

Paola Partenza / Özlem Karadağ / Emanuela Ettore (eds.)

Different Voices

Gender and Posthumanism



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Passages – Transitions – Intersections

Volume 10

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Challenging the Humanist Genre of Gender: Posthumanisms and Feminisms

This chapter explores the conceptual and ethical limits of human-centrism for theorizing gender. Human-centrism posits that humans should have command over non-human entities. Historically, humanistic conceptions are based on asserting the priority of humans; non-humans are viewed as means to human ends. Etymologically, the word ‘gender’ predates the word ‘sex’; it emerges in the 14th century as way of designating a “kind, sort, or class of persons or things sharing certain traits”, and comes from the Old French words *gendre* and *genre*, meaning “kind, species, character, or gender”, from the Latin stem *genus* – meaning “race, stock, family; kind, rank, order; species” and also “(male or female) sex” – and from the Proto Indo-European root **gènè*, meaning “to give birth, beget”.¹ Thinking of gender in terms of *genre* allows us to think of the genres of gender, in particular the *humanist* genre of binary gender that depicts humans as superior to non-humans, and consequently males as superior to females. Within the humanist genre, ‘humans’ are distinguished hierarchically (both ontologically and epistemologically) from various categories of ‘non-human’ in terms of the dynamics of domination and subjugation. Humans are imagined as having oversight over non-humans, thus justifying human domination over those who are deemed incapable of reaching full human potential. Gender is defined by the ontological superiority of humans over non-humans and institutionalized in the differences between male and female, master and slave. The humanist genre of gender is thus strongly anthropocentric, emphasizing human superiority and treating non-humans as instruments and means to achieve human ends. Strongly anthropocentric humanism posits a theory of ‘human nature’ that is used as a basis for making various normative, moral, cultural, and legal claims that elevate humans to the status of moral and political agents, while relegating non-humans to a lesser more instrumental status. Within humanism, humans are depicted as capable of transcending their animal roots

1 Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “gender”, https://www.etymonline.com/word/gender#etymonline_v_1349.

through intellection and instrumentalization of a non-human order for the benefit of humankind. This portrait of human control – of the morally conscious, modern individual that technologically transforms the non-human world for the benefit of all – is such a pervasive but unquestioned dogma that to challenge this viewpoint amounts to disrupting prevailing ways of doing, thinking, and being. In the following chapter, I ask: To what extent can humans and non-humans be conceptualized in terms other than human/istic?

Third wave feminisms have taken-up the mantle of questioning the legitimacy of the humanist genre of gender by challenging nature/culture dichotomies. In particular, recent contemporary critical feminist post-humanisms offer a basis for challenging the dominant humanist genre of gender. The post-humanist genre of gender seeks to displace and decenter – or more precisely dethrone – the humanist version of gender by underscoring the entanglements and compatibilities between human animals, non-human animals, and machines. Critical feminist post-humanisms recode gender as multiple, material, in motion, and made to bridge divides between human and non-human. “While the perspective of the Anthropocene centers human beings and their agency and interventions in geo-epochal transformations through technological developments and (bio-) chemical products, post-human perspectives decenter the idea of humankind being in charge of technical and ideological mastery over nature”.² Feminist post-humanisms are a resource for gaining alternative perspectives on the tensions between the politics of decentering and of recentering the human. Nonetheless, I suggest that critical feminist post-humanisms retain normative assumptions about the special status of humans (i.e. as well-meaning ‘stewards’ or ‘custodians’ of non-humans), and in this regard, ‘ethical’ posthuman perspectives tend to find refuge in humanistic/human-centric ideals that promise a special role for humans. These critical post-humanisms, well-meaning as they may be, are still weakly anthropocentric. Indeed, anthropocentrism is especially difficult to overturn completely when the intellectual resources come from histories that are deeply embedded in humanistic ideas that define humans as unique in relation to ‘others’. While in theory it may be possible, in practice, the strict distinctions between humanistic and post-humanistic versions of gender are hard to maintain, and neither perspectives can claim to have explained why humans should be considered exemplary in relation to other non-human entities.

The humanistic genre of gender is strongly anthropocentric, and its model of relationality is binary, dualistic, and based on the dynamics of mastery and subordination. Humans are conceptualized as being in command, justifying superiority over those who are deemed incapable of reaching full potential. A

2 Kornelia Engert and Christiane Schürkmann, “Introduction”, *Nature and Culture* Vol. 16, no. 1 (2021): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3167/nc.2020.160101>.

hallmark of humanism is that it established humanity's separate and exceptional character and, purposely or not, led to the subjection of everything else to this alleged special status. Humanism grounds its ethical claims in the human capacities for speech, reason, autonomy, impartiality, and universality, which are then used as justifications for mastery over and management of non-humans who are considered to lack these capabilities. In the intellectual histories of western thought, the view that humans possess unique capacities that make them exceptional and/or superior to others is prevalent. Within this mastery model, humans govern unpredictability through the instrumentalization of their rationality and their normative and norm-making capacities. Strong human-centrism posits the achievement of human control using the instruments of reason (like technologies) and by using reason as an instrument. In the history of Western ethics, this genre has emphasized human intellect, especially the activity of deliberating about human ends, which require mental and practical capacities to discern the worthy ends of human life. For instance, ancient Greek virtue-ethics, medieval humanism, early modern mechanistic philosophy, and even contemporary Philosophies of Mind are grounded in anthropocentric terms that privilege the achievement of human ends by way of human rationality at the expense of non-human lives.

Just take, for instance, Aristotle's stance justifying slavery. "The rule of soul over body is like a master's rule, while the rule of intelligence over desire is like a statesman's or a king's. In these relationships, it is clear that it is both natural and expedient for the body to be ruled by the soul, and for the emotional part of our natures to be ruled by the mind, the part which possesses reason. The reverse, or even parity, would be fatal all round. This is also true as between man and the other animals; for tame animals are by nature better than wild, and it is better for them all to be ruled by men, because it secures their safety. Again, as between male and female, the former is by nature superior and ruler, the latter inferior and subject. And this must hold good of mankind in general".³ Here, Aristotle offers an account of each dualism's place in a chain of hierarchies, establishing the division between human and non-human and connecting various hierarchies together, namely the human domination of nature, male domination over females, the master's domination over the slave, and Reason's domination of the body and emotions. The genre of gender inherited from the legacy of western Humanism is thus dualistic, hierarchical, and human-centric. Philosophically and politically, this conceptual network of binaries – mind/body, reason/emotions, human/animal, male/female, freedom/slavery – reflects the dynamics of mastery and/or hierarchy: of higher over lower, superior over inferior, essential over instrumental.

3 Aristotle, *The Politics*, Trans. T.A. Sinclair (London: Penguin Books), section 1254b2, 68.

Historically, humanism has portrayed the ‘human’ as agent, as creator of culture and technologies, and as a bearer of rights and responsibilities that makes use of other life-forms (both non-human and human) including animals, plants, and machines. Those who have been regarded as deficient in rationality and intrinsic moral worth such as women, children, slaves and colonized subjects, are deemed as lacking full human potential and are treated as less-than-human – that is, as ‘sub-human’. Along with this objectification of the non-human and sub-human, the instrumentalization of techniques and technological manipulation become the main vehicle by which humanism perpetuates its human exceptionalism. Humans are framed as having special insights and being self-authorized to preside, command, and control all others. The humanist genre of gender thus exemplifies a “logic of colonization” in which difference between beings is conceived dualistically as the mastery of a superior over an inferior order. “This is a model of domination and transcendence in which freedom and virtue are construed in terms of control over, and distance from, the sphere of nature”.⁴ By means of this hierarchical logic, the colonised are appropriated – incorporated – into the paradigm and culture of mastery and subordination which comes to form all expressions of identity. As Plumwood sums up, “the dominant conception of the human and of human nature corresponds to this structure and dynamics”.⁵

Framed within the terms of benevolence, mastery, and hierarchy, humans are tasked with governing unpredictability through the instrumentalization of their rationality and their normative and norm-making capacities. Liberal and normative theories of human rights are grounded in this human-centric representation of the individual who is expected to take ownership over its own self, this self-mastery thereby sanctioning the exercise of mastery over others who are incapable of such self-legislation. Even critically-minded liberal thinkers like feminist Mary Wollstonecraft did not challenge humanism’s presumption of humanity’s superiority over other forms of life. “In what does man’s pre-eminence over the brute creation consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than the whole; in Reason. What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue; we spontaneously reply. For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes: whispers Experience. Consequently, the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind so-

4 Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 23.

5 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 42.

ciety: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow, is equally undeniable, if mankind be viewed collectively”.⁶

Historically, advocacy for the rights and welfare of those deemed to lack reason emerged among liberal sentimentalists like Jeremy Bentham, who argued that non-rational people should be protected not on the basis of rational capacities and claims to freedom and equality, but rather based on the argument that the “non-rational” have shared capacities for sentience. Such vulnerable populations are therefore owed limited protection and sympathy. Liberal sentimentalism sought to protect individual freedom by borrowing from nineteenth and twentieth-century ideals of social equality as minimal capabilities that must be guaranteed by the state and should also extend to non-human animals, people with disabilities, and non-citizens.⁷ Human-centrism positions humans as being at the center of agency, cognition, and broader relations/networks of exchange. Humanism does not overturn the unchallenged assumption that what makes non-humans worthy of moral consideration is their commonality, similitude, and resemblance with humans who have a special status as ‘moral agents’. Thus, liberal concepts of human moral agency – even when they go beyond possessive individualism – tend to assess the worth of non-humans in terms of human-centric standards. By continuously deploying this binary and colonizing logic and its hierarchical dynamics, the humanistic diagram centered on human moral agency fails to overturn the logic of domination and transcendence that defines prevalent conceptions of human/non-human relations. The humanistic and sentimentalist liberal positions reinforce human-centric exceptionalism and thus prioritize the human element of oversight while pursuing whatever means necessary, including the denigration and instrumentalization of those deemed ‘non-human’ and/or ‘less than human’.

The humanist genre of gender follows a logic of colonization, domination and transcendence defined by patriarchal/universalist humanistic priorities, replicating the master/slave dynamics and politics of binary gender. Terms like ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ collide within a complex and contested battlefield of meanings, hierarchies, and exclusions where racial, sexual, ethnic, and other differences have been cast in terms that distinguish so-called ‘higher’ forms of humanity from ‘lesser’ ones deemed to lack some degree of rationality or cultivation. The master/slave dichotomy at the heart of the humanistic version of human exceptionalism reproduces a cluster of other dualisms such as self/other, human/machine, man/woman, colonizer/colonized, etc. This logic of mastery/subjugation views domination as natural and befitting. Within this frame, “the

6 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (New York: A. J. Matsell, 1833), 11.

7 See for example, Daniel Engster 2006 and Nussbaum 2007.

multiple, complex cultural identity of the master [is] formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination”; the problem, however, is that “the assumptions in the master model are not seen as such, because this model is taken for granted as simply a human model”.⁸

In an effort to address the limits of humanism, contemporary feminist trans-humanism claims to offer a post-gender and gender-liberationist view that argues that through the application of neuro-technology, bio-technology, and assistive reproductive technologies, gendering can be eliminated and human potential can truly be realized. Trans-humanism, which is a term said to have been coined in the 1950s by Julian Huxley to mean the transitional human who is moving beyond its human limits, is a movement that seeks to transform humans through technological augmentation in order to invert the humanistic hierarchy of human over machine and liberate humans from gender-oppression. Sometimes touted as ‘fourth-wave feminists’ ‘defined by technology’ and even ‘post-feminists’, feminist trans-humanists retain the first-wave feminist assumption that mind is a superior path to liberation than body, which is inferior and limiting; and that ‘technology’ is the instrument, the means towards the end of transforming the human. Retaining the humanist dualism favouring liberation through mastery, technological progress and exceptionalism, the trans-humanist argument for gender-liberation ultimately and ironically affirms the humanist logic of control. Indeed, scholars have emphasized the deep compatibilities and connections between trans-humanism and liberal feminism with intellectual roots in Enlightenment positivism and rationalism, and technological progressivism. Like its historical predecessor liberal sentimentalism, trans-humanism shares with liberal feminism a deep commitment to universality framed as “the well-being of all sentience”.⁹ It is the shared capacity to feel, in this case, and not the capacity to think rationally, that undergirds this brand of sentimentalist trans-humanism. As James Hughes argues in *Citizen Cyborg*: “persons don’t have to be human, and not all humans are persons”.¹⁰ Some trans-humanists are happy to anthropomorphize non-humans while at the same time denying personhood to some humans. What started out as discontent with some of the limitations within classical humanism has paved the way, ironically, for a position from which to turn back to humanism.

The need for an alternative perspective arises when understanding the limitations of the humanistic conception of gender. Post-humanisms seek to do just this by deprioritizing human-centrism, rejecting atomism, and underscoring the

8 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 5 and 22.

9 “Transhumanist Declaration”, Humanity Plus, <http://humanityplus.org/philosophy/trans-humanist-declaration>.

10 James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (USA: Basic Books, 2004), 79.

affinities (rather than the differences) between human animals, non-human animals, and machines. Humans are viewed as co-producing and co-evolving with non-humans, rather than as ontologically superior to them. For example, criticizing the scientific imagery that segregates species and privileges human-centric forms of life, critical post-humanists are arguing for a rejection of the principle of human mastery in favor of conceptualizations that bridge divides between humans and non-humans. Prioritizing connectionism as a way of de-prioritizing humanism and its version of strong anthropocentrism, post-humanisms strive to transform the ‘human’ into an open-ended category and to re-conceptualize it as a product of ongoing processes of collective bio-socio-technical interactions. For instance, Rosi Braidotti argues that life is not the exclusive domain or right of the human species alone, but more aligned with “the transversal force that cuts-across and re-connects previously segregated species, categories and domains. This vital interconnection posits a qualitative shift of the relationship away from species-ism and toward an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, others) can do. The new transversal alliance across species and among post-human subjects opens-up unexpected possibilities for the recomposition of communities, for the very idea of humanity and for ethical forms of belonging”.¹¹ In a similar vein, Cynthia Willett offers an inter-species ethics of radical multi-species relationality in which “bio-social processes of living matter challenge the atomistic individualism in classic liberal ‘state of nature’ theories more radically than one may first think. ... [W]e are not naturally frozen into genetically-defined groups with clear-and-distinct boundaries, but, for the same reasons, we are not individual atoms either. Rather than individuals or groups, we function at times like nodes in multispecies networks and selves-in-multispecies-communities”.¹²

Contrary to humanists and trans-humanist feminists who instrumentalize non-humanity and even seek to accelerate the technological transformation of the human, post-humanist feminisms decenter the human, making it cede its historical ties to the dialectics of domination and transcendence. Whereas the (trans-)humanistic conception of gender is strongly human-centered, binary, and hierarchical, the post-humanistic, the post-humanist alternative pursues the undoing of human-centrism in an effort to open-up multiple pathways and possibilities of relationality between humans and non-humans. As Willett notes, emphasizing the limitations of the liberal model of human agency, a “post-humanist lens ventures beyond modern and post-modern binaries, as in sympathy for the ‘other’ ... to engage multi-layered symbiotic agencies and bio-social

11 Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 60, 71–72.

12 Cynthia Willett, *Interspecies Ethics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 64, 66.

communities”.¹³ Here the emphasis on post-humanism rather than humanism signals the prioritization of narratives that privilege inter-species co-evolution and co-production. Drawing together anti-humanism’s rejection anthropocentrism (i.e. of Man as a universal ideal) and poststructuralist feminism’s critique of phallogocentrism, critical feminist post-humanisms, in embracing new materials and materialisms as the basis for displacing humanism, claim to be ‘post-anthropocentric’. Calling for a post-humanities to develop as a humanities without the human alongside a feminism without gender, Cecilia Åsberg, building on Braidotti’s account, argues that instead of the term ‘anthropocene’, we should consider our present epoch as ‘post-natural’, that is, “beyond the naturalism of the nature/culture dichotomy”.¹⁴ Rejecting gender essentialism, Eldon Yungblut contends that critical feminist post-humanism “endeavours to trace the notions of sex, gender and sexuality as they traverse the borders of internality and externality, revealing their entanglement in a complex web of sociocultural meanings and biological imperatives”.¹⁵ While anti-humanist, post-structuralist, and post-humanist feminisms have opened up avenues for de-centering the human and embracing the non-human, many point out that they remain troubled by gender despite the rejection of gender essentialism.¹⁶ In an effort to ‘deterritorialize gender’, some scholars warn that post-humanism does not posit a genderless body: “sex/gender, race, sexuality is not a difference from other bodies, but is a difference that emerges from within the individuating body as material discursive process”.¹⁷ Instead of negating gender, such post-humanist feminisms seek instead to experiment with and even simulate gender.¹⁸ Despite the many appealing features of critical feminist post-humanisms, they appear to continue to preserve commitments to human-centrism (however weakly). True, while such post-humanisms might decenter the human, they have not quite shed anthropocentrism completely because they do not sever or abolish the binary/

13 Willett, *Interspecies Ethics*, 7.

14 Cecilia Åsberg, “Feminist Posthumanities in the Anthropocene: Forays into The Postnatural”, *Journal of Posthuman Studies* Vol. 1, no. 2 (2017): 185–204.

15 Eldon Yungblut, “Sex in Posthuman Futures: Rethinking Gendered Embodiment in the Anthropocene”, *Gnosis* Vol. 17, no. 1 (2018): 7, <https://gnosisjournalofphilosophy.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/yungblut-for-sex-in-posthuman-futures.pdf>.

16 See for example Nicole Falkenhayner, “The Ship Who Sang: Feminism, the Posthuman, and Similarity”, *Open Library of Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.598>; Francesca Ferrando, “Is the Post-Human a Post-Woman? Cyborgs, Robots, Artificial Intelligence and the Futures of Gender: A Case Study”, *European Journal of Futures Research* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40309-014-0043-8>.

17 Silvia Gherardi. “If We Practice Posthumanist Research, Do We Need ‘Gender’ Any Longer?” *Gender, Work & Organization* Vol. 26, no. 1 (2019): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12328>.

18 See for example, Kim Toffoletti, “Catastrophic Subjects: Feminism, the Posthuman and Difference”, *Thirdspace: A Journal of Feminist Theory & Culture* Vol. 3, no. 2 (2004): <https://journals.sfu.ca/thirdspace/index.php/journal/article/view/toffoletti>.

dualistic distinctions between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’. The connectionistic post-humanist claim to be ‘post-anthropocentric’, while inspiring, is not convincing.

Since there are few ontological and epistemological resources that are not somehow connected to human-centrism, this final section attempts to consider what a truly ‘post-anthropocentric’ and ‘post-human’ would be. This is where most contemporary thinking fails to provide an adequate framework. In this case, we turn more to speculative than normative thinking about xeno-intelligences well beyond human parameters – and as such, conceptualizing non-anthropocentrism may require going beyond empirical and normative analyses to a level of speculation disconnected from the “is” and “oughts” of more human-centered approaches. A ‘post-anthropocentric’ post-humanism would, I argue, entertain possibilities that are not defined by the resonances and/or differences between humans and non-humans. Accordingly, this model could be provisionally called a “non-standard” post-humanism (in contrast with previous, more ‘standard’ connectionist model of post-humanism), or even a ‘speculative post-humanism’ based on a “disconnection thesis” that suggests that humans should not be conceptualized in terms of the presence or absence of some essential “human” property – in other words, not as “Lockean or Kantian persons” – but as “an emergent disconnection between individuals [that] should not be conceived in narrow biological terms but in ‘wide’ terms permitting biological, cultural and technological relations of descent between human and post-human”.¹⁹ Instead of positing any anthropocentric baseline (not even a weakly constrained one), the disconnectionist model would begin with the assumption that “our current technical practice could precipitate a non-human world that we cannot yet understand, in which ‘our’ values may have no place”;²⁰ speculative post-humanism, as such, would not need “to introduce any normative justifications (moral or otherwise) since the possibility of post-humans implies that the future of life and mind might not only be stranger than we imagine, but stranger than we can currently conceive”.²¹ Here, “human” would not refer primarily to the human-centric portrait equated with biological and cognitive embodiments (i.e. neither as a “real” organism nor as the phenomenological “self” that has subjective experiences), but to a view that is disconnected from and independent of any human-centrism.

José Muñoz, however, aptly captures the problem of thinking outside the regime of the human: “Thinking outside the regime of the human is simulta-

19 David Roden, *Post-human Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (London: Routledge, 2015), 105.

20 Roden, *Post-human Life*, 124.

21 Roden, *Post-human Life*, 125.

neously exhilarating and exhausting. It is a ceaseless endeavor, a continuous straining to make sense of something else that is never fully knowable ... The radical attempt to think incommensurate queer inhumanity is a de-naturalizing and un-settling of the settled, sedimented, and often ferocious world of recalcitrant anti-inhumanity. ... Queer thought is, in large part, about casting a picture of arduous modes of relationality that persist in the world despite stratifying demarcations and taxonomies of being, classifications that are bent on the silo-ing of particularity and on the denigrating of any expansive idea of the common and communism”.²² Here, the turn to post-humanistic connectionism belies a crypto-human-centrism that ultimately turns queerness’s non-standard potential for post-anthropocentrism against itself, returning it to a state of weak anthropocentrism.

Instead, the queer labour of a truly ‘post-anthropocentric’ conception of gender demands thinking not in terms of relation, but rather non-relation and disconnection from standard modes of being and thinking. In this regard, object-oriented feminisms (OOF) and xeno-feminisms (XF) are two contemporary discourses that, like standard post-humanisms, are based on the affirmation of techno-materialities, anti-naturalism, and inter-sectionality; but unlike the standard post-humanisms, both OOF and XF are based on cutting ties with ideals like ‘subjectivity’ and ‘agency’, focusing instead on non-standard notions of withdrawal (without emergence), objects (without subjects), alienation (without agency) and gender-abolition (instead of gender-essentialism or gender-performativity). For example, Katherine Behar is critical of standard object-oriented ontology for remaining silent about the tensions between feminism (the critique of female objectification) and object-orientation. Behar points-out that OOO (Object-Oriented Ontology) privileges liveliness and connectivity, which is problematic “because the imperative to connect is detrimental to individuals who suffer from the over-connection compulsions of neoliberal subjectivity”.²³ The withdrawal of the object – its ‘self-containedness’ is viewed as a kind of objection qua resistance: “OOO’s conception of objects as fundamentally withdrawn and self-contained resonates with feminist objects that resist us, and the feminist notion that as objects, we resist”.²⁴ Yet, instead of connection, what is offered is commonality and continuity: “our common status as matter makes way for

22 José Esteban Muñoz, “Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms: The Sense of Brownness”, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 21, no. 2–3 (June 2015): DOI 10.1215/10642684-2843323.

23 Katherine Behar, “Facing Necrophilia”, or ‘Botox Ethics’, in *Object-oriented Feminism*, ed. Katherine Behar (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 126.

24 Katherine Behar, “An Introduction to OOF”, in *Object-oriented Feminism*, ed. Katherine Behar (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 19.

continuity between all objects, whether human or nonhuman, organic or inorganic, animate or inanimate”.²⁵

Likewise, building on Laboria Kuboniks’s ‘Xeno-Feminist Manifesto’, Helen Hester names four technological principles of Xeno-Feminism (XF): circumnavigation of gatekeepers, repurposing, scalability, and intersectionality: “Through these principles, the master’s tools can dismantle the master’s house”.²⁶ While such post-humanisms go beyond trying to ‘decenter’ agency and strongly renounce the humanistic ontotheology at the heart of the master logic of power, the attempt to bring-about new configurations of relationality/continuity based on alter-ontologies loosens anthropocentrism but does not eliminate it altogether. Hester’s suggestion that the master’s tools can dismantle the master’s house threatens to extend mastery as the driving force of XF’s technological mandate. Ultimately, queer, xeno-feminist, and object-oriented feminisms are in danger of reverting to the ‘standard’ post-humanisms insofar as they do not abandon connectionism (whether strong or weak) prioritizing relation, communication, continuity, and exchangeability, thus operationalizing the age-old standard of defining at least two terms and the differences that connect them. As Michelle Liu reminds us: abolitionism does not equal post-humanism: “These procedures of making equal, calculable and knowable are articulated in processes of converting worlds into the grammars of the human. [...] an end of the human would be nothing less than abolitionist”.²⁷

Rather than recuperating abolitionist and decolonial thought for a connectionist post-humanism, a ‘post-anthropocentric’ perspective on gender is concerned first-and-foremost with thinking about how to incapacitate the conceptual and structural apparatus-of-relation that makes distinction possible in the first place. Post-anthropocentrism, it would seem, requires reckoning with the end of the human. Disconnection and non-relation, in other words, become important concepts to consider when making claims about post-anthropocentrism. Liu stresses “the continuing damage of the human as an invention of the Western philosophical tradition, suggesting that its orders of transcendence, overcoming and resolution proceed in philosophies of relation and difference that lacerate-into-rivenness and vanish-by-equivalency a structural violence that is at once constitutive and irreparable. [...] The human is a transcendental formation cut into Being through procedures of an injurious & enduring philosophical colonization” that correlates “blackness with the non-human and indigeneity with the non-sovereign. Underlying liberal orders of consensus and

25 Behar, “An Introduction to OOF”, 9.

26 Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism. Theory Redux* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 137, 97–8.

27 Michelle Liu, “com-posing abolitionist≠posthumanism: notes on incommensurability, incomputability and incognita syn-aesthetics” (MA diss., Western University, 2020), 8, <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/7016>.

being-in-common are structures-of-relations that constitute a carceral thought-world. [...] Where abolitionist thought elicits an end of a carceral paradigm which the post-human may also inhabit, post-humanism may leave intact the racial, sexual, colonial, ontological underpinning the human”.²⁸ Liu declares that within the terms of this World, the demands of the non-human cannot be met.

In conclusion, what has been called ‘post-anthropocentrism’ ends up getting caught in the backdraft of anthropocentrism, however weakly. Post-anthropocentrism ought to be non-anthropocentric. I have suggested that non-anthropocentrism entails disconnection with human-centrism; without such a move, declarations of so-called ‘post-anthropocentrism’ end-up being caught in the endless differential circuits of humancentrism. Along with disconnection and non-relation, post-anthropocentrism entails a rethinking of incommensurability, particularly the incommensurability of thinking post-anthropocentrically (since speculative post-humanism permits speculating what it is impossible to know anthropocentrically).

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28 Liu, “com-posing abolitionist≠posthumanism”, 5.

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