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Critical Posthuman Knowledges

The convergence of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism is currently producing a field of posthuman critical enquiry that is more than the sum of its parts and points to a qualitative leap in new directions (Braidotti 2013). The critique of the humanist ideal of Man as the allegedly universal measure of all things, on the one hand, and the rejection of species hierarchy and human exceptionalism, on the other, are equally interdisciplinary in character, but they refer to different theoretical and disciplinary genealogies. They converge, however, in enabling the emergence of posthuman knowledges.

By way of introduction, let me say that I practice critical thinking by drawing cartographies of the power operational in and immanent to the production of discourses and practices circulating in our sociopolitical order and integral to our subject formation (Foucault 1970). This approach is supported by two main theoretical pillars: the first is feminist epistemology, with its emphasis on the situated and accountable nature of knowledge (Harding 1986; Rich 1987; Haraway 1988; Hill Collins 1991). The second is a monistic neomaterialist philosophy inspired by Gilles Deleuze, which assumes all matter is one and that

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it is intelligent and self-organizing (autopoietic). In critical Spinozism (Deleuze 1988, 1990), thinking—in philosophy, art, and science—is the conceptual counterpart of the ability to enter modes of relation, to affect and be affected, sustaining qualitative shifts and creative tensions accordingly (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). Simultaneously critical and creative, posthuman thought pursues the actualization of intensive or virtual relations, inhabited by a vitalist and multidirectional memory that works in terms of transpositions, that is to say, generative cross-pollination (Ansell Pearson 1999) and nomadic interconnections (Braidotti 2006). Thinking is indeed the stuff of the world (Alaimo 2014).

A cartography is consequently a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present that aims at exposing power both as entrapment (*potestas*) and as empowerment (*potentia*) in the production of knowledge and subjectivity (Braidotti 1994, 2011a, 2011b). In my cartography, the posthuman is less of a concept than a *conceptual* persona, that is to say, a theoretically powered navigational tool that helps us think along and across the complexities of the present. My argument in this essay is consequently that qualitatively new discourses are emerging across a number of fields, which constitute the vitality of contemporary posthuman scholarship.[1] Their relevance is framed by the urgency of the Anthropocene condition, which I read in the light of Félix Guattari's (2000) three ecologies as being environmentally, socioeconomically, and affectively and psychically unprecedented. The combination of fast technological advances on the one hand and the exacerbation of economic and social inequalities on the other makes for a multifaceted and conflict-ridden situation. To discuss the posthuman is also to stare into the abyss of the inhumanity of our times.

Transdisciplinary Knowledges

The exuberant growth of posthuman knowledges tends to concentrate in a number of transdisciplinary fields that do not coincide with the traditional humanities disciplines but are rather hybrid crossover formations. They are generated mostly from critical "studies" areas and produce their own extradisciplinary offsprings. For instance, cultural studies and comparative literature have spawned ecocriticism and animal studies. Science and technology studies has pioneered a number of variations of biotechnological and disability studies. Media studies is a planet of its own, which has led to new media, and more. Environmental studies has always been postanthropocentric and today mutates into a number of neomaterialist variations. I shall return to this.

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Feminist theory, notably ecofeminism, has long struck an imaginary alliance with science fiction to support the insurrection of women—as the others of "Man," and of other "others," like nonwhites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous, and native subjects) with nonhuman agents (animals, insects, plants, tress, viruses, fungi, bacteria, and technological automata). Never quite certain as to the human rights assigned to their sex, LBGT+ seize the opportunity of exiting the binary gender system and taking the posthuman leap. There is no question that contemporary feminist theory is productively posthuman.[2]

The critical studies areas have provided the prototypes of the radical epistemologies that voice the situated knowledges of the structural "others" of humanistic Man. The first generation of these studies shares a number of metamethodological premises. First, it has often criticized the academic humanities on two grounds: structural anthropocentrism, on the one hand, and in-built Eurocentrism and "methodological nationalism" (Beck 2007), which Vandana Shiva (1993) called "monocultures of the mind," on the other. Second, they are firmly grounded in the world, which means that they take real-life events and, by extension, power seriously. They both criticize dominant vision of knowledge production and actualize the virtual insights and competences of marginalized subjects (Braidotti 2002, 2006). The main feature of these studies areas is their relative disengagement from the traditional methods of the academic disciplines. This disidentification, or nomadic exodus from disciplinary homes, fosters accountability for the present, in a mode that Michel Foucault (Foucault and Blanchot 1987) defined as "the philosophy of the outside."

The first generation of critical studies caused both internal fractures and the dislocation of outerdisciplinary boundaries in the humanities, but the studies do not merely oppose humanism. They also create alternative visions of the self, the human, knowledge, and society. Notions such as a female/feminist humanity (Irigaray) and black humanity are part of this tradition of more inclusive humanism (Braidotti 2016).

The posthuman turn is marked by a second generation of studies areas that address more directly the question of anthropocentrism, while remaining committed to social justice and ethical accountability. For instance, consider posthuman/inhuman/nonhuman studies; cultural studies of science and technology; secularism and postsecular studies; posthuman disability, fat, sleep, fashion, and diet studies; critical management studies; and success and celebrity studies. New media proliferated into a whole series of subsections and metafields: software, Internet, game, algorithmic,

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and critical code studies, and more. Further analyses of the social forms of exclusion and dominations perpetuated by the current world-order of "biopiracy" (Shiva 1997), necropolitics (Mbembe 2003), and systemic dispossession (Sassen 2014) produce other discourses. These inhuman(e) aspects have been taken up by conflict studies and peace research; post-Soviet/communist studies; human rights studies, humanitarian management; migration studies; mobility studies; human-rights-oriented medicine; trauma, memory, and reconciliation studies; security studies; death studies; suicide studies; queer inhuman studies; and extinction studies, and the list is still growing.

Whereas the multifaceted critiques and revisions of humanism produced by the first generation of studies areas—like women's, feminist, gender, and queer studies, and postcolonial studies—empowered the sexualized and racialized human "others" to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of anthropomorphic oppositional hierarchical relations, the crisis of Anthropos relinquishes the forces of the naturalized others. Now we are "humanimals," and the Earth and its cosmos have become a political arena.

This planetary insight is compounded by another crucial factor: high technological mediation, or digital "second" life. What used to be the continuum of "naturecultures" (Haraway 1997, 2003) has evolved into "medianatures" (Parikka 2015). My monistic—material and vitalist—approach posits a media ecological continuum (Fuller 2005, 2008; Hansen 2006) based on a new understanding of nonhuman life—*zoe*—also as machinic autopoiesis (Guattari 1995; Braidotti 2002, 2006). This general ecology (Hörl 2013) foregrounds not just any form of materiality, but rather a geological (Parikka 2015), transcorporeal (Alaimo 2010), and terrestrial (Protevi 2013) kind of materialism.

Ever mindful of the fact that these developments take place within the axiomatic system (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Toscano 2005) of so-called cognitive capitalism (Moulier Boutang 2012), I want to stress that what constitutes capital value today is the informational power of living matter itself, its immanent qualities and self-organizing capacity. Advanced capitalism profits from the scientific and economic understanding of all that lives. *Zoe*—vital power—gets transposed into data banks of biogenetic, neural, and mediatic information about individuals, populations, and species. This erases categorical differences between humans and nonhumans when it comes to profiting from them. Data mining includes profiling practices and risk assessments that identify different types or characteristics as strategic targets for knowledge/power practices. There is therefore an opportunistic angle to the posthuman discussion, which requires critical attention.

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This fast-growing scholarly landscape indicates that the proper study of the humanities is no longer Man and this generic figure is in trouble, with the blessing of cognitive capitalist economics. Donna Haraway's analysis of the Capitalocene (2015) confirms her earlier analyses, which argued that "Man the taxonomic type [has] become Man the brand" (1997: 74). Massumi (1998) writes about "Ex-Man": "a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human"; Hardt and Negri (2000: 215) see a sort of "anthropological exodus" from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation. Panic-stricken social theorists argue about the future of the human, for instance, Habermas (2003), Fukuyama (2002), Sloterdijk (2009), and Derrida (in Borradori 2003). In response to such outpours of anxiety, I want to argue that the evidence provided by the growing posthuman scholarship shows no crisis, but rather a remarkable upsurge of inspiration.

But what does it mean for successive generations of critical studies areas to emerge and proliferate in such a context? I approach the question on the basis of the affirmative ethics drawn from contemporary neo-Spinozism. A neomaterialist vital position offers a viable alternative to the profit-minded knowledge practices of biomediated cognitive capitalism. Taking living matter as *zoe*, a geocentered process that interacts in complex ways with the technosocial, psychic, and natural environments and resists the overcoding by the profit principle (and the structural inequalities it entails), I propose an affirmative plane of composition of transversal subjectivities. Subjectivity can then be redefined as an expanded self, whose relational capacity is not confined within the human species but includes nonanthropomorphic elements. *Zoe*-centered egalitarianism, the nonhuman, vital force of life, is the transversal entity that allows us to think across previously segregated species, categories, and domains. Neomaterialist immanence leads nomadic subjects to posit collective accountability also for the sustainability of our knowledge production and to resist the opportunistic transspecies commodification of life.

The crucial issue is that of the speeds of de/reterritorialization and the toxic saturation of the present by cognitive capitalism, to the detriment of the actualization of the virtual, and the extent to which they affect knowledge practices in the contemporary university and scientific community. How to tell the difference between affirmative and reactive modes of knowledge production is the fundamental question. Because power, in my scheme of thought, is a multilayered and dynamic entity, and because as embedded and embodied, relational, and affective subjects, we are immanent to the very conditions we are trying to change, we need to make the careful ethical distinction between different speeds of both knowledge production—with

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the predictable margins of institutional capitalization—and the construction of alternative knowing subject formations.

Let me apply these insights to the last phase of my cartography, namely, how the studies areas, which historically have been the motor of both critique and creativity, are currently crossbreeding and nomadically generating posthuman knowledges, which I call the *critical posthumanities*.

The Critical Posthumanities

Today the critical posthumanities are emerging as postdisciplinary discursive fronts not only around the edges of the classical disciplines but also as offshoots of the established studies areas. The terminological exuberance of the field is significant: the digital and the environmental humanities are but the tip of the Anthropocenic iceberg of the "emerging humanities."[3] In my assessment the emerging humanities represent both an alternative to the neoliberal governance of academic knowledge, dominated by STEM fetishism, and a renegotiation of its terms. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argue, deepening Foucault's insight about the multilayered structure of power (as both *potestas* and *potentia*): it is not a question of either/or, but of "and . . . and." Let me explain.

We could take the critical posthumanities as expressing an increase of metadiscursive energy on the part of the disciplines of the humanities, so as to reassert their institutional power while making a shift toward extradisciplinary encounters in the world. But we could also see these developments as a rhizomatic political economy of endless expansion of multiple studies and sprawling posthumanities as heterogeneous assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1994). This is a postdisciplinary (Lykke 2011) approach, fueled by the active desire to actualize unprecedented modes of epistemic relations. Nomadic subjects produce nomadic humanities (Stimpson 2016).

Whichever approach we may prefer (and it *is* a matter of "and . . . and," not either/or), the defining feature of the posthumanities—which makes them critical in the intensive or qualitative sense of the term—is their supradisciplinary character. In other words, the field is taken as a constitutive block, composed of the classical disciplines plus the transdisciplinary studies areas, plus the overcoding flows of cognitive capitalism, plus our desire for adequate knowledges, and so on. In any case, the driving force for knowledge production is not disciplinary purity, but rather the modes of relation these discourses are able and willing to engage in. The point of encounter or assemblage for the critical posthumanities is the acknowledgment of the

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porous nature not only of their institutional boundaries, but also of their epistemic core, which gets redefined in terms of relational capacity. The supradisciplinary sensibility allows for movement to be set in action within the different fields of knowledge production.

Thus, if we take the environmental, we can see it both as a majoritarian formation, contiguous with neoliberal economics, stemming from both comparative literature and environmental studies and consolidating them both. Power being productive as well as prohibitive, this results in a quantitative proliferation of studies of nonhuman objects and themes. This quantitative accumulation, joining forces with multidisciplinary components from outside the humanities (mostly social sciences, anthropology, and geology and environmental sciences), gets to recode its field of activity as the environmental humanities. The field is so dynamic, it has produced several specialized scholarly journals[4] and counts as an established academic field.

Similarly, the digital humanities can be framed by a majoritarian narrative that traces a straight line from media studies, via the application of computing methods to humanities. This posits human-technological relations as a major research theme and establishes a field that is so advanced that it publishes specialized journals and curricula and international institutional networks.

But this majoritarian metapattern—both driven by the speed of reterritorialization of neoliberal economics and limited by it—is not all there is to posthuman knowledges. A minor metapattern is also at work here, indexed on the becoming-minoritarian of knowledge production practices. I could express it with a provocative question: What does it say about the contemporary posthumanities that so few institutions have embraced feminist/queer/migrant/poor/decolonial/diasporic/disabled/diseased humanities? The speed of deterritorialization of these "minor" subjects of knowledge, or "missing peoples," is of an altogether different order from the majority-driven values. Cognitive capitalism cannot or does not want to overcode these minoritarian subjects to the same extent as it territorializes other established discourses. This is the opening we need in which to compose a different plane of encounters. Granting to minoritarian subjects the political potential of carrying alternative modes of becoming, I want to propose a different metapattern that actualizes the "missing peoples."

This second option rests on a crucial distinction between quantitative or extensive and qualitative or intensive states, which Deleuze (1988) adapts from Spinoza's ethical system. My cartography so far shows a quantitative proliferation of discourses, fields, and themes generated from posthuman

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locations. Many of these objects of study have already been itemized and quantified for the academic market inquiry. A focus on nonhuman objects/things (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and a quantitative proliferation of discourses without qualitative shifts is an insufficient condition for the production of new concepts and conceptual practices. In order to set up credible and rigorous critical posthumanities, we need a qualitative shift.

The qualitative criteria I want to suggest are (1) supradisciplinarity, (2) metadiscursivity, (3) material grounding, and (4) nomadic generative force or affirmative ethics. These general principles get operationalized in a series of methodological guidelines, which include cartographic accuracy, with the corollary of ethical accountability, and the combination of critique with creativity, including a flair for paradoxes and the recognition of the specificity of art practices. Other criteria are nonlinearity, the powers of memory and the imagination, and the strategy of defamiliarization (Braidotti 2013). I regret that I cannot expand on them here.

To apply these qualitative distinctions to the point I made earlier about different speeds of de/reterritorialization of contemporary knowledge practices, I need to argue two potentially contradictory cases at the same time. This is not irrationality but complexity. On the one hand, it is clear that the critical posthumanities are caught in the instrumental spin of neoliberal logic of capitalizing on life itself. They are developing faster than the academic institutions can keep up with, and they are growing either from the transdisciplinary studies or among the university, social movements, and corporate interests. On the other hand, they pursue and even radicalize the aims and affects of the studies (notably the second generation). This means that the posthumanities coexist but do not coincide with the profit-oriented reacquisitions of life as capital—both financial and cognitive—that is the core of advanced capitalism. The distinction I seek is ethical; it is about what kind of affirmative assemblages we are capable of sustaining, knowing that their political force lies in actualizing "collective imaginings" (Gatens and Lloyd 1999) or virtual futures (Braidotti 2006).

Complexity becomes the operative word and, applied to the analysis of posthuman knowledges, it produces the useful distinction Deleuze makes between royal and minor science/knowledge. Royal science is institutionally implemented and well funded, being compatible with the economic imperatives of advanced capitalism and its cognitive excursions into living matter (Bonta and Protevi 2004). Minor science, on the other hand, is underfunded and marginalized, while acting as an ethically transformative and politically empowering event. The monistic, ecosophical, and geocentered turn that sustains the critical posthumanities gains strength from this distinction

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between actualized states of "royal science" and the virtual becoming of "minor science" (DeLanda 2002). The emphasis on matter as autopoetic supports a call for a retuning of the scientific laws according to a view of the subject of knowledge as a complex singularity, an affective assemblage, and a relational vitalist entity. All this marks a qualitative and methodological shift that goes beyond mere quantitative proliferations of objects of study.

The combination of the high degree of supradisciplinary hybridization I analyzed above and the monistic idea of vital geocentrism—the love of *zoe*—as a qualitative criterion frames an ethics of affirmation that casts the method of defamiliarizing our habits of thought in a new direction. We are now encouraged to build on the postcolonial injunction of "unlearning our privilege as our loss" (Spivak 1990: 9) toward a qualitative assessment of our relational deficits and injuries, notably toward nonhuman others. The question is: what is an embrained body and embodied brain capable of becoming? The frame of reference becomes the world, in all its open-ended, interrelational, transnational, multisexed, and transspecies flows of becoming (Braidotti 2006, 2013).

In other words, affirmative ethics, grounded in the politics of immanence (Deleuze 2003), opens up margins of differentiation and negotiations within the reterritorializations of cognitive capitalism. The overflowing codes of capital never fully saturate the processes of becoming, and therefore the minor discourses always contain margins of disenfranchisement from royal science, because power is not a single entity but a multilayered, dynamic, and strategic situation. The task of posthuman critical knowledge is in activating subjects to enter into new affective assemblages, to cocreate alternative ethical forces and political codes—in other words, to instill processes of becoming for the multiple missing people.

Given that rhizomic multidirectionality is the rule for both royal and minor science and related knowledge production systems, let me conclude by pointing to some planes of organization of knowledge that are taking place within the critical posthumanities. Considering the high degrees of specialization required by the generations of transdisciplinary studies areas and the fact that each transdisciplinary plateau is framed by specific affective assemblages and relations, it follows that no two planes of composition are the same. The current recomposition of posthuman knowledges shows patterns of organization but also of resegregation of discourses. Feminist, queer, migrant, poor, decolonial, diasporic, disabled, and diseased perspectives do not enjoy the benefits of royal representation in the contemporary posthuman landscape. As I argued earlier, their speed of deterritorialization is other than that of royal science.

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This is where the emphasis on rhizomatic energy of the field allows me to identify the forces that overflow and overturn majoritarian knowledge production. The strength of minoritarian subjects consists in their capacity to carry alternative modes of becoming that break up segregational majoritarian patterns. New border crossings are being set up that aim at actualizing these missing peoples.

For instance, significant new links are being set between postcolonial theories, the environmental humanities, and indigenous epistemologies, resulting in growing convergence between them (Nixon 2011). This results in the production of new areas of studies that cross over the complex postanthropocentric axes: postcolonial environmental humanities come to the fore. Similar developments are filling in missing links in the digital humanities. Postcolonial digital humanities is now an emerging field, digital media providing the most comprehensive platform to rethink transnational spaces and contexts (Nakamura 2002; Ponzanesi and Leurs 2014). These new assemblages pursue the aims of classical postcolonial studies, across the reterritorialized digital humanities platform, into the complexity of minor science. And so are the decolonial digital humanities, for example the Hastac Scholars Forum,[5] explicitly inspired by Walter Mignolo's (2011) work. This results in new alliances between environmentalists and legal specialists, indigenous and non-Western epistemologies, First Nation peoples, new media activists, IT engineers, and antiglobalization forces, which constitute a significant example of new political assemblages.[6]

These multiple hybrid connections of the minor sciences that sustain these new epistemological openings are not the effect of spontaneous generation, but rather the result of the hard work of communities of thinkers and activists—alternative collective assemblages—that reconstitute not only the missing links in academic practices, but also and especially the missing people. The struggle for their visibility and emergence drives the radical politics of immanence, aimed at actualizing minority-driven knowledges through transversal alliances. The people who were missing—even from minor science—get constituted as political subjects of knowledge through such alliances.

Within a neomonistic Spinozist frame, the political—that is to say, the actualization of the virtual—is driven by the ethics of affirmation. This entails the overthrowing of negativity through the recasting of the oppositional, resisting self ("I would prefer not to") into a collective assemblage ("we"). This transversal alliance today is technologically mediated, and it always involves nonhuman agents (land, water, plastic, wires, information highways, algorithms, etc.). It is a praxis that involves the formation of a new

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alliance, a new people. The activating factor in the politics of immanence is a plane of transposition of forces—in both spatial and temporal terms—from past to future and from the virtual to the actual. It is the actualization of a virtuality.

The point of this actualization is to provide an adequate expression of what bodies can do and think and enact. The degree of adequacy is estimated in terms of one's intensity, that is, one's ability to process pain and negativity, to turn the painful experience of inexistence into relational encounters and knowledge production. This is liberation through the understanding of our bondage, as Spinoza teaches us (Lloyd 1994, 1996). The politics of immanence composes planes of becoming for a missing people that was never fully part of the "human," and therefore was able to trigger a becoming-minor of the human as a vector of composition of a new people and a new earth.

Instead of taking a flight into an abstract idea of a new pan-human, bonded in negative passions like fear of extinction, I want to make a plea for monistic affirmative politics grounded on immanent interconnections: a transversal composition of multiple assemblages of active minoritarian subjects. This framework provides theoretical grounding for the emergence of the critical posthumanities as a supradisciplinary, rhizomic field of contemporary posthuman knowledges that are contiguous with, but not identical to, cognitive capitalism, being driven by radically different ethical affects.

The critical posthumanities design a horizon of becoming for an academic minor science that the contemporary university would do well to heed. It involves multidirectional openings toward social and cultural movements, new kinds of economically productive practices in a market economy liberated from capitalist axioms, and multiple curiosity-driven knowledge practices that do not coincide with the profit motive of cognitive capitalism.

The task of critical subjects of knowledge is to pursue the posthuman, all-too-human praxis of speaking truth to power and working toward the composition of planes of immanence for missing peoples, respecting the complex singularities that constitute our respective locations. "We" is the product of a praxis, not a given. The dwellers of this planet at this point in time are interconnected but also internally fractured by the classical axes of negative differentiation: class, race, gender and sexual orientations, and age and ablebodiedness continue to index access to normal humanity. This rhizomic field of posthuman knowledges does not aspire to a consensus about a new humanity but labors to produce a workable frame for the actualization of the many missing people, whose "minor" or nomadic knowledge is the breeding ground for possible futures.

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Notes

1 For an overview, see Braidotti and Hlavajova, forthcoming.
2 For an overview, see Braidotti 2015 and forthcoming.
3 A brief overview of new developments would have to include the following fields: medical humanities; bio-humanities; energy humanities; digital humanities; public humanities; civic humanities; community humanities; global humanities; ecological humanities; environmental humanities; sustainable humanities; interactive humanities; organic humanities; neural-evolutionary humanities; entrepreneurial humanities; translational humanities; greater humanities; and resilient humanities.
4 The two major journals in the field are *Environmental Humanities* (www.dukeupress.edu/environmental-humanities) and *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* (www.resiliencejournal.org).
5 See HASTAC Scholars Program 2015. With thanks to Matthew Fuller.
6 See, for instance, the land/media/indigenous project based in British Columbia: Bleck, Dodds, and Williams 2013.

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