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The Anthropocene: Thinking in “Deep Geological Time” or Deep Libidinal Time?

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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a socialist feminist postcolonial interpretation of the Anthropocene concept as used in recent ecocriticism. In contesting the rigid positioning of Humanity over Nature, the paper draws on the Marxist psychoanalytic theory of non-identity in Theodor Adorno (1973) and Julia Kristeva (1973, 1977, 1978). Making an ecofeminist contribution to the new field of environmental humanities, it engages critically with the perspective of prominent US scholar Timothy Morton (2012). Its embodied materialist argument is that contemporary Eurocentric institutions, science, and philosophies are indeed shaped by affect as Morton believes, but not in the way that he envisages. In addition, it is suggested that the socialist feminist postcolonial politics of ecofeminism is already challenging the inevitable universality of the Anthropocene by building an Earth Democracy with epistemologies of care. It is concluded that understanding the Anthropocene notion, a phenomenon that is profoundly gendered, requires more than thinking in “deep geological time.” Ultimately, all ecological awareness will demand a capacity for thinking in “deep libidinal time.”

KEYWORDS

Environmental humanities; Anthropocene; Eurocentrism; Adorno; embodied materialism; epistemologies of care

Nature embodied

While life on Earth falls to the Anthropocene, a globalising corporate culture provides ad hoc policy as science and pastiche as cultural reflection. In this context, Timothy Morton’s essay “The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness” in *Environmental Humanities* (2012) promises an analysis of the important role of affect in determining social practices. Yet Morton’s academic approach is unable to get beyond middle class Eurocentric androcentrism. What would a more grounded—socialist feminist postcolonial—exploration of the Anthropocene idea look like? What insights can be derived from people at the geopolitical margins? Before answering this question, it will be necessary to spell out the critical epistemology of an embodied materialism.

It is often said that arrival of the Anthropocene era calls for thinking in deep geological time. But here it is argued that it will call for thinking in deep affective time, because at its most fundamental level, the Anthropocene is driven by embodied libidinal energies. The global ecological crisis will not be calmed until the underlying sex-gendered dynamic that

fires it up is dealt with. This means that the struggle for life on Earth must overcome two distinct kinds of denial—a geological denial that defies the historical reality of global warming and a libidinal denial that suppresses the fact that humans are themselves “nature in embodied form.” A critical ecotheory needs to articulate flows—between ideas and feelings, ecosystems and bodies, free of conventional strictures like mind over body, subject over object, Humanity over Nature. Without understanding the biophysical pulses that energise humans as material beings, there is no remedy for the international problems that contemporary communities and governments are facing.

So what conceptual tools are available for this important political work, dependent as it is on cultural deconstruction and personal disengagement from ingrained assumptions and oppressive modes of feeling? In the environmental humanities, thinkers of the “affective turn” increasingly look to how subjectivity, pre-individual forces and autonomic responses bring about earthly degradation. Many in the field of ecocriticism are uncomfortable with the smooth Enlightenment subsumption of feeling by reason, and equally with the over-socialised postmodern constructivist account of emotion. Heavily cognitive approaches such as these simply shore up the classic mind versus body, Humanity versus Nature divide. On the other hand, the so-called hydraulic model of affect, popular among followers of Sigmund Freud (1905), is dismissed as a closed thermodynamic system redolent of Newtonian physics. However, Freud’s tripartite personality structure of *id-ego-superego* is really more like an open system, with natural libidinal energies moving from one phase of the individual self to another. The psychoanalytic psyche resembles the behaviour of water as it assumes different forms: gas-liquid-solid. This metabolism of feeling in the human body seems to resemble Ilya Prigogine’s (Prigogine and Stengers 1984) creatively dissipative structures in global nature at large. Thus, the impulsive human *id* is akin to water in its volatile gaseous phase; whereas the morally controlling *superego* is solid ice, holding down the *id* under pressure of internalised social norms. But the self-made *ego* is like water in liquid form, always moving, non-identical with itself, balancing and adjusting the interior person to challenges from the external world.

Libidinal politics

As a man of the industrial era, Freud (1905) described the *ego* defenses as “mechanisms.” However, ego modulation of existential tensions by displacement or condensation are not mechanical but living regenerative processes. These bioenergetic transfers between phases of the self shift complex cultural meanings around. Cathexis is the psychoanalytic term for this embodied material yet symbolic investment of affect, coming and going, in and out of equilibrium. The model is neither hydraulic, nor dualist. It gives the sociology of social construction its part, and yet it shows feelings to be biological. Personhood emerges over time—driven by embodied energies and shaped by historical conditions. A psychological cathexis links the order of social discourse with the material body, and the therapist’s intervention—if needed—is to ease the conflicted self by nurturing this fluid interplay towards self-acceptance. Freud knew well that people are nature in embodied form; scholars of the Anthropocene are yet to learn it. This revolutionary insight is now indispensable to science, as humans invent new theory and political institutions to reconfigure their ecological relations.

If Freud's path-breaking theory of affective energies transcended the old Humanity versus Nature split, Theodor Adorno (1973) would intuit, and Julia Kristeva (1973, 1977, 1978) amplify, the sociological sex-gendering of this bifurcation. There is immeasurable insight here for those wanting to lay bare the emotional source of the Anthropocene in human mastery. An honest analysis will leave behind the all too familiar "god trick" of objectivity, the philosophic attitude of the man that stands nowhere, but sees everywhere (Haraway 1991). In defiance of the scientific conceit of objectivity, an ecofeminist embodied materialism asserts that only grounded earthlings can make accurate observations—and rightly so, since this same felt embodiment activates political resistance from social quarters where change is most needed. By contrast, the transcendent notion of historical contradiction in Marxism risks political praxis without an acting subject (Kristeva 1973).

Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1973) traced the genealogy of Eurocentric domination back to Aristotelian logic. The latter sought universal validity for the proposition $A = A$ and its mirror image, $A \text{ cannot} = \text{not-}A$. It was a system that trapped the material movement of language by imposing an artificial unity or identity on each concept. Centuries later, the scientific manipulation of biophysical and social systems would be carried out using this crude symbolic closure, cutting across the flow of life-giving processes within ecosystemic nature and human bodies embedded in it. Every day now, in the so-called developed world, earthly matter is reduced to ad hoc mathematical indices in the belief that somehow this facilitates control of it.¹ Arrival of the Anthropocene era clearly evinces this failed correspondence—a hiatus between human instrumental reason and the world as pulsing metabolism. By contrast, Adorno's theory of non-identity is a tool for reflecting the logic of flow, $A = \text{not-}A$, where substance is not readily contained by its concept or numeric indicator. Adorno took seriously the fluid relations that enjoin fixed identities or named objects, because, in his words: ". . . cognition of the object in its constellation (or full context) is cognition of the process stored in the object" (Adorno 1973, 163). This perception is both historical and ecological.

Non-identity and flow

As a Marxist, Adorno assumed an inverse relation between political power and political insight—which is to say that suffering and conflict most often drive social change. The exercise of negative dialectic unravels the cultural double-binds that mystify people in their everyday rounds. But people also have their own inexhaustible living powers. In fact, personal identity is made and unmade as individuals reject discrepancies between an imposed ideology and the sensuous phenomenology of their experience. Adorno described such moments of liberatory insight and subjective integration as "a last epistemological quiver of the somatic moment . . . the unrest that makes knowledge move" (Adorno 1973, 203). Kristeva too, claimed that social criticism moved by physical abjection becomes a sharp epistemological tool. With Adorno, she saw patriarchal power being sustained by the deformed practice of the identitarian $A = A$ formula. Her feminist focus cut beneath such rules. It was interested in the pre-Oedipal bodily energies, discharges and cathexes flowing underneath language and subjectivity. To paraphrase Kristeva (1978, 33, 80, 85): when the fragile equilibrium of consciousness is destroyed by the

¹ This stands in marked contrast with classical Chinese science: see Joseph Needham (1956), see also Ariel Salleh (2008).

violent heterogeneity of contradiction, the body returns to a state of difference, heavy, wandering . . . it is this moment of annihilation and decomposition of subjective unity, anguish and disarray, which gives up a new productive unity, reaffirms the subject as active “signification-in-process” (paraphrased by Salleh 1982, 76). In short, deprivation energises political critique.

Adorno and Kristeva set out to dissolve linguistic reifications like subject versus object, humanities versus science. So too, by embodying their materialism, they envisage an over-determination at work between social structures, existential consciousness, somatic energies, and biophysical flows. Today in the universities, such mutual relations are made unthinkable by the artificial division of labour among the “disciplines.” Thus it is apposite that Adorno wrote: “He who wishes to know the truth about life must scrutinise its estranged form” (Adorno 1969, 15). As a deeply democratic and dialectical thinker, he gave effectivity to both “power over” and “power within.” The living energies of the ego are never static but a hybrid, reflexive, subjectivity-in-process. In similar vein, Kristeva’s notion of the structurally excluded, historically contradicted, alienated marginal, helps explain the rich outsider voice of the feminist or postcolonial activist.

In contrast to this embodied materialism, the mainstream scientific formulation of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) testifies to the dualist fracture of human consciousness and ecosystems. Moreover, it takes for granted the pursuit of production for profit, prioritising economic “exchange value” as distinct from simple everyday livelihood and “use value.” Capitalism pivots on the mathematised logic of identity, $A = A$; on atomistic reduction in science; on the pulverisation of matter; on manufactured sameness; and on exchange value by “equivalence.” But what is the affective source of this move from flows to units? By the ecological feminist hypothesis, social institutions and practices designed around the value of 1 over non-value of 0 re-enact the libidinal formation of masculine subjectivity.

Anthropocene or andro-scene?

By ecofeminist reasoning, capitalism and the Anthropocene are fundamentally sex-gendered phenomena (Salleh 1997). This is why Timothy Morton’s analysis of the Anthropocene at the level of personal politics looks promising. As noted already, his piece “The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness” was published in the inaugural issue of the Australian journal *Environmental Humanities* (Morton 2012). Morton has impressive academic credentials, not to mention a captivating aura of Adorno about him, at least in sentences such as: “A being contains, by definition, a little bit of non-being, a little trace of nothingness, which just is the crack that allows a being to exist. Entities contain things that are not themselves by definition” (18). Morton maintains that the Anthropocene started in classical Greece where an Oedipal logic became “embedded in the technical, logistical and philosophical framework of agriculture” (7). He links the parcelling out and inheritance of land to Jacques Derrida’s (1978) “metaphysics of presence.” For sure, ecotheorists must address the shortcomings of Eurocentric logic. But Morton’s rather phallic reading of the Anthropocene as “hyperbolic ploughing” (Morton 2012, 18) does not really cover the uniquely destructive impacts of capitalist technoscience sustained as it is by the deadly logic of $A = A$.

Given the long durezza of agricultural folly, Morton considers thinkers from Immanuel Kant to Karl Marx as having been “whistling somewhat blindly in the dark” (Morton 2012, 7). In his words: “the limits of history is recursively part of the problem, since it is human [*sic*] insularity that precisely has resulted in our unconsciously becoming such a force on a planet-wide scale” (8). Eurocentrism aside, Morton’s chronology is also confusing. For while pinning the Anthropocene on the tribulations of Oedipus in agricultural Thebes, he does not deny the standard thesis of atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Their argument is that the Anthropocene got underway in the eighteenth century and accelerated after World War II. Crutzen, Will Steffen, and other scientific colleagues explain this complex conjuncture as follows:

... climate change is only the tip of the iceberg. In addition to the carbon cycle, humans are (i) significantly altering several other biogeochemical, or element cycles, such as nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur, that are fundamental to life on the Earth; (ii) strongly modifying the terrestrial water cycle by intercepting river flow from uplands to the sea and, through land-cover change, altering the water vapour flow from the land to the atmosphere; and (iii) likely driving the sixth major extinction event in Earth history ... these trends are strong evidence that *humankind, our own species*, has become so large and active that it *now rivals some of the great forces of Nature* in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system. (Steffen et al. 2011, 843; italics added)

Staying with this semi-official statement for a moment, the phrase “humankind, our own species ... now rivals some of the great forces of Nature” (Steffen et al. 2011, 843) remains disturbing. As with Morton above, the essentialising term “humankind” distributes the responsibility for environmental breakdown as if the Earth were sociologically flat without class, sex-gender, or ethnic variability. This account of Anthropocenic damage, spoken by middle class men through *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* no less (Steffen et al. 2011), passes over major differences that determine people’s actions on the natural world. These are differences of habitus, intention, capacity, power, opportunity, or access to resources. Again, using a psychoanalytic lens, the phrase “humankind, our own species ... now rivals some of the great forces of Nature” (Steffen et al. 2011, 843) seems to echo the very Humanity versus Nature rivalry that continues to be so pivotal to traditions of patriarchal reasoning. The point I am making is: if “Patriarchy is the power to transcend natural realities with historical, man-made realities” (O’Brien 1981, 54–55), will new scientific responses to the Anthropocene, geo-engineered ones perhaps, be up to changing the game?

Pre-Oedipal logic

Scholars of ecocriticism, political ecologists, and activists, really need to get beneath these androcentric diversions. For several decades now, ecofeminists have asserted that making Man the Measure of All Things is a bad way to live (Mellor 1992; Salleh 2010). To womanist eyes, the Humanity over Nature divide reflects a deep affective rift; one that secures each generation of Eurocentric masculine selfhood by allowing it to rise above the very first nourishment of amniotic fusion. Coming to masculine self-awareness in a patriarchal society depends on a preconscious dissociation, as the boy-child tears his libidinal cathexis away from the gifts of maternally “embodied nature.” Radical feminist psychoanalysts see this pre-Oedipal symbolic mother-rift as the originary 1/0 struggle of subject versus object;

a struggle whose resolution now prepares the way for “the proper Oedipal contest” of son against father (Chesler 1978, 43). Challenged and defeated, the older man is then symbolically eaten according to Freud, so incorporating the “masculinist value regime” into the younger man’s sense of self. Masculinity is based on man to man closure: A = A. The originary pre-Oedipal break from continuity with the vegetal mother, mere caregiver, is thus essential for the actual Oedipal displacement and transmission of men’s power forward into the future. However, this patriarchy rests on a primal affective contradiction, a visceral line, unconsciously projected, acted out and institutionalised over and over as the foundational civilised splitting of mind over body, masculine over feminine, white over black, Humanity over Nature.

The Oedipal energies are never completely sealed up, however. There is always a libidinal residue, a leak, a need to prove “the manufactured self” against the next man, and the next. These competitive masculinist energies have taken form as and continue to find perfect elective affinity with capitalism. Marx notwithstanding, the economic rhetoric of progress is libidinally charged. Women of course, do not come into adulthood with the same affective sociological configuration as the Eurocentric masculine prototype. Rather, they are damaged in another way, by being reduced ideologically to “mere bodies.” The patriarchal norm is a numbing dissociation from the materiality of both living women and, by extension, a psychologically loaded notion of the originary Mother-Nature. But the integration of masculine self-identity in this way justifies the control of both objectifications—embodied Woman and material Nature as “reproductive resources.” In its externalised, projected, disembodied symbolic form, Oedipal energy infuses and motivates ecological, social, economic, and political domination. The same discursive diminishment as applied to women, is also exercised over other “non-men,” those who are not-A like queers and indigenes, and minors such as children, or “non-human” animals. Sadly, under twentieth century liberal feminism, some women try to escape this humiliation by imitating the mainstream masculine model, but with mixed success.

Carolyn Merchant (1980), an ecological feminist historian, has traced the death of nature and its mechanisation through Francis Bacon’s scientific revolution, foundation of the Royal Society, and the witch-hunts that helped make way for the latter. Vandana Shiva (1989), an ecofeminist quantum physicist, gives the thesis a postcolonial twist with her exposure of the twentieth century development paradigm and its “green revolution” toll on Indian forest dwellers and farmers. Luce Irigaray (1985), a feminist psychoanalyst, affirms Merchant’s epistemological critique of Enlightenment science. In Irigaray’s words:

Anything conceded to nature is immediately taken back and will be found useful only in so far as it ensures more rigorous dominion over her. Thus, *the function of the transcendental schema will be to negate all intrinsic quality of the sensible world.* (Irigaray 1985, 204; italics added)

Returning to Morton and the Anthropocene, this negation of sensory qualities appears in his concern over “the uncanny” affective quality of Oedipal agriculture, which he puts down to identitarian logic in “the reduction of being to non-contradiction” (Morton 2012, 7). Although Morton cites Freud on the uncanny, he externalises it as if “out there.” Later, he interiorises the uncanny in a Cartesian manner, by reference to Gödel’s theorem in mathematics, which posits that ultimately there will always be an unknown premise, an original

point that can never be spoken. While Morton locates the origin of uncanniness in ploughing, an embodied materialist reading locates this unspeakable absence in the living mother-nature fracture; the pre-Oedipal affective turn that sets Eurocentric masculine identity adrift in a sea of dualisms. By this sex-gendered reading, the uncanny points to a gap, a memory lapse, a denial of what has given the emergent subject-in-process his “self-consistency”—as a human “presence” as distinct from a “natural” object.

Fathers of affect

Morton is not strong on women’s scholarship, poststructural or ecofeminist, rather his interest is in “taking on the fathers” of affect theory—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983), in particular. He condemns them as hypocrites, intellectual fixtures in the very modernity they would free us of. Their would-be revolutionary tract, *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 1983), is said to bend back on itself, revealing them as two philosophical detectives who are culprits in their own investigation. The problem, according to Morton, is that in attempting to get beyond the ancient reification of Nature with a capital N, “Deleuze and Guattari . . . naturalise: they produce another, ‘new and improved’ version of Nature, which is a direct product of an agricultural age” (Morton 2012, 12). While Deleuze and Guattari argue that the Oedipal story must be rejected, Morton wants to engage with it as manifest through agriculture and the logic of land as precursor of the “metaphysics of presence” and Anthropocene. Morton does not seem to perceive the paradox of his own Oedipal position as a libidinally competitive son of the French academics whose authority he is challenging.

The nub of the matter for Morton is that the French text, *Anti-Oedipus*, avoids “precisely what brings about the [Anthropocenic] cataclysm,” in other words, “hyperbolic ploughing” (Morton 2012, 7). For him, the error of Deleuze and Guattari exists in naming “the self” as source of our problems rather than the abstract metaphysics of presence. Adorno by contrast, and Kristeva, bypass all such problems in understanding how the logic of identity—the same principle of presence, is actually carried within the socially constructed material psyche. The self is biophysically energised and affectively embodied, yet too often unravelled by experiences of oppression and negation. Morton avoids the grubby materiality of bodily-ecological metabolism. His totalising refusal of agriculture for having created “slabs of abstract land” is full on idealism, based on a metonymic chain of free association through—land, the real, the royal realm, royaume, and so on (10). His analysis of the Anthropocene does little to unpack the Earth heating thermodynamic toll of industrialisation, free trade, and consumerism. He attributes environmental impacts by fire to “pre-agricultural peoples”; while the Eurocentric trajectory from fire, through alchemy all the way along to fossil fuelled corporate profiteering, is sidelined.

To quote Morton:

The accelerationism Deleuze and Guattari espouse is precisely to do with hastening the “decoding” and “deterritorialization” of all flows—flows that are temporarily blocked in molar aggregations. Capitalism according to this acceleration mode of thinking is a necessary phase of liquefaction through which everything on Earth must pass. (Morton 2012, 12)

This could be received by unsympathetic readers as an apology for the status quo, but either way, there is no doubt that the formulations of Deleuze and Guattari are conceived in conditions of class, race, and gender privilege, not in praxis, for example, or livelihood struggles. Their schizoanalysis and rhizomic “becoming” celebrate the nomadic individual, free of mundane ties and responsibilities, a de-coded route to self-realisation not open to many beyond the intellectual elite whose time is materially secured by the productive and reproductive labours of unnamed others. This personal blindspot in the project of anthropo-decentrism parallels claims to universalism made by gender-illiterate liberal ideologues. Then there are those famous poststructuralist careers based on *gynesis* or “speaking like a woman” (Pateman 1988; Jardine 1985). Do such evaporative gestures express the healing logic of water flows—or more power to the Promethean flame?

Posthuman actants

The internationally dominant expression of masculinity, known today as neoliberal capitalism, has always justified its assault on women and nature as a need to master creatures of “unpredictable vapours.” This humanist discourse remains hegemonic, despite “posthumanists” like Bruno Latour (1993) and others who would release an impotently idealised Nature by emphasising mutual humanity-nature determination. That said, is the reconstitution of objects as “actants” really anything more than ventriloquism? This projection of human capacities risks colonising the uniqueness of other entities and species. My hunch is that an actor network approach has little to offer an ecotheory based on affect, sensuous apprehension, libidinal insight, and passionate resistance. Without defending Marxist anthropocentrism, the adage—humans make their own history, but in conditions not of their own choosing—already affirms an interplay of bodies and environments without necessitating a posthuman stance.

Morton attributes the idea of Man as Measure of All Things to “*the moment at which history had intersected with geological time, two halves of a torn whole which ecological thinking and politics must begin to put back together*” (Morton 2012, 8; italics added). It is a curiously split-off, denialist claim, because in fact, humans as mineralised and watery earthlings, intersect, and have always intersected, with geological time. Influenced by “object-oriented-ontology,” Morton theorises the Anthropocene as a “hyper-object,” whose characteristic feature is that it may be everywhere yet “cannot be touched.” Radioactivity is a case in point—“a gigantic entity that cannot be localised,” he writes (Morton 2012, 19). However, this abstraction relies on a very masculine gendered mind/body split. The women of Chernobyl, dealing with radiation induced abortions and childhood leukaemias, know just how flesh is touched, indeed penetrated, and rearranged, by the “hyper-object” of environmental radiation. So too, the people of Kiribas know that their island days are numbered by the hyper-object of global warming. It is just this kind of materially situated knowledge that has led women to develop an ecological feminist politics (Wyman 1999; Gebara 1999).

What exactly is an “object” anyhow? As discussed above, a fixed $A = A$ identity is as arbitrary an imposition on the material world as the word “system” is. For object or system boundaries are always contingent and tailored to specific human interests. The hyper-object looks too much like an instrumental rational concept generated by mathematics and designed for policy management. Indeed, the digitised informatic paradigm now

operating at atmospheric, organismic, and social-systemic levels is mainly useful for legitimating political authority. But this crude Anthropocene leads to a bureaucratic world, operating with decision parameters of such immaterial complexity that governments simply cannot apply them.

Down to earth

Scientist William Ruddiman (2005) considers that the Anthropocene set in with agricultural land clearing, water and biodiversity loss. James Lovelock (2014) maintains that the Industrial Revolution harnessing energy driven machines from 1750 onwards was the main cause. Recent research by Will Steffen and colleagues (Steffen et al. 2015) for the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme observes that the only truly significant Anthropocenic shift from natural levels of ecosystem variability follows World War II. This “acceleration thesis” converges with the common sense observation of grassroots environmentalists—workers and women, peasants and indigenes. Moreover, it links the Anthropocene to twentieth century economic models based on urbanisation, intensified production, agroindustry, mining, computing, telecommunications, and global free trade. These practices destabilise and replace previously self-sufficient rural community based lifestyles in the name of “development.” Additionally, it has long been recognised that under capitalism, military technologies were converted into consumer products to be marketed for civilian use; and the military-industrial-complex as such, continues to be the world’s greatest environmental polluter. It is noteworthy that the research by Steffen et al. (2015) shows consumption by wealthy OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries to be a more important Anthropocene “accelerator” than population growth. They also point out that equity issues are masked when scientists rely exclusively on statistical measurement of global aggregates.

Indeed, ruling class privilege, technocratic advancement, and corporate profiteering, are readily mystified and secured by high abstractions such as the Anthropocene. By contrast, the grounded feminist ecocriticism of Jane Bennett (2010) envisages everything on Earth as alive, interconnected, intentional, and fluid. This resonates with the critical psychoanalysis of Adorno and Kristeva, an apprehension of the logic of non-identity, and an ecofeminist embodied materialism. Bennett (2010) shares the world with “a swarm” of actants, a force field where affective habits, propensities, and trajectories distribute themselves as fractal not linear causality. Yet while this genre of cultural theory uses a rhetoric of materiality and the body, many posthumans standing in awe of technoscience are unaware of its disintegrative stochastic imaginary and role in planetary burning. Likewise, it is disturbing to find humanities scholars using cybernetic metaphors to give their work a patina of firmness and facticity. The exploitations of structural power are made invisible by such writing. The adoption of systems-theoretic jargon may also serve neoliberal domination by harbouring a positivist fact/value dichotomy. The feminist posthumanist Katherine Hayles does at least confirm that the digital revolution has problematised “the body” (Hayles 1999; Morton 2012, 7). So the “situated” question now becomes: Whose body exactly?

Morton’s reduction of ecocriticism to a remediation of the logic of presence implies an armchair pursuit, rather like the nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari (1983); whereas an embodied materialist attends to the urgent biophysicality of daily life. Ecological feminists

judge reproductive or regenerative labour as the node point of human engagement with natural energetic transactions. This experience gives rise to learning and to expert knowledges that can be called “epistemologies of care.” When Morton claims that “Thinking ecologically means thinking beings as inherently sick—disturbingly hobbled in an ontological sense” (Morton 2012, 17), he writes as if there are no socially learned differences of orientation or labour skill in relation to the material environment. Not only does Morton miss the deep libidinal asymmetry of the pre-Oedipal formation of masculinist values, his essay “The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness” simply rules out women as historical agents of any sort. While scientists of the Anthropocene may tend to overlook sociological “difference,” it is surprising to find essentialist thinking in the humanities, where sensitivity to gender, race, and class is a long established expectation.

Regenerative labour

Dissociation should never be confused with liberation. For instance, what happens politically, if the fashionable posthuman word “actant” replaces the intentional “agent”? Indeed, the subject-woman becomes object, and object, all over again. Adorno and Kristeva, embracing the open logic of non-identity, kept the possibility of a constitutive subject alive, by tracing the bioenergetic dissipation of social marginality into politics. Not all human communities are “hobbled” or have ploughed the Earth into what Morton calls “self-consistency.” Nor are all libidinal flows necessarily locked into Deleuzian “molar aggregations” of capitalism and the metropole. While Morton (2012) reminds us that Hegel judged Africa and Asia as lacking history, ecological feminists see subjects at the geographic periphery—peasants, gatherers, caregivers—working in reciprocity with nature and history. These labours are precautionary, reproducing embodied and ecosystemic metabolisms over long time lines. Notwithstanding the “hyperbolic plough,” a majority of people around the world still provision themselves by earth and water friendly subsistence agriculture (Blanco 2009). What is more, their economic models do not lead to alienation, but satisfy multiple emotional needs at once—learning, participation, innovation, ritual, identity, and belonging (Max-Neef 1991).

The most catastrophic outcome of making the Earth “self-consistent,” identity thinking, and its corollary in the mathematised commodification of life, is passed over by Morton. This is the androcentric separation of water from land. Under the Anthropocene, water is drained, channelled, dammed up, or flushed out to sea, as if it was a transgression . . . a stopped up pre-Oedipal flow of love perhaps, an uncanny one, that cannot say its name? Yet the fusion of water and land together is essential for the damp rich organic soil, pulsing plants and rising mists that bring cycles of rain and Earth cooling. Modes of non-Eurocentric provisioning and domestic nurture keep peoples and habitats whole. These embodied material labours sensitive to interacting time scales, create epistemologies of care.

By coming down to earth, political ecologists and ecotheorists discover spaces of hope. In fact, the food sovereignty struggles of the international peasant union Via Campesina (2012), indigenous Australian protection of country by “strong seeing,” *Kyosei* in Japan, Andean notions of nature like *Pachamama* and *buen vivir*—are the vanguard of alternative globalisation politics today (Salleh 2012). They are joined by a vibrant movement for de-growth in affluent Europe and precarious youth from the US rustbelts who are re-making patriarchal agriculture as a self-sufficient and relational commons. Facing down the

Anthropocene will require thinking in both deep geological time and deep libidinal time. Framing an ecological theory to enjoin material bodies in earthly relations will mean challenging the powers of sex-gender ideology in university disciplines, in science, in government policy, and in everyday life. It will mean respecting social marginality and vegetal nurture as sources of political insight giving value to regenerative labour. Today, there is a rising tide of ecologically aware citizens on every continent; can we bend our academic work to help grow this Earth Democracy?

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Notes on contributor

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