Insurgent posthumanism*

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abstract

Can we imagine a posthumanism in close connection to alternative political projects and new global social movements? What would it mean to organise *radical left posthumanism?* Posthumanism could offer an alternative perspective to dominant left political fantasies focused on conquering institutional and state power. But coupling radical left politics and posthumanism challenges many of mainstream posthumanism's assumptions. An insurgent posthumanism would contribute to the everyday making of alternative ontologies: the exit of people into a common material world (not just a common humanity); the embodiment – literally – of radical left politics; finally the exodus to a materialist, non-anthropocentric view of history. These engagements are driven by the question of justice as a material, processual and practical issue before its regulation though political representation. Alter-ontology: justice engrained into cells, muscles, limbs, space, things, plants and animals. Justice is before the event of contemporary left politics; it is about moulding alternative forms of life.

1. Radical posthumanism?

Posthumanism challenges the dichotomy between humans and nonhuman others and the analysis of social processes based solely on the grounds of human action and intentionality.[1] But is it possible to reduce the textured relations between humans to the universalising category 'human'? How is it, after so many decades of work trying to question humanist universalisations, are we now confronted with probably the worst of them all: all humans as one, as if there were no divisions and alliances, divergences and

1 This essay will focus solely on posthumanism as a social-semiotic practice that challenges the humanist understanding and split of society and nature. Post-human positions and trans-humanism (the discourse of overcoming the human condition) touch only marginally (or not at all) upon serious debates and critiques of humanism and therefore won't be considered here.

similarities, differences and conflicts between humans? And the problem seems even more acute when we consider the other pole: how is it possible to homogenise nonhumans to the extent of creating an otherness so vast and uniform that even the most dedicated orientalists could not have conjured such an image in their wildest dreams? In fact, the universalism and reductionism of the category 'nonhuman' may be even more dubious than traditional humanist categorisations because it can so easily be presented as a progressive move of including the hitherto expunged nonhuman others into human business.

Can we develop an alternative take on posthumanism? Can we think of alternative forms of organisation that challenge both humanism and the new universalisms of mainstream posthumanism?[2] This essay attempts to rethink possibilities for a posthumanism that would be in close connection with the organisational forms of radical political projects and new global social movements. What would it mean to organise *radical left posthumanism?* But since the left is as clear as the waters of Ganges we will need to question many of its fixations and certainties in order to be able to detect and strengthen non-humanist and posthumanist energies in radical left activism.

It is true that left politics have largely ignored the complexity and unpredictability of the entanglement between a deeply divided society and that of a deeply divided nonhuman world. The principle avenue for social transformation, at least in the main conceptualisations of the political left[3], passes through seizing the centres of social and political power. The dominant motivation for left politics after the revolutions of 1848 (and definitely since 1871) has been how to conquer institutional power and the state. Within this matrix of radical left thinking the posthumanist moment becomes invalidated, subsumed to a strategy focused solely on social power. But here I want to argue that a post-humanist gesture can be found at the heart of processes of left political mobilisations that create transformative institutions and alternatives. This was the case even when such moves were distorted at the end, neutralised or finally appropriated into a form of left politics solely concerned with institutional representation and state power. What such an appropriation conceals is that a significant part of the everyday realities put to work through radical left struggles have always had a strong posthumanist character through their concentration on remaking the mundane material conditions of existence beyond and outside an immediate opposition to the state. In what follows I will try to excavate this posthumanist gesture from the main narratives of radical left political struggles along the following three fault lines: the first is about the exit from an alienated and highly regulated relation to the material, biological and technological realms through the making of a self-organised common world – a move from enclosed and separated worlds governed by labour to the *making of ecological commons*. A second posthumanist move is one that attacks the practice of politics as a matter of ideas

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2   These questions are inspired by critical organisational studies, e.g. De Cock, Fleming and Rehn (2007); Parker (2002); Parker, Fournier and Reedy (2007).

3   I am mainly referring here to the left tradition emerging out of the working class movement, including socialist, communist and autonomist currents. The anarchist left is of course very different in terms of their strategy regarding institutional power but has (as with other leftist thought) been equally plagued by the humanistic ideas I will be discussing in this paper.

and institutions and rehabilitates politics as an embodied and everyday practice – an exit from the representational mind to the *embodiment of politics*. Finally, the third, involves the decentring of the human subject as the main actor of history making. History is a human affair but it is not made (only) by certain groups of humans – a move towards a *post-anthropocentric history*.

2. The state and the appropriation of the posthumanist commons

A first erasure of the posthumanist gesture in the left can be located in the political strategies that evolved after 1871. 'The Socialist Party is the anti-State, not a party.' This is not Lenin. It is Gramsci, in 1918 (quoted in Pozzolini, 1970: 76).[4] There is a fundamental assumption behind the politics of the left up to World War II: the state is a totalising form of power that the socialist party, if it wants to be successful in its political struggle, needs to destroy. A classless society is possible only through the destruction of the state. The mantra of Marx and Engels' refutation of Hegel's idealism of the state is of course well known. But the departure from Hegel was an unfinished story. By keeping the state in the centre of society, even if only as a materialist immanent entity, Marxists opened the possibility for modelling any struggle for the emancipation of labour as passing through it.[5] Every other possibility for radical social transformation disappears from the horizon of radical political action. The name of this path is revolution – which seizes the state in order to organise the move to a stateless society.

But the effects of the revolution that Marx and 40 years later Lenin had envisioned never happened. The non-state stage never came, instead a new incarnation of the state emerged, state socialism. The fact is that radical left revolutions, at least historically, have strengthened the state as totality instead of ending it. But how is this possible?

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4   Gramsci (1918): 'The Socialist Party is fundamentally different from other political parties. It is not even a party in the organic and classical sense of the word. Political parties are spokesmen for social groups, not for a class. It is only in their entirety that they represent a class which has its executive organ in the State. The Socialist Party is the anti-State, not a party. Bourgeois groups want to change the state marginally through their parties, merely by giving it one particular direction rather than another. The Socialist Party wants to remould the State not to improve it. It wants to change all of its values. It wants to re-organise it, founding it upon social forces and ethical principles totally different from the present ones.' (Gramsci quoted in Pozzolini, 1970: 76).

5   The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat was Marx's answer to the political dilemmas between anarcho-syndicalism on the one hand and reformist democratic politics on the other. These dilemmas were widespread already since 1848. After the defeat of the Paris Commune the need was to overcome a fixation with spontaneous revolt and to form a new kind of organisation, the Marxist Parties, with the Social Democratic Party of Germany as one of the first of them. 'The question then arises: What transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence that are analogous to present state functions? This question can only be answered scientifically, and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'state'. Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*' (Marx, 1875, Chapter IV, emphasis in original).

How did the 'science of revolution' get things so wrong? A change of perspective could help to illuminate this paradox: rather than look at the state in terms of the control it engenders we need instead to examine it from the perspective of struggles. In other words, instead of focusing on how the state governs society, we should explore the particular social struggles that the state in the age of revolutions is responding to.

If we investigate the state from the perspective of struggles we find something more important in its resilience than its rough persistence against the revolutions spreading across the globe from 1848 up to the 1950s with the Chinese and the Cuban revolutions. It is its capacity to embody and to guarantee a form of humanist freedom which was equally central to both the formation of the working classes as well as of capital: the freedom to sell one's labour power. The supposed ideological power of the state is considered to be multifarious but at its very core what the state does is to appear as uniting the freedom of labour and the freedom of capital under the banner of humanism. In fact what the state does is to appropriate the freedom of the workers and to make it productive by guaranteeing that the workers can be free and autonomous sellers in the market. This particular freedom and the market system that it brings with it is the bedrock of a humanist understanding of society and of people's existence. In other words, the humanist vision of the state identifies this freedom to being a fully human subject. The state is the main guarantor of humanism which appropriates people's freedom through the labour market. And left politics usually attack the state not because of this humanist appropriation of the workers' freedom but because it is not humanist enough.

But what this humanism in fact hides is that it is a response to a long history of non-humanist struggles that were equally but differently appropriated by the state as well as by formalised left politics. The freedom to choose and to change your employer is not a fake freedom or an ideological liberty, as classical working class Marxism suggests, but a historical compromise designed to integrate the released, disorganised and wandering workforce emerging from the 15th century onwards into a new regime of productivity. In fact what we have here is a mass of workers exiting indentured, forced or slave work and reinvesting their capacities in a new entanglement with materiality. The Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology* (unlike the later Marx of the *Gotha Program*) captures some of these tight interdependences between people's action and the creativity of the natural world and investigates how alienation from the capacity for a self-organised development of people is imposed on them by separating people into classes (as well as genders and races) and alienating them from nature. This is the reason why Marx talks of 'species being', a term, which despite its essentialist connotations, is as close as one can get to a radical understanding of a form of self-instituted collective emancipation in which cooperation and interaction among people and between them and the environment is crucial (Dyer-Witheford, 2006).

The singularities that composed the escaping, wandering mob were very far from the humanist individual emerging at the same moment across Europe and much closer to a non-humanist pleb. It is exactly these despised and dangerous non-humanist collectivities that defined the core of radical struggles for emancipation (even long before they could be called left). This non-humanist gesture is literally a displacement of the previous regime of feudal and indentured labour into the world of matter and of

multiple collectives between other people and nature's forces. This exit from the feudal labour regime into a creative relation with matter gives rise to new shared common worlds. It is only the humanist ideal of 'Man mastering nature' that destroyed these diverse ways of relating to others and to nature – as Merchant (1990) and Starhawk (1982) remind us. So, many of the scattered, disorganised, ephemeral, insurgent movements of people exiting feudal labour in so many different locales and geographies, continents and seas were *not* to enter into the capitalist humanist regime of the labour market but to escape into a journey that allowed them to create common worlds. Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the witch* (2004), Yann Moulier Boutang's *De l'esclavage au salariat* (1998), Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The many-headed hydra* (2000), Marcus Rediker's *Between the devil and the deep blue sea* (1987), A.L. Beier's *Masterless men* (1985), Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden's *Free and unfree labour* (1997), Robert Steinfeld's *Coercion, contract, and free labor in the nineteenth century* (2001), all – among many others of course – describe various incidents and occasions, dispersed in historical time and geography, in which new modalities of labour and new self-organised relations between escaping people and land, plants and animals gave birth to forms of exit from oppression and to the making of different social-material relations of liberty (for a further discussion of these texts see Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos, 2008, Section II).[6] These are moments of making a common non-proprietary world, the making of the commons, 'commoning' as Linebaugh (2008) calls it, the continuation of life through 'commoning' the immediate sociality and materiality of everyday existence. This is a truly non-humanist flight into a world where the primary condition of existence is the immersion into the worlds you inhabit and share with other humans and non-humans.[7] This is not only the social commons, it is a worldly commons, an ecological commons. And then this world is collective, shared by definition, a culture mixed with nature, actual *naturecultures*, a material order that facilitates the sharing of different commons. It is only after that the question of social organisation is asked. And this question is about labour, how should work be organised in order to maintain the commons?

Thus, just before the historical moment of the emergence of the modern left and of humanism we could say that the first *radical left non-humanist moment* is the moment of making justice and achieving freedom through a flight to the self-organised world of the commons, the worldly commons, the ecological commons – an ecological world which of course existed long before this flight from the feudal order. It is this form of

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6 My position here is directly connected to Nick Dyer-Witheford's understanding of the commons (http://commonism.wordpress.com/). It also corresponds to Stefano Harney's approach to the history of living labour and its capitalist capture (Harney, 2006; 2008). See also the work of Massimo de Angelis (2007).

7 Peter Linebaugh: 'So common rights differ from human rights. First, common rights are embedded in a particular ecology with its local husbandry. For commoners, the expression "law of the land" from chapter 39 [of the Magna Carta] does not refer to the will of the sovereign. Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. You might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state. Magna Carta does not list rights, it grants perpetuities. It goes deep into human history' (Linebaugh, 2008: 44-45).

escaping into a non-humanist nature-cultural and socio-material regime that needed to be recaptured and was in fact recaptured into a new order of organisation that became formed into capitalist social relations. The key function of wage labour is not first and foremost to oppress or control people's productive capacities but to manage worker's surplus of non-humanist freedom. Wage labour was the device which made capitalist social organisation possible and it was a device which was aiming at controlling the liberties' proliferation in the eco-commons. The long process of the historical formation of capitalist relations of production relied on the long process of the transformation of commoning to wage labour. 'Labour as dressage': discipline, taming, performance lies in the heart of the process of transforming work through protestant humanism to the centre of the markets and busy-ness (for a critical analysis see the inspiring work of Carter and Jackson, 2005; Jackson and Carter, 1998). Thus, capitalist social relations transform the worker's non-humanist liberty of 'commoning', of making eco-commons, into a fixed and stable labour market that operates through enclosing labour into individual performance, efficiency, precision and the ethics of the humanist subject.

But this description of the rise and fall of non-humanist struggles is not yet the whole story for what we understand left politics today. Yann Moulier Boutang in his book *De l'esclavage au salariat* (1998) highlights that there is absolutely no historical necessity to move to the capitalist form of wage relations: patronage, forced labour, different forms of serfdom, indenture, plantation slavery all existed up to the 19th and 20th century and even until today (for an extended discussion of these examples see Papadopoulos et al., 2008). If one thinks from the perspective of the capitalist state, there is absolutely no necessity to change the state in its feudal form. The necessity for transformation happened because of the struggles of the working classes and most importantly the slaves[8] escaping into new forms of non-humanist liberty: this form of liberty is a move to a tighter, more intimate relation between human action and material force. The move from forced or bonded labour to *free* practice is a step in achieving more freedom to enter into more immediate entanglements with material processes. It is people reclaiming their relation to the material world – it is this commoning of the world, not only the social world, but the world as such – that becomes the revolutionary drive of the transformation to capitalism. Struggles come before the formation of power. However elusive and neglected they are, it is these non-humanist struggles that drive history-making on the ground. And they drive it by creating new possibilities that cannot be ignored. Capitalist power reforms as a response to these non-humanist struggles by slowly moving to a form of production that appropriates most of these liberties but preserving a small part of them: this small part is that work can no longer be regulated through non-economic violence but only by contractual means. That means that labour becomes free labour, i.e. the freedom to choose your employer. Thus,

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8   'Haiti, the island that produced half the sugar in the world, initiated a decolonization that lasted two centuries, got rid of the whites, and abolished the slave economy. Between 1791 and 1796, it was done: Toussaint L'Ouverture defeated Napoleon Bonaparte. The plantation economy was undoubtedly efficient; the problem was that it was unstable. If capitalism abandoned slavery as a strategic perspective, it is because its own existence was menaced by the instability of the market that it put into place: if there had not been the Jamaican insurrection of 1833, the English Parliament would never have abolished slavery. The struggles of the slaves in the two centuries of modern slavery are worth ten times more than the struggles of the working class: they were more violent, more virulent, more destabilizing than the workers movement' (Moulier Boutang, 2001: 228-229).

'striving for freedom' is the fundamental element of the capitalist labour relation if it is to succeed in appropriating and canalising the non-humanist liberties of the eco-commons. The freedom to choose your employer becomes so important for capitalist labour that it simultaneously becomes the main focus of control and coercion.

It is exactly this kind of control of workers' and slaves' exit that the modern wage labour embodies and engenders.[9] I read this as the moment of the formation of control against the unfolding of the slaves' and workers' cultures of freedom established on a non-humanist relation to their own bodies, tools, the environment, physical space, animals and plants. The capitalist state is neither a superstructure nor ideology nor a strict tool of domination. It is a form of everyday control which simultaneously guarantees the freedom of employees to sell their labour power but translates this freedom into capitalist profit. This schizophrenic mix of freedom and exploitation are the two most crucial ingredients for the sentiment which is still dominating our lives in Global North-Atlantic societies. The capitalist state is an organic mould of society and materiality, it makes exploitation out of freedom without falling as far back as to cancel freedom itself completely. And it does not even try to mask it. It just does that. It is not mere ideology or illusion that there exists a shared interest in the way the state organises society. Out of relative non-humanist freedom, the capitalist state forges a relative humanist unfreedom.

Any attempt to overcome this situation by eliminating this freedom, however relative and limited it might be, is doomed to fail. And it is doomed to fail not because it will be opposed by capital but because in the long run it will be not supported by labour. This is what happened with most of the revolutions since 1871. The progress which was achieved after seizing power, soon transformed into a form of control that attempted to diminish even this minimal part of workers' freedom to sell their power which even capital relations try to preserve. 'The so-called socialist societies' became 'backward capitalist societies' (Negri, 2005: 179). The fidelity to the coming society evaporated into seizing state power in order to impose conditions for increasing the freedom of labour and for eliminating the freedom of capital. But what happened in reality was that by making the totality of the state both the main target and simultaneously the path for social transformation and radical change, the revolutions ended up reinforcing the logic of the state rather than supporting a radical non-humanist extension of the workers' freedom. Instead of betraying the state and its order, the revolutions, one after the other, ended up betraying the workers. And while this was happening, the capitalist state kept reorganising itself in response to the threat of the worker's cultures of freedom. As Wallerstein says, 'the revolutions never worked the way their proponents hoped or the way their opponents feared' (Wallerstein, 1998: 13).

9　'As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital' (Engels, 1886, Chapter IX).

3. The event and the appropriation of posthumanist embodiment

What the revolutions could not establish was achieved in a series of uprisings and social movements erupting across the globe since the 1960s (Connery, 2005). Common to these is the betrayal of a relative stable form of regulation manifesting after World War II. In a moment when the 'withering away of the state' seems almost impossible, new social movements, social mobilisations and the cultural uprisings after the 1960s challenged the conditions of the organisation of the state in a deep and radical way.

Only ten to fifteen years after referring to the socialist party as the 'anti-state', Gramsci challenged the fidelity to the strategy which focused on the state as the main target to change existing social relations. Such a strategy would be just a defensive and responsive action to existing and congealed relations of power, something which would be a disastrous guide for achieving the hegemony that could facilitate radical social transformation. Gramsci's work on seeing the state as a balance of forces which is not only sustained through economic power and class antagonism but also through cultural relations was an important example of a conceptualisation of the state that conceives it as an amalgam of singularities and subjectivities. This corresponds to a new moment of non-humanist struggles – which can now be called *posthumanist* as they come long after the manifestation of humanism: embodied subjectivities become the site for the making of a politics as a means of radically challenging an existing balance of power.

The centrality of embodied subjectivity for politics manifests in the centrality that the human body achieves as a site of control in humanist culture: co-option and training, subjugation and usefulness are inseparable for the operation of the modern political rationalities of state government. For Foucault (2004a; 2004b), in his later lectures, there is no external relation between the modern state and the subject, government is what connects practices of the body and practices of domination. The capitalist state is understood as a totalising form of power only because it individualises its members and is increasingly fragmented. Following but also criticising Foucault, Nicos Poulantzas (1978) highlights how the modern state evolves as a permanent but unstable balance of compromises between different social subjectivities and classes. The state does not have the *resolution* of social conflicts – by absorbing and terminating them – as its ultimate aim. Rather, it attempts to regulate and ultimately control conflicts, by developing multiple ways to *include* subaltern social subjectivities and classes and therefore to claim itself as a representing body. This form of government emerges after the 1960s. And it emerges as a response to the new social movements' mobilisations and uprisings which forced the capitalist state to reorganise itself. What the so called new social movements in fact did is to betray both, the total state of the previous period as well as the orthodox left revolutionary practices (described in the previous section) which were trying to respond to this total state.

The struggles of the new social movements were not solely organised around and against the state and its institutions. Again, the opposite is the case: subversion is performed by social actors who negotiate their embeddedness in state power under the signature of a posthumanist escape, not under the imperative of inclusion. They escape into the reorganisation of embodied ways of existing and relating, mutating the

meanings of what social and human relationality means, they escape into novel embodied material practices which put their subjectivities at the forefront of doing politics (feminist movements, environmental movements, anti-racist movements, cultural mobilisations are some of the most important in this regard). The rise of neoliberalism is how the state attempted to capture these escaping and subversive subjectivities. Luhmann's (1995) vision of 'non-society' is the most brilliant and apt description of the workings and intricate relationalities dwelling in the social worlds emerging in these conditions.[10] The social and material space as fragmented, discontinuous, undecided, interconnected, relational: as network. The imagination of neoliberalism and of transnational sovereignty is dominated by one banal picture: nodes and lines, no beginning or end. You can constantly withdraw or add new nodes. Some of them are more powerful than others and manage a certain region of the network. A thinker like Bruno Latour appears (2005) as the prototypical intellectual of the new networked and plural 'assembling' state through his concerned crusade against the structuralist totalitarian state of the Marxist orthodoxy.

The crucial moment here is that the posthumanist exodus to an embodied form of politics was gradually appropriated into the networked neoliberal function of society. And with it much of the left retreated to a new way of understanding social transformation: it is no longer the revolution against the state that dominates the left's imagination but a fidelity to the event to come which will overcome the new plural networked capitalism. Alain Badiou seems to express this kind of thought in an exemplary manner. In his magnificent book *Metapolitics* he says that every real politics can be first and foremost evaluated on what it says about the state. A central idea to Badiou's ontology is 'that what the State strives to foreclose through its power of counting is the void of the situation, while the event always reveals it' (Badiou, 2005: 119).[11] Here again freedom is derived from the situation of control, more specifically from its absent centre, the void which is a structuring constituted power but cannot be represented within it. The very possibility of the event, as conceived by Badiou, relies on that: the fidelity to something which eludes the logic of the situation but as such comes to oppose it. This seems to capture a crucial turn in developing the new metaphysics of broad currents of the left in the neoliberal transnational networked state: a duality of the plural state versus the event. The event is a continuation of the model of revolution which dominated left politics up to the 1960s revived in a new incarnation

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10 For an extended discussion of this see Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008, chapter 2 and 3) and Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006).

11 As Peter Hallward writes: 'Over the course of the last forty years Badiou has never compromised on his essential revolutionary commitment, but the development of his philosophy suggests a qualification of its expectations. In his early work the eruption of inconsistency (in the form of mass insurrection) figured as an evanescent but directly historical force, and the project to make the state "wither away" had a literal and immediate objective. In *Being and Event* he developed an ontology which accepted the state as an irreducible dimension of being itself: consistency is imposed at both the structural and "meta-structural" levels of a situation, and a truth evades but cannot eliminate the authority of the state. In *Logics of Worlds* he has gone a little further still, by admitting that the very process of being's appearing ensures that it must always appear as consistent. The upshot is that "inappearance" comes to serve as a de facto criterion of commitment and truth. In a world structured by compromise and betrayal, Badiou's motto has in effect become: trust only in what you cannot see' (Hallward, 2008: 120-121).

which puts again the primacy on state power and announces the end of the posthumanist exit to an immediate ordinary embodiment of politics.

Faithful to the left's obsession of revealing the chosen radical historical subject in each particular period and, simultaneously, succumbing to the weight of the social and political realities of networked neoliberal capitalism that defies the existence of any such historical subject, much of the contemporary left (especially the academic left) sees in the event the possibility of sustaining a new radical vision of change after the demise of revolution. The difference between revolution and the event is one which pertains to time. Revolutions are made. Events need to be designated in retrospective, they exist as such in the past, they come after the fact. Only once they happen can one designate them as events. If we privilege their role for social change we do so at the expense of considering the potentia of the continuous experience in the present that is made of people's embodied everyday practices (Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2006): the practices employed to navigate daily life, to sustain relations, to remake the materialities of our bodies, all those practices which are at the heart of social and material transformation long before we are able to name them as such. The event is retroactive, the power of distinction between what is and what is not post hoc. At the end it carries the sadness and fear to designate something as an event because it has not happened yet. A sadness resulting from the inertia induced by fear of making the wrong choice or even more a fear which is the outcome of thinking in terms of making or not making choices. And with Spinoza we know: the mob inspires fear when it acts, but it only does that if it is unafraid; the mob is terrifying if it acts, and it acts if it is unafraid and therefore it has to be tamed by the State and Religion with sad passions (1996, IV.54). Derrida (1992) attacked this logic of choice by assuming that undecidability is a permanent ingredient of any decision; the final undecidability of any process of making and actualization is not the ground of 'sad passions' but the necessity of *practice*. From a very different and much more radical posthumanist feminist perspective we could say with Starhawk (2002) that practice is not about retroactive choice but about the 'power to act with' in the remaking and reclaiming of the material realities of life. Actualisation exists because 'the ghost of the undecidable' (Derrida, 1992: 24) dwells in every step, in every practice, in every situation. There is no promise, no guarantees, no fidelity. Expecting the event we lose touch with present, apparently innocuous and imperceptible, everyday transformation.

Probably the best remedy against the sad passions is to refuse repeating endlessly the fidelity to the coming event, to the new truth or to the new historical subject to come. But the path is not a fidelity to the present, but joy of embodying and betraying it. This is the joy of the second posthumanist moment of the left, which was absorbed and effaced in the intricacies of the eventful networked cultures of transnational neoliberal capitalism. Instead of the pretentious and concerned waiting for the event one could think with Bakhtin about a form of joy which defies seriousness and makes truth erupt out of the present. The joy of bringing together and assembling a whole cosmos around everyday radical material practices which are events that might never be named as such (Bakhtin, 1984: 285; see also 94ff.). In the same way that Bakhtin is searching in Rabelais' grotesque images of the lower stratum of the body (food, drink, urination, defecation, sexual life) for the forces that escape ecclesiastical and political censorship and coercion, I am searching in the posthumanist embodiment of politics – the joy of

changing bodily practices and fusing with new ingredients and processes in this world –
for the forces that defy both the cognitivist left fixation with events and historical
subjects to come as well as the circulation of class privileges in the aseptic circuits of
contemporary networked neoliberal capitalism. The laughter and joy of those who
partake in the world through remaking their embodied existences defy seriousness,
disperse fear, liberate the word and reveal a truth that escapes the injustices of the
present. This is a cosmic constellation, not an individual act. It is in this feast of eating,
drinking, defecating and having sex that the body becomes posthuman, that it retraces
within itself and stresses elements common to the entire cosmos, as Bakhtin says:
common to the earth, sea, air, fire and all the cosmic matter and manifestations
(Bakhtin, 1984: 318; see also 335ff.). The practice of alternative material embodiments
is the heart of the erased second posthumanist gesture of the left, which is nevertheless
inscribed into our imagination of radical social change: with Anzaldúa (and I'm
thinking here also of Jose Martí and Oswald de Andrade and many others) I see how
radical change passes through the posthumanist transformation of the materiality and
social relationality of the body when she says that 'she is willing to share, to make
herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of
safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes *nahual*, able to transform
herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person' (Anzaldúa, 1999: 104). Anzaldua is
non-humanist in a very immediate sense. The way in which she refers to becoming
coyote is not the romantic vision of joining nature nor the becoming-animal of joining
the idealised pack (such as Deleuze and Guattari's wolf pack). Anzaldua's becoming
coyote is rather ethopoietic: the boundary crossing of her coyote existence is that of an
everyday transformation of ethos required by living as an 'inappropriate' body in either
sides of a border (Mexico/USA) – a chicana lesbian – reclaiming her otherness as an
embodied strength that refuses to be appropriated. It is also required in order to account
for all the changes that so many fellow people undergo as they cross the Mexican/US
borders to live a clandestine life below the radar of surveillance (Papadopoulos and
Tsianos, 2007). This embodied politics explored by a feminist, queer, migrant
minoritarian body betray representation – rather than claim inclusion by the state – and
challenge left identity politics by undermining its fundamental ground: humanism.

4. Post-anthropocentric history: Worlding justice

The question is then: how can we think posthumanism and radical left politics outside
of mainstream posthumanism as well as outside dominant left traditions that focus
solely on the obtaining of social power? How can left politics become more
posthumanist (again) and how can posthumanism become more left again? In all
previous incarnations of radical posthumanist left politics I described a picture which is
not articulated through the fidelity to a situation which supersedes the state but through
betraying the political thinking and everyday action regulated by the state. This is
because the constituent force of left politics seems to be vanishing and the dialectic of
constituent and constitutive power becomes the very ground on which control operates
today. The constant focus on the state, which has exhausted the radical political
potentials, leaves radical left politics in a space of powerlessness and simultaneously in
a space of possibility. What then is radical left politics when it is not an antithetical
subjectivity? Perhaps we can start with a speculation: the space of possibility for radical

left politics today lies once again in a posthumanist gesture which is about making alternative forms of life.

I borrow the term *forms of life* from Langdon Winner (1986, especially Ch. 1), a term which Winner traces back to Wittgenstein as well as to Marx. In forms of life we encounter a re-weaving of the social and the material through the insertion of practices and technologies. But much can be said about this idea of insertion. A practice, a technical device is not just applied or used. It does not just enter into an existing organisation of life. Rather a form of life is remade through it; a practice, a set of practices, a device, a new form of relationality becomes part of a given form of life by changing it. There are no users, no tools, or disconnected actions, no individual actors (human or non human), no subjects-objects. There are just forms of life which set up the material constraints of what we are. Wittgenstein (1958: 226): 'What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could *say – forms of life.*' Acting within such forms of life is the possibility for instigating justice in conditions where its deferral is promoted by both state power as well as much of the contemporary left. Justice in this sense is the making of alternative forms of life – wherever this can happen, whenever this is possible. Every social context, every material arrangement, every moment has enough space for conflicting forms of life: alter-ontologies. There are no closed spaces, there are no lost spaces. Re-appropriation and reclaiming is the practice of liberating closed terrain. It is a practice which happens on the ground, through a form of politics which is beyond the existing coordinates of the representational politics of the left. And this making of alter-ontologies, that is the acting within alternative forms of life, points again towards a posthumanist gesture, perhaps one which is more radical and deeply transformative than all the previous ones.

It is crucial here that these alter-ontologies are primarily engaging with matter, that they practise the politics of matter. This is probably the most profound dislocation of left politics that posthumanism has affected, a post-anthropocentric politics. It is a moment which has been so aptly described in recent attempts to discuss posthumanism as the co-construction of life with other species and technical apparatuses (Badmington, 2004; Haraway, 2007; Wolfe, 2010). But there is not much in these studies about politics. Although some kind of critical politics is silently presupposed it is never explicitly discussed. What are the repercussions of these post-anthropocentric world-making practices for left politics? A post-anthropocentric ecological view of history is the ability to transform the material conditions of existence in such a way that it cannot be neglected or bypassed. I want to think here of the making of lively ecologies as a form of material transformation that instigates justice as an immediate, lived, worldly experience. I want to think of the ethical coordinates of radical action that can set posthumanist left politics in motion.

Walter Benjamin's (1996) *Critique of Violence* opens possibilities for answering these questions. Benjamin explores the possibility of action which can open political spaces outside of the eternal cycle of law making (constituent) and law preserving (constituted) power. There is a form of power/violence, the German word for both is *Gewalt*[12] – Benjamin uses various terms to describe this form of Gewalt: revolutionary, pure or

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12 For a discussion of the ambiguity of the term *Gewalt* see Balibar (2009).

divine – which is neither law-making nor law-preserving and which, through its pure existence, addresses justice. He asserts that Gewalt, 'when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law' (Benjamin, 1996: 239). The reason for this is that this kind of Gewalt can 'modify legal conditions' (Benjamin, 1996: 240), that is, it can be a form of Gewalt which breaks the monopoly of law over power and violence itself. When Gewalt is *outside* the law it is a form of Gewalt which is induced in a situation rather than being given in it. Gewalt which is given in a situation is the Gewalt which the law can exercise, and this form of Gewalt appears as fate (Benjamin, 1996: 242). The Gewalt of the law is always reinstituting a political order that is different from the previous one but equally coercive: the Gewalt of the law appears as fate, as cyclical history, as inescapable. The new form of Gewalt that Benjamin tries to introduce is non-fate. '[P]ure unmediated' Gewalt (Benjamin, 1996: 249) gets rid of the narrow sighted 'dialectical rising and falling in the lawmaking and law-preserving' forms of Gewalt (Benjamin, 1996: 251), it overthrows law altogether. It is within this new space of Gewalt that a 'new historical epoch is founded' (Benjamin, 1996: 252).

How can we populate this space, fill it with acts of justice before and independent of the law of the state? I am not talking here of clichés such as taking justice in our hands, nor of blank apologies of violence, but of possibilities for creating spaces of polite engagements and respect that are not dominated by an anthropocentric humanistic view that continuously restores a new coercive form of law after the other. It is not a coincidence that I turned earlier to Bakhtin to evoke the space where justice can be enacted: the ordinary materiality of existence which Bakhtin describes so wonderfully in *Rabelais*. In Benjamin this is further developed: the realisation of this new form of Gewalt outside of the law is the space of the ordinary, or better it is a space which starts from the materiality of the ordinary. I want to link Benjamin's 'other type of Gewalt' to the ordinary, to see how and if radical left politics can be grounded in the radical making of alternative forms of life and everyday materialities which exist outside the law.

Against the perspective that sees radical left politics as targeting the exceptionality of law, social power and the state, I find with Benjamin that the only possibility to break the cyclical historical time and the anthropocentric passing of history is by mobilising this other type of Gewalt. That is, to enact justice *independently* of the existing law. Benjamin exemplifies this in his example of the general strike: the general strike is so unthinkable from the perspective of the law because it destroys the ordinary life of society since the workers exit from the role which is assigned to them by the law. They become a *non-subject*. And they do this immediately, now: the general strike as a form of divine and revolutionary Gewalt is ordinary and exists now, in der 'Jetztzeit'.[13] I'm not interested here in the general strike as such. I don't even want to use it as an example or to think of its political applicability and meaning today. Rather, what interests me here is how Benjamin introduces a crucial dimension for understanding justice which has not only to do with its spatiality but with is temporality. Given that justice is never here, it is something of another world to come, Benjamin sees divine

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13 For an extended discussion of the meaning of the proletarian general strike in Benjamin see Tomba (2009, 139ff.).

violence as the termination of deferral. Rolland Munro's work (2004) provides us with an important insight in the temporality of justice: justice is now, justice is against deferral, the space of deferral is the space of law, the space of deferral is the space of managerialism. Benjamin's divine Gewalt is that which dismantles the very possibility of law which is the deferral of justice. It is the moment where something which is just, happens just now. And paradoxically this is the end of Gewalt and of individual violence. The more justice is ordinary and happens just now, the more non-violent and collective it is. The temporal and spatial qualifications of divine Gewalt describe a form of justice which I want to foreground here as the main possibility for radical left politics today, its immediateness. When justice is ordinary and now it happens without mediators (Benjamin, 1996: 247), a justice without intermediaries; it is a justice which operates without diplomats, referees, experts, translators (so common in contemporary social theory, see for example Latour, 2004; Stengers, 2005). Divine violence, *immediate* justice, the moment when mediation stops. 'Just-ice takes places in the time of the stop', as Munro (2004: 64) says.

This form of radical political action is a form of processual and material justice which rather than being concerned with pragmatic or normative issues is concerned with altering the material conditions of existence starting from positions marked by asymmetry and injustice: thick justice. Let's turn 'thick description' (Geertz, 1993) upside down: thickness for Geertz is semantic, let's look for material thickness instead; practice for Geertz is text, but what about action as matter.[14] Thick justice is the beating heart of radical posthumanist left politics. This could offer an alternative view on what many contemporary social theorists and social scientists call ontological politics, cosmopolitics and action in actor networks (Latour, 1987; Law and Hassard, 1999; Stengers, 2005). In all these approaches symmetry is required in order to grasp how the human and nonhuman constitution operate together and how they produce new mixed hybrid forms of existence and associations with various elements of a network. Instead of clear cut classifications and orderings of beings these positions multiply the possibilities of how beings can connect to each other. This is of course a legitimate perspective which responds to either traditional humanists who attempt to defend the exceptionality of humans or to deep ecologists who put the emphasis on the independence of nature and its primacy of value. So far so good. But this position cannot help much if we accept that these clear-cut distinctions between the cultural and the natural do not exist. It is even more limited if you take hybridity not as something which must be defended or argued for, but as something which is a given and a starting point for action. The real question facing posthumanist left politics is how to move beyond anthropocentrism and humanism by maintaining a commitment to the problem of justice that pervades socio-technical assemblages. The third dimension of posthumanism I am describing here is post-anthropocentric because *we* have indeed never been human; but we have never been human not because we have never been modern but because 'we' have never been *we* and 'they' (the nonhumans) have never been *they*. The post-anthropocentric dimension of posthumanist left politics is neither about developing an ecological egalitarianism that considers the value of all nonhuman

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14 See for example how this transition takes places in Haraway's work: from the thick descriptions of representation in *Primate Visions* (see Haraway, 1992, especially Ch. 3) to the thick inter-species traffic of matter and meaning (Haraway, 2007).

beings as equal[15], nor about creating the grounds for the articulation of constantly novel connections and concerns between us and them (see Puig de la Bellacasa, forthcoming). Rather, it is about making alliances and engaging in practices that restore justice in the immediate ecologies which *certain* humans and *certain* nonhumans are inhabiting in deeply asymmetrical ways.

Such a move is only possible if there is an evacuation of the universalising categories human/non-human. It is not a symmetrical perspective that is needed here in order to multiply their possible connections, but rather a commitment to start from the asymmetrical registers that *certain* humans and *certain* non-humans occupy in an assemblage. This is not an asymmetry between human and non-human actors in an assemblage, it is an asymmetry that in some cases will start from the position of certain humans rather than others, in other cases from certain non-humans rather than other non-human beings. It is a generalized asymmetry that attempts to put the emphasis on those positions which address in the best possible way the question of justice as a means of promoting direct interventions in an existing socio-technical assemblage. These interventions are about building alternative forms of life and connecting them together into shared commons. An association of such forms of life into common spaces – alter-ontologies is the term used to describe the eco-commons emerging today – can ultimately *account for* the multiplicity of hybrid life forms that contemporary technoscience and global capitalist production unleash. It is about acting within and against these conditions in order to fulfil the responsibilities that the world-market announces but cannot complete. The question for alter-ontologies is then the question Marx asks in the Manuscripts of *1844 Manuscripts* mentioned in the beginning of this paper: who controls collective self-transformation (Dyer-Witheford, 2006)? How can we develop alternative hybrid forms of life that have as their effect the *worlding* of justice? Chris Connery, Rob Wilson and the work of Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California in Santa Cruz fashioned this term to show the many divergent trajectories and speeds that criss-cross globalisation. The worlding project is about enacting an opening in our thinking and practice to other values, ideas and ways of being (Wilson and Connery, 2005). I want to take this seriously and to read worlding not only as an opening to other social ways of being, but to other material processes as well. What does it mean *to world* justice today if not to enact openings, to build associations, to craft common, alternative forms of life? Worlding justice is a form of posthumanism which evolves out of the long tradition of the left by escaping its fatal obsessions with social power, the state and the event to come, and simultaneously avoids the happy and hopeless posthumanism that is content with counting and recounting the connections between humans and nonhumans. This is insurgent posthumanism.

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15 For an important critique of this type of inclusive egalitarianism, see Rancière (1998). See also Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006, chapter 6).

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