole earth as a single, sacred organism. This holistic approach is rich in perspectives, but also quite problematic for a vitalist, materialist posthuman thinker. What is problematic about it is less the holistic part than the fact that it is based on a social constructivist dualistic method. This means that it opposes the earth to industrializa-

tion, nature to culture, the environment to society and comes down firmly on the side of the natural order. This results in a relevant political agenda that is critical of consumerism and possessive individualism, including a strong indictment of technocratic reason and technological culture. But this approach has two drawbacks. Firstly, its technophobic aspect is not particularly helpful in itself, considering the world we are living in. Secondly, it paradoxically reinstates the very categorical divide between the natural and the manufactured which it is attempting to overcome.

Why do I not agree with this position? Because of two interrelated ideas: firstly, because of the nature–culture continuum and the subsequent rejection of the dualistic methodology of social constructivism – the post-anthropocentric neo-humanists end up reinstating this distinction, albeit with the best of intentions in relation to the natural order; secondly, because I am suspicious of the negative kind of bonding going on in the age of anthropocene between humans and non-humans. The trans-species embrace is based on the awareness of the impending catastrophe: the environmental crisis and the global warm/ning issue, not to speak of the militarization of space, reduce all species to a comparable degree of vulnerability. The problem with this position is that, in flagrant contradiction with its explicitly stated aims, it promotes full-scale humanization of the environment. This strikes me as a regressive move, reminiscent of the sentimentality of the Romantic phases of European culture. I concur therefore with Val Plumwood's (1993, 2003) assessment that deep ecology misreads the earth–cosmos nexus and merely expands the structures of possessive egoism and self-interests to include non-human agents.

Significantly, while the holistic approach also makes reference to Spinoza's monism, it steers clear of contemporary re-readings of Spinoza by the likes of Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, or other radical branches of Continental philosophy. Spinoza's idea of the unity of mind and soul is applied in support of the belief that all that lives is holy and the greatest respect is due to it. This idolatry of the natural order is linked to Spinoza's vision of God and the unity between man and nature. It stresses the harmony between the human and the ecological habitat in order to propose a sort of syn-

thesis of the two. Deep ecology is therefore spiritually charged in an essentialist way. Because there are no boundaries and everything is interrelated, to hurt nature is ultimately to hurt ourselves. Thus, the earth environment as a whole deserves the same ethical and political consideration as humans. This position is helpful but it strikes me as a way of humanizing the environment, that is to say, as a well-meaning form of residual anthropomorphic normativity, applied to non-human planetary agents. Compensatory Humanism is a two-faced position.

In contrast with this position, but also building on some of its premises, I would like to propose an updated brand of Spinozism (Citton and Lordon, 2008). I see Spinozist monism, and the radical immanent forms of critique that rest upon it, as a democratic move that promotes a kind of ontological pacifism. Species equality in a post-anthropocentric world does urge us to question the violence and the hierarchical thinking that result from human arrogance and the assumption of transcendental human exceptionalism. In my view, monistic relationality stresses instead the more compassionate aspect of subjectivity. A Spinozist approach, re-read with Deleuze and Guattari, allows us to by-pass the pitfalls of binary thinking and to address the environmental question in its full complexity. Contemporary monism implies a notion of vital and self-organizing matter, as we saw in the previous chapter, as well as a non-human definition of Life as *zoe*, or a dynamic and generative force. It is about 'the embodiment of the mind and the embrainment of the body' (Marks, 1998).

Deleuze also refers to this vital energy as the great animal, the cosmic 'machine', not in any mechanistic or utilitarian way, but in order to avoid any reference to biological determinism on the one hand and overinflated, psychologized individualism on the other. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also use the term 'Chaos' to refer to that 'roar' of cosmic energy which most of us would rather ignore. They are careful to point out, however, that Chaos is not chaotic, but it rather contains the infinite expanse of all virtual forces. These potentialities are real in so far as they call for actualization through pragmatic and sustainable practices. To mark this close connection between the virtual and the real, they turn to literature and borrow from James Joyce the neologism 'chaosmos'. This is

a condensation of 'chaos' and 'cosmos' that expresses the source of eternal energy.

Again, the issue of language and representation comes up in this seemingly abstruse choice of terms. What I find praiseworthy on the part of my critical theory teachers is the extent to which they are willing to take the risk of ridicule by experimenting with language that shocks established habits and deliberately provokes imaginative and emotional reactions. The point of critical theory is to upset common opinion (*doxa*), not to confirm it. Although this approach has met with hostile reception in academia (as we shall see in chapter 4), I see it as a gesture of generous and deliberate risk-taking and hence as a statement in favour of academic freedom.

I consequently experiment with my own alternative figurations, ranging from the nomadic subject to other *conceptual personae* that help me navigate across the stormy waters of the post-anthropocentric predicament. Rigorously materialist, my own nomadic thought defends a post-individualistic notion of the subject, which is marked by a monistic, relational structure. Yet, it is not undifferentiated in terms of the social coordinates of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race. Nomadic subjectivity is the social branch of complexity theory.

Where does this leave our becoming-earth? Actually, we are in the middle of it. Let us resume the argument from the idea of the posthuman subject. You may remember that the recomposition of a negatively indexed new idea of 'the human' as an endangered species, alongside other non-human categories, is currently celebrated by post-anthropocentric neo-humanists of all sorts, from animal rights activists to eco-feminists. They take the environmental crisis as evidence of the need to reinstate universal humanist values. I have no real quarrels with the moral aspiration that drives this process and share the same ethical longing. I am, however, seriously worried about the limitations of an uncritical reassertion of Humanism as the binding factor of this reactively assumed notion of a pan-human bond. I want to stress that the awareness of a new (negatively indexed) reconstruction of something we call 'humanity' must not be allowed to flatten out or dismiss all the power differentials that are still enacted and operationalized through the axes of sexualization/racializa-

tion/naturalization, just as they are being reshuffled by the spinning machine of advanced, bio-genetic capitalism. Critical theory needs to think simultaneously the blurring of categorical differences and their reassertion as new forms of bio-political, bio-mediated political economy, with familiar patterns of exclusion and domination. For instance, in his analysis of the double limitations of both classical Humanism and Marxist oriented and post-colonial theory, Dipesh Chakrabarty raises a very pertinent question: if you consider the difference in carbon print between richer and poorer nations, is it really fair to speak of the climate change crisis as a common 'human' concern? I would push this further and ask: is it not risky to accept the construction of a negative formation of humanity as a category that stretches to all human beings, *all other differences notwithstanding*? Those differences do exist and continue to matter, so what are we to make of them? The process of becoming-earth points to a qualitatively different planetary relation.

The question of differences leads us back to power and to the politics of locations and the necessity of an ethical-political theory of subjectivity, namely, who exactly is the 'we' of this pan-humanity bonded in fear of a common threat? Chakrabarty puts it lucidly: 'Species may indeed be the name of a pace-holder for an emergent, new universal history of humans that flashes up the moment of the danger that is climate change' (2009: 222). As a result, I would argue that critical theorists need to strike a rigorous and coherent note of resistance against the neutralization of difference that is induced by the perverse materiality and the tendentious mobility of advanced capitalism.

A more egalitarian road, in a *zoe*-centred way, requires a modicum of goodwill on the part of the dominant party, in this case *anthropos* himself, towards his non-human others. I am aware, of course, that this is asking a lot. The post-anthropocentric shift away from the hierarchical relations that had privileged 'Man' requires a form of estrangement and a radical repositioning on the part of the subject. The best method to accomplish this is through the strategy of defamiliarization or critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject. Dis-identification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way

for creative alternatives. Deleuze would call it an active ‘deterritorialization’. Race and post-colonial theories have also made important contributions to the methodology and the political strategy of de-familiarization (Gilroy, 2005). I have defended this method as a dis-identification from familiar and hence normative values, such as the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, so as to move sexual difference towards the process of becoming-minoritarian (Braidotti, 1994, 2011a). In a similar vein, Spinozist feminist thinkers like Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd (1999) argue that socially embedded and historically grounded changes require a qualitative shift of our ‘collective imaginings’, or a shared desire for transformations. The conceptual frame of reference I have adopted for the method of de-familiarization is monism. It implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others. A posthuman subject thus constituted exceeds the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism, to acquire a planetary dimension.

The Posthuman as Becoming-machine

The issue of technology is central to the post-anthropocentric predicament and it has already come out several times in the previous sections. The relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion. The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems.

As in the case of human–animal relations, the move is beyond metaphorization. The metaphorical or analogue function that machinery fulfilled in modernity, as an anthropocentric device that imitated embodied human capacities, is replaced today by a more complex political economy that connects bodies to machines more intimately, through simu-

lation and mutual modification. As Andreas Huyssen (1986) has argued, in the electronic era, wires and circuitry exercise another kind of seduction than the pistons and grinding engines of industrial machinery. Electronic machines are, from this angle, quite immaterial: plastic boxes and metal wires that convey information. They do not 'represent' anything, but rather carry clear instructions and can reproduce clear information patterns. The main thrust of micro-electronic seduction is actually neural, in that it foregrounds the fusion of human consciousness with the general electronic network. Contemporary information and communication technologies exteriorize and duplicate electronically the human nervous system. This has prompted a shift in our field of perception: the visual modes of representation have been replaced by sensorial-neuronal modes of simulation. As Patricia Clough puts it, we have become 'biomediated' bodies (2008: 3).

We can therefore safely start from the assumption that the cyborgs are the dominant social and cultural formations that are active throughout the social fabric, with many economic and political implications. The Vitruvian Man has gone cybernetic (see figure 2.4). Let me qualify this statement by adding that all technologies can be said to have a strong biopolitical effect upon the embodied subject they intersect with. Thus, cyborgs include not only the glamorous bodies of high-tech, jet-fighter pilots, athletes or film stars, but also the anonymous masses of the underpaid, digital proletariat who fuel the technology-driven global economy without ever accessing it themselves (Braidotti, 2006). I shall return to this cruel political economy in the next chapter.

What I want to argue next is that technological mediation is central to a new vision of posthuman subjectivity and that it provides the grounding for new ethical claims. A posthuman notion of the en fleshed and extended, relational self keeps the techno-hype in check by a sustainable ethics of transformations. This sober position pleads for resistance to both the fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of transhumanist and other techno-utopias. It also juxtaposes the rhetoric of 'the desire to be wired', to a more radical sense of the materialism of 'proud to be flesh' (Sobchack, 2004). The emphasis on immanence allows us to respect the bond of mutual dependence between bodies and technological

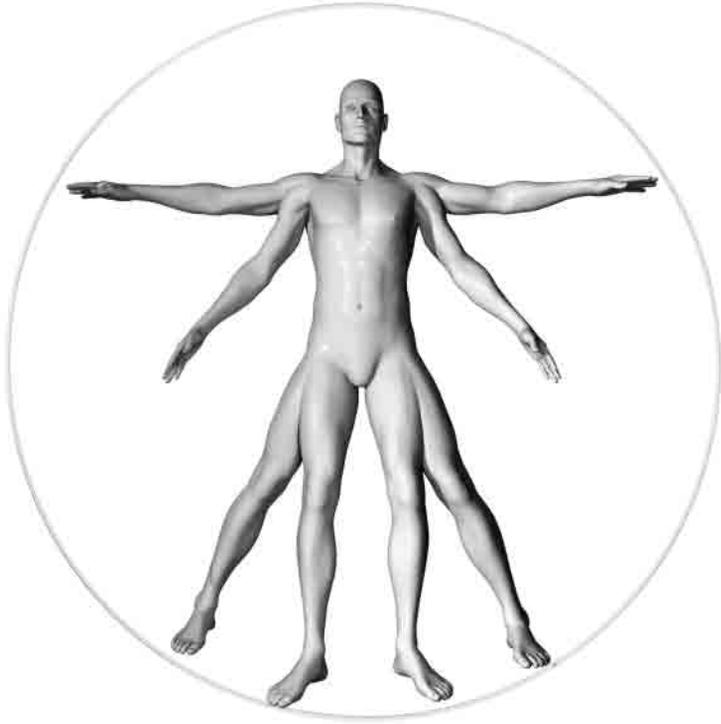


Figure 2.4 Victor Habbick (Maninblack), *Robot in the style of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man*

Source: Clivia – Pixmac

others, while avoiding the contempt for the flesh and the trans-humanist fantasy of escape from the finite materiality of the enfleshed self. As we shall see in the next chapter, the issue of death and mortality will be raised by necessity.

I want to argue for a vitalist view of the technologically bio-mediated other. This machinic vitality is not so much about determinism, inbuilt purpose or finality, but rather about becoming and transformation. This introduces a process that Deleuze and Guattari call 'becoming-machine', inspired by the Surrealists' 'bachelor machines', meaning a playful and pleasure-prone relationship to technology that is not based on functionalism. For Deleuze this is linked to the project of releasing human embodiment from its indexation

on socialized productivity to become ‘bodies without organs’, that is to say without organized efficiency. This is no hippy-like insurrection of the senses, but rather a carefully thought-through programme that pursues two aims. Firstly, it attempts to rethink our bodies as part of a nature–culture continuum in their in-depth structures. Secondly, it adds a political dimension by setting the framework of recomposition of bodily materiality in directions diametrically opposed to the spurious efficiency and ruthless opportunism of advanced capitalism. Contemporary machines are no metaphors, but they are engines or devices that both capture and process forces and energies, facilitating interrelations, multiple connections and assemblages. They stand for radical relationality and delight as well as productivity.

The ‘becoming-machine’ understood in this specific sense indicates and actualizes the relational powers of a subject that is no longer cast in a dualistic frame, but bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one’s technologically mediated planetary environment. The merger of the human with the technological results in a new transversal compound, a new kind of eco-sophical unity, not unlike the symbiotic relationship between the animal and its planetary habitat. This is not the holistic fusion that Hegel accused Spinoza of, but rather radical transversal relations that generate new modes of subjectivity, held in check by an ethology of forces. They sustain a vitalist ethics of mutual trans-species interdependence. It is a generalized ecology, also known as eco-sophy, which aims at crossing transversally the multiple layers of the subject, from interiority to exteriority and everything in between.

This process is what I mean by ‘post-anthropocentric posthumanism’, which I defend throughout this book. It involves a radical estrangement from notions like moral rationality, unitary identity, transcendent consciousness or innate and universal moral values. The focus is entirely on the normatively neutral relational structures of both subject formation and of possible ethical relations. The elaboration of new normative frameworks for the posthuman subject is the focus of collectively enacted, non-profit-oriented experimentations with intensity, that is to say with what we are actually capable of becoming. They are a *praxis* (a grounded shared project),

not a *doxa* (common sense belief). My own concept of nomadic subject embodies this approach, which combines non-unitary subjectivity with ethical accountability by foregrounding the ontological role played by relationality.

According to Felix Guattari, the posthuman predicament calls for a new virtual social ecology, which includes social, political, ethical and aesthetic dimensions, and transversal links between them. To clarify this vision, Guattari proposes three fundamental ecologies: that of the environment, of the social nexus, and of the psyche. More importantly, he emphasizes the need to create transversal lines through all three of them. This clarification is important and I would connect it to the theoretical reminder I issued earlier, namely that we need to practise de-familiarization as a crucial method in posthuman critical theory and learn to think differently.

It is crucial, for instance, to see the interconnections among the greenhouse effect, the status of women, racism and xenophobia and frantic consumerism. We must not stop at any fragmented portions of these realities, but rather trace transversal interconnections among them. The subject is ontologically polyvocal. It rests on a plane of consistency including both the real that is already actualized, 'territorialized existential territories', and the real that is still virtual, 'deterritorialized incorporeal universes' (Guattari, 1995: 26). Guattari calls for a collective reappropriation of the production of subjectivity, through 'chaosmic' de-segregation of the different categories. You may remember that 'Chaosmos' is the universe of reference for becoming in the sense of the unfolding of virtualities, or transformative values. A qualitative step forward is necessary if we want subjectivity to escape the regime of commodification that is the trait of our historical era, and experiment with virtual possibilities. We need to become the sorts of subjects who actively desire to reinvent subjectivity as a set of mutant values and to draw our pleasure from that, not from the perpetuation of familiar regimes.

The work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1972) is a great source of inspiration in redesigning this type of environmentally bound post-anthropocentric and non-Kantian ethics of codetermination between self and other. The notion of codependence replaces that of recognition, much as the ethics of sustainability replaces the moral phi-

losophy of rights. This reiterates the importance of grounded, situated and very specific and hence accountable perspectives in a move that I call *zoe*-centred egalitarianism.

In his analysis of the 'collective existential mutations' (1995: 2) currently taking place, Felix Guattari refers to Varela's distinction between autopoietic (self-organizing) and allopoietic systems. Guattari moves beyond the distinction proposed by Varela by extending the principle of autopoiesis (which for Varela is reserved for the biological organisms) to cover also the machines or technological others. Another name for subjectivity, according to Guattari, is autopoietic subjectivation, or self-styling, and it accounts both for living organisms, humans as self-organizing systems, and also for inorganic matter, the machines.

Guattari's machinic autopoiesis establishes a qualitative link between organic matter and technological or machinic artefacts. This results in a radical redefinition of machines as both intelligent and generative. They have their own temporality and develop through 'generations': they contain their own virtuality and futurity. Consequently, they entertain their own forms of alterity not only towards humans, but also among themselves, and aim to create meta-stability, which is the precondition of individuation. The emphasis on self-organization and metastability frames the project of becoming-machine of the posthuman subject. It helps us rethink transversal technologically mediated subjectivity while avoiding scientific reductionism. In his critique of the rhetoric of bio-technological vitalism (1997), Ansell Pearson warns us against the pernicious fantasy of a renaturalized notion of evolution mediated by advanced bio-technological capitalism. I think that the point of the posthuman predicament is to rethink evolution in a non-deterministic but also a post-anthropocentric manner. In opposition to classical, linear teleological ideas of evolution (Chardin de Teillard, 1959), I want to emphasize instead the collective project of seeking a more adequate understanding of the complexity of factors that structure the posthuman subject: the new proximity to animals, the planetary dimension and the high level of technological mediation. Machinic autopoiesis means that the technological is a site of post-anthropocentric becoming, or the threshold to many possible worlds.

The key notion is the transversality of relations, for a postanthropocentric and posthuman subject that traces transversal connections among material and symbolic, concrete and discursive lines of relation or forces. Transversality actualizes *zoe*-centred egalitarianism as an ethics and also as a method to account for forms of alternative, posthuman subjectivity. An ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, values *zoe* in itself.

I also refer to these practices of becoming-machine as ‘radical neo-materialism’ (Braidotti, 1991), or as ‘matter-realism’ (Fraser et al., 2006). These ideas are supported by and intersect with changing understandings of the conceptual structure of matter itself (De Landa, 2002; Bennett, 2010), under the impact of contemporary bio-genetics and information technologies. The Spinozist switch to a monistic political ontology stresses processes, vital politics and non-deterministic evolutionary theories. Politically, the emphasis falls accordingly on the micro-politics of relations, as a posthumanist ethics that traces transversal connections among material and symbolic, concrete and discursive, lines or forces. The focus is on the force and autonomy of affect and the logistics of its actualization (Massumi, 2002). Transversality actualizes an ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, which values non-human or a-personal Life. This is what I call posthuman politics (Braidotti, 2006).

Difference as the Principle of Not-One

Let me take stock of how far we have come in the complex debate opened by the demise of *anthropos*. Firstly, I have argued that contemporary capitalism is ‘bio-political’ in that it aims at controlling all that lives. It has already turned into a form of ‘bio-piracy’ (Shiva, 1997), because it exploits the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. Secondly, this means that human and anthropomorphic others are relocated in a continuum with non-anthropomorphic, animal or ‘earth’ others. The categorical distinction that separated the Human from his naturalized others has shifted, taking the humanist assumptions about what constitutes the basic unit of reference for the ‘human’ into a spin. Thirdly,

this anthropocentric process produces a negative category of the human as an endangered species bound by fear of extinction. It also forces a new unity among the human and other species, in the form of compensatory extension of humanist values and rights to the non-human others. Fourthly, the same system perpetuates familiar patterns of exclusion, exploitation and oppression. In order to ground my claim about the advantages of a posthuman subject position based on relationality and transversal interconnections across the classical axes of differentiation, the next step of the argument needs to address the question of difference. I will look critically at the status and function of difference in this new post-anthropocentric landscape.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the most striking feature of the current scientific redefinition of 'matter' is the dislocation of difference from binaries to rhizomatics; from sex/gender or nature/culture to processes of sexualization/racialization/naturalization that take Life itself, or the vitality of matter as the main target. This system engenders a deliberate blurring of dichotomous differences, which does not in itself resolve or improve the power differences and in many ways increases them. In other words, the opportunistic post-anthropocentric effects of the global economy engender a negative cosmopolitanism or a sense of reactive pan-human bonding by introducing the notion of 'Life as surplus' and of a common human vulnerability.

The political line of questioning has to start from this firm location to raise some key questions about subjectivity. For instance, Katherine Hayles argues, 'What do gendered bodies have to do with the erasure of embodiment and the subsequent merging of machine and human intelligence in the figure of the cyborg?' (Hayles, 1999: xii). In a similar vein, Balsamo, who believes that bodies are always and already marked by gender and race, asks (1996: 6), 'When the human body is fractured into organs, fluids and genetic codes, what happens to gender identity? When the body is fractured into functional parts and molecular codes, where is gender located?' Let us trust women, gays, lesbians and other alternative forces, with their historically 'leaky bodies' (Grosz, 1994) and not fully human rights, to both reassert the powers and enhance the potentiality of the posthuman organism as generative 'wetware'.

Genetic engineering and biotechnologies have seen to it that a qualitative conceptual dislocation has taken place in the contemporary classification of embodied subjects. As I argued previously, bodies are reduced to their informational substrate in terms of materiality and vital capacity. By implication, this means that the markers for the organization and distribution of differences are now located in micro instances of vital materiality, like the cells of living organisms and the genetic codes of entire species. We have come a long way from the gross system that used to mark difference on the basis of visually verifiable anatomical differences between the empirical sexes, the races and the species. We have moved from the bio-power that Foucault exemplified by comparative anatomy to a society based on the governance of molecular *zoe* power of today. We have equally shifted from disciplinary to control societies, from the political economy of the Panopticon to the informatics of domination (Haraway, 1990, 1992, 2003). The question of difference and power disparity, however, remains as central as ever.

This posthuman political landscape is not necessarily more egalitarian or less racist and heterosexist in its commitment to uphold, for instance, conservative gender roles and family values, albeit – in the case of the Hollywood blockbusters like *Avatar* (2009) – of the intergalactic and alien kind. The power of contemporary techno-culture to destabilize the categorical axes of difference exacerbates power relations and brings them to new necro-political heights, as we shall see in the next chapter. It also results in some misleading tendencies like techno-transcendence that, coupled with a consumer-oriented brand of liberal individualism, emerge as one of the traits of the social imaginary of global capitalism.

What are the consequences of the fact that technological apparatus is no longer sexualized, racialized or naturalized, but rather neutralized as figures of mixity, hybridity and interconnectiveness, turning transsexuality into a dominant posthuman *topos*? If the machine is both self-organizing and transgender, the old organic human body needs to be relocated elsewhere. Ever mindful of Lyotard's warning about the political economy of advanced capitalism, I think we should not trust the blurring effects and states of indeterminacy it engenders. However tempting, it would be misguided to assume that posthuman embodied subjects are beyond sexual

or racialized difference. The politics of representation and hence the location of sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences are still strongly in place, though they have shifted significantly (Bukatman, 1993). In the electronic frontier, as we saw earlier, the technologically mediated point of reference is neither organic/inorganic, male/female, nor especially white. Advanced capitalism is a post-gender system capable of accommodating a high degree of androgyny and a significant blurring of the categorical divide between the sexes. It is also a post-racial system that no longer classifies people and their cultures on grounds of pigmentation (Gilroy, 2000), but remains nonetheless profoundly racist. A strong theory of posthuman subjectivity can help us to re-appropriate these processes, both theoretically and politically, not only as analytical tools, but also as alternative grounds for formations of the self.

Sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences, from being categorical boundary markers under Humanism, have become unhinged and act as the forces leading to the elaboration of alternative modes of transversal subjectivity, which extend not only beyond gender and race, but also beyond the human. In my view, posthuman eco-philosophy functions as an attempt to rethink in a materialist manner the intricate web of interrelations that mark the contemporary subjects' relationship to their multiple ecologies, the natural, the social and the psychic, as Guattari indicates. More importantly for the sake of the current argument, they do not abolish but profoundly restructure the processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization which provided the pillars of biopolitical governmentality.

In terms of feminist politics, this means we need to rethink sexuality without genders, starting from a vitalist return to the polymorphous and, according to Freud, 'perverse' (in the sense of playful and non-reproductive) structure of human sexuality. We also need to reassess the generative powers of female embodiment. In this vision, gender is just a historically contingent mechanism of capture of the multiple potentialities of the body, including their generative or reproductive capacities. To turn it into *the* transhistorical matrix of power, as suggested by queer theory in the linguistic and social constructivist tradition (Butler, 1991), is quite simply a concep-

tual error. From the perspective of a posthuman monist political economy, power is not a static given, but a complex strategic flow of effects which call for a pragmatic politics of intervention and the quest for sustainable alternatives (Braidotti, 2006). In other words, we need to experiment with resistance and 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 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 post-anthropocentric 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.

I have argued that matter-realist or posthuman vitalist feminism, resting on a dynamic monistic political ontology, shifts the focus away from the sex/gender distinction, bringing sexuality as process into full focus. This means by extension that sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institutions (Braidotti, 1994). 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. Claire Colebrook (2000), for instance, argues that sexual difference is not a problem that needs a solution but a productive location to start from. Patricia MacCormack (2008) 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. Posthuman feminists look for subversion not in counter-identity formations, but rather in pure dislocations of identities via the perversion of standardized patterns of sexualized, racialized and naturalized interaction.

These experiments with what sexed bodies can do, however, do not amount to saying that in the social sphere differences no longer matter or that the traditional power relations have actually improved. On the contrary, on a world scale, extreme forms of polarized sexual difference are stronger than ever. They get projected onto geo-political relations, creating bel-

ligerent gendered visions of a ‘clash of civilizations’ that is allegedly predicated in terms of women’s and GLBT people’s rights, as I argued in the previous chapter. These reactionary manifestations of gender dichotomies are only part of the picture.

The broader picture indicates that the dislocation of the former system of marking differences makes it all the more urgent to reassert the concept of difference as both central and non-essentialistic. I have stressed difference as the principle of not-One, that is to say as differing (Braidotti, 2002), as constitutive of the posthuman subject and elaborate post-anthropocentric forms of ethical accountability to match it. In my view, posthuman ethics urges us to endure the principle of not-One at the in-depth structures of our subjectivity by acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple ‘others’ in a vital web of complex interrelations. This ethical principle breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality and one-ness, but also the master narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable lack and irreparable separation. What I want to emphasize instead, in a more affirmative vein, is the priority of the relation and the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of.

This humbling experience of not-Oneness, which is constitutive of the non-unitary subject, anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the ‘self’. Posthuman nomadic vital political theory stresses the productive aspects of the condition of not-One, that is to say a generative notion of complexity. At the beginning, there is always already a relation to an affective, interactive entity endowed with intelligent flesh and an embodied mind: ontological relationality. A materialist politics of posthuman differences works by potential becomings that call for actualization. They are enacted through collectively shared, community-based *praxis* and are crucial to support the process of vitalist, non-unitarian and yet accountable recomposition of a missing people. This is the ‘we’ that is evoked and actualized by the postanthropocentric creation of a new pan-humanity. It expresses the affirmative, ethical dimension of becoming-posthuman as a gesture of collective

self-styling. It actualizes a community that is not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of ancestral communal violence, or the melancholia of unpayable ontological debts, but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of their interdependence with multiple others most of which, in the age of anthropocene, are quite simply not anthropomorphic.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have pursued a dual aim: I provided an answer to the question of what the posthuman might be in a post-anthropocentric perspective and argued the case for a posthuman theory that takes into account subjectivity.

The most serious political problems in post-anthropocentric theory arise from the instrumental alliance of bio-genetic capitalism with individualism, as a residual humanist definition of the subject. My view of posthuman thought is instead profoundly anti-individualistic and it consists in working within the belly of the beast, resisting the myth of organicism and holistic harmony, but also capitalist opportunism. Katherine Hayles (1999: 286) makes a powerful intervention on contemporary posthuman bodies:

But the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human [. . .]. What is lethal is not the posthuman as such but the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self [. . .] Located within the dialectic of pattern/randomness and grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information, the posthuman offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines.

Hayles attacks the classical humanistic notion that subjectivity must coincide with conscious agency, in such a way as to avoid some of the mistakes of the humanist past, notably the liberal vision of an autonomous subject whose ‘manifest destiny is to dominate and control nature’ (Hayles, 1999: 288).

One of the risks of the ‘hype’ that surrounds the post-anthropocentric body-machines is indeed that of recreating a

hard core, unitary vision of the subject, under the cover of pluralistic fragmentation. We run the risk of reasserting transcendence via technological meditation and of proposing a neo-universal machinic *ethos*. In the language of posthuman critical theory, this would produce the deception of a quantitative multiplicity which does not entail any qualitative shifts. To avoid this pitfall, which fits in with the neo-liberal euphoria, and in order to enact qualitative transformations instead, we need to be equally distanced from both hyped-up disembodiment and fantasies of trans-humanist escape, and from re-essentialized, centralized notions of liberal individualism. I propose to reinscribe posthuman bodies into radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels. The post-anthropocentrism of our science and our globalized and technologically mediated times makes it urgent to work towards ‘a new techno-scientific democracy’ (Haraway, 1997: 95).

The status and the location of Humanism, which was the theme of the previous chapter, are central to this discussion of post-anthropocentrism. I tend to resist the political neutrality of critical, social and science theorists who support an analytic form of post-anthropocentrism and avoid or dismiss the question of subjectivity. I maintain that the post-anthropocentric subject rests also on the anti-humanist project, which means that I want to keep an equal distance from both the humanistic assumptions of the universal value of the unitary subject and the extreme forms of science-driven post-humanism which dismiss the need for a subject altogether.

One needs at least *some* subject position: this need not be either unitary or exclusively anthropocentric, but it must be the site for political and ethical accountability, for collective imaginaries and shared aspirations. Philosophical investigations of alternative ways of accounting for the embedded and embodied nature of the subject are relevant to develop an approach to subjectivity worthy of the complexities of our age. As I will argue more extensively in chapter 4, this discussion reopens the question of the relationship between the two cultures, the Humanities and Science. My point is that the social studies of science (Latour, 1993) are not the only, or

even the most useful, tools of analysis for the complex phenomena surrounding the postanthropocentric technobodies of advanced capitalism.

Let me get to this from another angle. I have argued that *zoe*-egalitarianism expresses the simultaneously materialist and vitalist force of life itself, *zoe* as the generative power that flows across all species. The new transversal alliance across species and among posthuman subjects opens up unexpected possibilities for the recomposition of communities, for the very idea of humanity and for ethical forms of belonging. These are not confined to negative bonding in terms of sharing the same planetary threats: climate change, environmental crisis or even extinction. What I propose is a more affirmative approach to the redefinition of posthuman subjectivity, as in the counter models of transversal, relational nomadic assemblages we saw earlier in this chapter or the extended nature-cultural self as an alternative to classical Humanist subjectivity in the previous chapter. Many more models are thinkable and feasible, if we collectively choose to experiment systematically with the project of what 'we', the differently located posthuman subjects of the anthropocene era, might be capable of becoming.

We all stand to gain by the acknowledgment of a post-anthropocentric, transversal structural link in the position of these embodied non-human subjects that were previously known as the 'others' of the anthropocentric and humanistic 'Man'. The ethical part of the project concerns the creation of a new social nexus and new forms of social connection with these techno-others. What kinds of bonds can be established within the nature-culture continuum of technologically mediated organisms and how can they be sustained? Both kinship and ethical accountability need to be redefined in such a way as to rethink links of affectivity and responsibility not only for non-anthropomorphic organic others, but also for those technologically mediated, newly patented creatures we are sharing our planet with.

In opposition to the nostalgic trend that is so dominant in contemporary politics, but also opposing a tendency to melancholia on the part of the progressive Left (Derrida, 2001b; Butler, 2004a; Gilroy, 2005), I want to argue that the posthuman emphasis on *life/zoe* itself can engender affirmative poli-

tics. Critical post-anthropocentrism generates new perspectives that go beyond panic and mourning and produce a more workable platform. For one thing, it produces a more adequate cartography of our real-life conditions because it focuses with greater accuracy on the complexities of contemporary technologically mediated bodies and on social practices of human embodiment. Furthermore, this type of vital materialism, unconstrained by clear-cut distinctions between species composes the notion of *zoe* as a non-human yet generative life-force. This posthuman approach moves beyond 'high' cyber studies (Haraway, 1985; Hayles, 1999) into post-cyber materialism (Braidotti, 2002) and posthuman theory (Braidotti, 2006). A nomadic *zoe*-centred approach connects human to non-human life so as to develop a comprehensive eco-philosophy of becoming.

This posthuman and post-anthropocentric sensibility, which draws on deep affective as well as intellectual resources, also expresses my rejection of the principle of adequation to the *doxa*, or commonly received normative image of thought. The posthuman predicament, in both the post-humanist and the post-anthropocentric sense of the term, drives home the idea that the activity of thinking needs to be experimental and even transgressive in combining critique with creativity. As Deleuze and Guattari teach us, thinking is about the invention of new concepts and new productive ethical relations. In this respect, theory is a form of organized estrangement from dominant values. More clinical than critical, posthuman theory cuts to the core of classical visions of subjectivity and works towards an expanded vision of vitalist, transversal relational subjects. Theory today is about coming to terms with unprecedented changes and transformations of the basic unit of reference for what counts as human. This affirmative, unprogrammed mutation can help actualize new concepts, affects and planetary subject formations. Just as we do not know what posthuman bodies can do, we cannot even begin to guess what postanthropocentric embodied brains will actually be able to think up.