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Posthuman Aesthetics.
Perception and Relationality, Mapping the Field
Through the Lens of Critical Posthumanism

> *If resemblance haunts the work of art, it is because sensation refers only to its material: it is the percept or affect of the material itself, the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone.*
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> Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 166

Introduction

The expanding philosophical enquiries of critical posthumanism offer the tools to overcome the epistemological limits of humanism. The false separation of culture from nature, as well as other key dualisms that are rooted in the humanist tradition – subject-object, organism-environment, and internal-external – have been disputed, and their foundations questioned. These dichotomies expose the limits of an epistemology of domination over otherness. In particular, from a humanist standpoint, non-human alterities end up occupying an ancillary ontological position with regard to the human-animal – the gravitational centre and measure of all things[1]. Humanist epistemologies exclude non-human alterities, for instance conceiving of culture as strictly a domain of the human or anthropogenesis as an autarkic and self-referential loop in which the differential ontological status of non-human others is negated (Pansera 2001).

This article follows and develops insights that were first presented in September 2018 at a workshop entitled "The Work of Art in Post-Human Times", to which one of the authors contributed as part of the Post Human Studies research group, and was held at John Cabot University, in Rome. This article stems from a specific question or, perhaps more accurately, the answer to a question, which we have put to ourselves, namely: Can there

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[1] More specifically, for the white, urbanised, heterosexual man as suggested by cultural posthumanism (e.g. Braidotti 2013).

exist something that might be – even if roughly – defined as posthuman aesthetics? Our answer has been immediately negative: posthuman aesthetics cannot transcend artistic forms; it cannot reify itself into something that is well defined and that defines these same artistic manifestations. We both agreed that a definition derived from the application of a universal posthuman thinking to the aesthetic realm could never prevail.

Thus, far from offering such an impossible definition, we want to think about "a" posthuman aesthetics; that is, a field of forces that can be mapped via the conceptual tools forged by posthuman critique. We are aware of the fact that the same field of aesthetics needs to be rethought by following such critical accounts. Aesthetics has to be reconsidered, in line with posthuman thought, strongly rebutting ideas that match it with a modernist notion of beauty, or conceiving art as an ideal form that departs from, and ends with, an anthropocentric, mono-directional creative process – a creative act that reinforces the superiority of the human-animal in face of his/her non-human animal and inhuman surroundings. Therefore, our main scope is to propose a possible map of a posthuman aesthetics that is capable, via two interrelated axes (perception and relationality), of grasping the key modalities through which the inhumanity of matter can be reconsidered as an active participant in the artistic, creative process. Rather than the arrogance of offering an understanding or definition of posthuman aesthetics, our objective is to set the coordinates for a localised aesthetics that can encounter ethics following the Guattarian tradition (Guattari 1995), as well as going beyond, becoming onto-epistem-ological (Barad 2007), and fostering the performativity of artistic practices and their ecological constitution.

First, we will briefly discuss two recent examples that allow entry into art field from a posthuman standpoint. However, we are not offering a critique of such artworks; rather, our initial aim is to signal the emergence of a trend, a tendency that we term a humanist aesthetics of the posthuman. In order to indicate such a recurring trope, we focus on the problem of mirroring – that holding a representational core seems to reinforce, rather than abandon, the humanist perspective. Secondly, we will sketch out our map for a posthuman aesthetics by working with diffraction, following a path opened by the work of Donna Haraway (1992) and subsequently continued by Karen Barad (2007). In the central section of the article, we posit our two main axes of analysis: one of relationality, and one of perception. Instead of thinking of them separately, we consider them as overlapping, and our aim is to advance the understanding of the main notions sustaining them towards the ideas of scalar relationality and an intensive (inhuman, or beyond human) perception. For this reason, our argument will touch upon the modes through which the field of aesthetics, according to Guattari (1995), followed the autonomisation of value creation that shaped the rise of modernity, separating itself from the immanent unfolding of societal

complexity. Finally, our proposal will apply its main analytical tools to two further cases that, from two very far distant temporalities, show the intimate and embodied encounters between human-animals and nonhuman materialities that characterise a posthuman aesthetics.

Mirroring sameness, reinforcing ethical and ontological primacy: The staged signals of an aesthetics of the posthuman

For viewers of the Italian public of the state television (RAI) channel, 2019 began with the second series of a show presented by one of the nation's leading dancers. *Danza con me* (Dance with me) is an entertainment programme presented by the Italian danseur Roberto Bolle, staging various ballets in which he either dances alone, or is accompanied by other prominent national and international artists. In particular, this second edition of the dance show gained interest and popularity because of a double step performance danced by Bolle with a robotic machine: a one-and-a-half-ton arm usually employed in industrial manufacturing processes (Rai 2019).

The partnering dance is thus a duet between a human-animal – the Italian dancer – and a complex piece of technology – the programmable, mechanical arm. The artistic performance pivots around the recognition by the former of the mechanical agency of the latter. To begin, Bolle approaches the robot arm as a coat racket, hanging up his jacket. However, when the robotic arm discloses its capacity to (re)act by throwing the jacket to the floor, the act of recognition begins, occupying the centre of the stage. The act proceeds through simple gestures of touch and movement, back and forth between the robotic arm and the danseur. Recognition then shifts from the dancer to the audience, following a sequence that shows the point of view of the robot, which holds a camera at the end of its rotating hook. The camera displays the surprised facial expression of the dancer, offering it beyond a black and white, hyper-mediated interface, and simultaneously induces and "incepts" into the public the idea of the recognition of the technological alterity of the robotic arm.

Another interesting case comes from one of most debated trends in contemporary art. In 2018, so-called "algorithmic art", made its market debut on the global stage of auction houses. In November of that year, Christie's sold at auction a printed on canvas artwork of the Parisian collective Obvious, entitled *Edmond de Belamy* (2018). The piece sold for $432,500. The "paining", a male portrait, was created using generative adversarial networks (GAN), a class of artificial intelligence algorithms that work via the interaction of two neural networks in which the second discriminates candidates generated by the first, as such training from an initial data set. The author-

ship of the artwork was attributed to the algorithm, part of its code providing the artist's signature in the bottom right-hand corner of the print[2].

According to Obvious and the auction curator at Christie's, *Edmond de Belamy* is the first work of art autonomously created by a machine as a result of its own creative agency, making it an original product of the algorithm rather than of any human mind that instructed it (Christie's 2018). This rhetoric, subtly marked by transhumanist suggestions, seems to characterise the communicative strategy of the French collective. Here, the spectacularisation of the human-non-human relation is built by glorifying human-machine, biotic-abiotic, and mind-algorithm dichotomies. The exaltation works in the light of a supposed, extraordinary ontological innovation and revolution in which, from now on, a technological system is, and will be, able to emulate human behaviour, actively and autonomously contributing to the maximisation of a creative potential that, until now, has been the exclusive preserve of man.

Without entering into too much detail, the two cases – even though with evident differences dictated by the diverse contexts of their staging – signal the surfacing of a posthuman trope within the contemporary art field. In the first case, the posthuman motif reaches a national broadcast channel, touching upon televisual culture, probably for the first time in Italian transmissions. Whilst the second, attempting to figuratively challenge human-centred forms of authorship, reaches a global art market. Both cases involve the relationality between humans and non-humans – human-animals and technological machines – and are fully charged by an aesthetics of reciprocal recognition. However, as we will argue, a posthuman aesthetics cannot find resolution in recognition: the already introduced limits of humanist epistemologies cannot be overcome by a reflection on otherness that comes from, and reinforces human rationality, offering an aesthetics of pure acknowledgment.

Putting to one side the evident anthropomorphic disguise of the staged act of recognition performed by the dancer, a reflection from the human-animal side cannot avoid reproducing sameness, occurring via a sort of self-referential loop that re-elevates the human-animal from its co-constituting natural-cultural continuum. Similarly, the French art collective that designed the algorithmic piece explicitly talks about a "collaboration" between the human and the technological machine, signalling the existence of a relational dialogue in which the latter is acknowledged as being a subjectivity – a co-active partner. Yet, it is a partner whose independence still distances it from any human counterpart, and whose agency is valorised only when the ontological and performative autonomy of the technology exhausts itself in

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[2] Details can be found at the website of the art collective: "obvious-art.com" (retrieved 01-02-2019).

a mirroring of the human capacities it is capable of emulating. As such, a strong anthropocentric and biocentric logic implies the description of the human-non-human relation, which is anchored to a dynamic of mirroring and a reflection of the first term over the second.

The paths towards an ontological revolution and innovation, which are central in the conceptualisation of both the cases, and able to attract public attention and economic value, show the limits of a futuristic viewpoint that is still enmeshed in the humanist perspective. This is a perspective in which the bio-cultural effort of evolution and transformation of the human – as his or her venture to move "beyond-man" – resolves and coincides with the multiple attempts to lead back towards the human that which is non-human. In the public broadcast, the exotic and alien figure of the robotic arm hypnotised the audience, providing an easy target to which to relate, one capable of whirling and twirling as a human dancer. In the art market, the lure of such an intuitive and easily graspable logic attracted collectors, critics, and merchants – some of whom made a great deal from the opportunity of obtaining the "first" material artistic trails produced by an artificial intelligence put to the test of creativity; a test in which until recently, the human-animal dominated unchallenged.

Donna Haraway (1992) and more recently, Karen Barad (2007), have both faced the issue of taking otherness in consideration via a reflective process that reconstitutes the uncatchable sameness of univocal identity. In their proposal, it is diffraction rather than reflection that offers the optical phenomenon capable of overcoming such an analytical (ontological and epistemological) impasse. We want to start by focusing on the conceptual distance that lies between reflection and diffraction. This is in order to signal a re-territorialising movement that, by re-elevating the human-animal beyond otherness, characterises the two examples mentioned above and stages a mirroring, representationalist aesthetics from which we want to distance ourselves.

In order to challenge the hyper-rationalisation of the Western-centric discourses of productionism and enlightenment, particularly in relation to nature and techno-scientific constructivism, Haraway envisions an analytical, "optical" device operating through diffraction rather than reflection (1992, p. 299). Diffraction indeed, as a phenomenon concerning wave propagation, composes patterns of interference rather than mirroring images and reflecting sameness. Haraway expands Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1986-87) "inappropriate/d others" to encompass technological non-humans, as an historical opposition to Western identity politics that offers a critical, deconstructive relationality; a connection that contaminates, going beyond the simple hierarchy of the taxonomic difference – of an authentic, pre-ordered, and fixed difference. As such, the artifactuality of diffraction provides another optical geometry that deals with interferences rather than duplication or reflective extension. In Haraway's words: "[a] diffraction

pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear" (1992, p. 300; *emphasis in the original*).

Barad (2007) develops and elaborates upon the "subtle vision" that diffraction, according to Haraway (1992, p. 300), trains us to discover, concentrating on the quantum understanding of this phenomenon and building her own diffractive method against the grain of reflexive scholarly practice. Without entering into a detailed description of the physical phenomenon of interference in question and in its understanding within the field of quantum mechanics, the key relationships between representationalism and reflexivity upon which Barad (2007) sheds light are worth noting. Indeed, such relationships, as signalled by the two cases mentioned above, offer a positioning of the artwork as disconnected from the material entanglements of which it forms part, releasing the artist from any ethical responsibility in the face of the work created[3]. According to Barad (*ibid.*), reflection is grounded on the false premise of representation, supporting a perspective of the world at a distance in which the bridges of representationalism do not have any consequence, offering instead positive access to knowledge. Indeed, it is the separation of representation that, moving in a vicious circle or a self-referential loop, re-establishes an unbridgeable distance via reflection. Representationalism reterritorialises difference into sameness via the mirroring of reflection, whilst diffraction allows "thinking about socialnatural practices in a performative rather than representationalist mode" (ivi, p. 88).

In the conceptual terms proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1977; 1987), territorialisation is a process of appropriation and enclosure, in which the territory is considered beyond the strict definition given to it in fields such as ethnology or ethology. As an emergent set of relations unfolding in the field of existence, the territory might best be considered as caught up in processes of *ouverture*, opening towards new possibilities, thanks to immanent and positive co-constituting encounters that, as such, signal its deterritorialisation. Félix Guattari (1995; 2000; 2006; 2013) employed this vision throughout his psychotherapeutic work, particularly with regard to subjectivation and the capabilities of certain practices of positively acting upon patients. Against the critique of an "accelerationist" understanding of such a move (Noys 2014), deterritorialisation is never transcendental or a speeding towards an impossible exteriority. Rather, it always presupposes a subsequent reterritorialisation that recomposes the existential territories in question (Guattari 2006). Surely, this process is not without consequences, and thus the movement needs to be mapped if it is to be understood more fully.

The recognition of non-human alterities staged by Bolle and by the Obvious collective produces a form of reterritorialisation, a knowledge-loop that

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[3] Some of the most vivid examples of such a release of ethical concern are Damien Hirst's artworks, in which the bodies of non-human-animals are often abused and exposed.

reinforces one of the terms of the relation, rather than diffracting; that is, interfering and contaminating both. The loop re-hierarchises the conjunction between the human-animal and the technological machine in favour of the former, and does it via a representationalism that avoids the implication of any material consequence for the authors. These art forms mimic a post-human aesthetics, creating what we posit here as a *humanist aesthetics of the posthuman* – that is, a reflecting aesthetics that refortifies the ethico-onto-epistemological superiority of the human-animal, evading a possible mash-up and contamination with otherness. The deterritorialised move, the encounter of different forces traversing the bodies in question, is charged with potential lines of flight, but exhausts this productive promise, instead re-territorialising it in the safe territory of resemblance. Such a humanist aesthetics of the posthuman produces an invariable difference that restages identity, re-establishing the superiority of human reason over any prospect of hybridisation. Mere recognition of the hybridative partner results in a sort of hyper-rationality, a representational circuit that transcends and enlightens (again and again) the human-animal about his or her "originary" technicity and the post-human condition. Instead, our map of a posthuman aesthetics attempts to evolve diffractively, proceeding via two main, interrelated axes – one relational and one perceptual – which will help outlining our proposal to rethink the material encounters between human-animals and the alterities at stake in the artistic process.

Scalar relationality meets intensive perception: Setting the axes for a posthuman aesthetics

The representationalism of what we have labelled a humanist aesthetics of the posthuman still retains the seeds of a modernist view of the artistic field. The limits of an aesthetics that mirrors and resembles the human-animal, by re-detaching him or her from the continuity of his or her co-constituencies, accentuates the over-codified interdependence between (a transcendental value of) beauty and art – a pivotal attribute of a modern, still very widespread and influential conception of aesthetics. The two main axes of our aesthetic map can be derived via an entangled view of aesthetics that recognises its creative power beyond the strict separation of the artistic field from other subjective dimensions.

Outlining a proposal for an ethico-aesthetic paradigm that might be capable of recovering human subjectivation from the self-destroying and standardising spiral of modern valorisation, Félix Guattari (1995) recognises two different modes through which the artistic field, and the related problem of aesthetics, intertwines and unfolds with the actual co-constitution of the subjective and social spheres on the existential level

(or on the "plane of consistency", to be more aligned with the Guattarian vocabulary)[4]. In his analysis, Guattari describes the non-linear, historical passages that, at the dawn of modern Western societies, led to the delimitation of art as a definite set of activities – one that is chained to specific, particular, and defined axiological references and values (Guattari 1995).

Within pre-modern societies, rituals and religious customs were imbued with activities such as music, dance, or the plastic arts. Similarly, the domain of human life did not exclude economic exchanges and social relationships, being instead fully co-determined and co-constituted by them. Guattari (*ibid.*) characterises this domain via what he calls "territorialised assemblages of enunciation", recognising in their subsequent evolution the surfacing of a gradual emphasis on individual subjectivity (and the parallel decline of the polyvocality intervening in the production of the self) and the autonomisation of the modes of value attribution (pp. 98-9). Economic, artistic, social-interactive, religious, or magical activities, which in a contemporary context seem to occupy specific and clearly defined spheres of action, were part of the same, contingent concatenation of human societal life. Within such social contexts, the aesthetic dimension was not a separate area of individual psychic formation or social valorisation. Whilst forming part of the immanent acting of the socius – of collective and individual subjectivations – art was not a specific activity separated from the context.

After this first figure, a second one emerges during modernity. This is a deterritorialised figure, in which each sphere of valorisation establishes an autonomised pole of reference, transcending the actual field of action. Polyphonic valorisation becomes hierarchised and the intertwinement of different, territorialised and emergent values is lost, making way for transcendent and homogeneous instances that capture and over-code them: the good of moral aligns with the true of logics, and beauty surfaces as the absolute referent of the aesthetic field. Such a form of polarisation, autonomisation, and separation takes up the position of a pre-given, unquestionable definition of the terms in question, neutralising the potential contamination of the various dimensions of value constitution. Since the materials of expression enter into an orbit of standardisation and general equivalence, Guattari (*ibid.*) equally calls this figure "capitalist". As capital establishes itself as the measure of economic exchange, over-coding the other modes of regulation, an ideal form of beauty hierarchises and neutralises the relational and constituent forces that might traverse the aesthetic field; aesthetics becomes binarised and attached to an axiological reference that is universalist in pretence, and totalising in application.

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[4] In his *Glossary of Schizo-Analysis*, Guattari (2006) defines the "plane of consistency" as a plane of immanence in which the "different existence modalities of the systems of intensity are not transcendental idealities, but real engenderment and transformation processes" (pp. 418-19).

In order to avoid historical linearity and attribute to the aesthetic ambit a power of feeling that is capable of offering novel and possibly positive existential territories, an overlapping difference arises between a proto-aesthetic paradigm, which refers to creation as an emergent dimension that is capable of intervening in the contingency of entangled action, and the established field of art which, in contrast, is made of the actual works of art that find a place across different institutions (*ibid.*). Such a proto-aesthetic dimension can be equally acknowledged from the etymology of the word aesthetics. Indeed, derived from the ancient Greek adjective *aisthetikos*, meaning "sensitive", the word follows from *aisthanesthai*, which translates in the verbal form "to perceive", or "to feel". These verbal forms are not subjective, suggesting that aesthetics does not describe the perception or the feelings of a specific entity. Rather, it seems to call back the processes by which entities – or "materialities", as we prefer to call them – enter into relations and encounter a constant, but also immanent and contingent change.

Rather than having an anthropocentric vision of the human-animal as the immutable centre of a self-referential loop that reinforces his or her ontological superiority over otherness, and an aesthetic field that pertains to the reification of such a position via a transcendental canon of beauty derived from an autonomised pole of reference, we discover a human-animal that is the ongoing result of mutant encounters with alterities. In addition, these alterities actively shape and co-constitute anthropogenesis. Within this formulation, aesthetics emerges as a field that, via perception, enables such a relationality. A shift occurs, from a mere creative and mono-directional process that reflectively echoes the human-animal, to a field of "cosmological" relationality. This perceptive processuality allows the temporary stabilisation of subjective states – that is, the perpetual co-constitution of collective and individual human-animal subjectivations.

With the objective of offering a map for a posthuman aesthetics that diffractively attempts not to stumble on the slippery terrain of resemblance, and whilst recalling an early understanding and proto-dimension for the artistic terrain, we want to focus on two main interconnected axes, before delving, in the final section of the article, into an understanding of the material implications of such a rethinking of the aesthetic process. Relationality (1) and perception (2), we suggest, offer the chance to move away from an overcoded vision of aesthetics as well as configuring the coordinates for a possible posthuman aesthetics – one that precisely challenges and attempts to overcome the residue of a modernist and humanist vision of artistic creation. Our wish is to foreground the ideas underpinning the dual axes sustaining our map. For this reason, the former will be confronted with the critique of correlationality, pointing to scalar relationality via the key difference between intrinsic and extrinsic relations, whilst the latter will be angled towards an inhuman intensity that exceeds any gravitation around the human-animal.

On the first axis – even if this key notion does not subsume the diversity of the positions shaping the diverse nuances and facets of such a field of cultural and philosophical inquiry – we posit relationality (1), which lies at the heart of many critical posthumanist proposals. From Haraway's (1991) seminal manifesto, which contested the rigid separation of the human and the machine with the relational figure of the cyborg, to the ties of the companion species, a pointer to the interdependence of the "becoming with" of human animals and non-human ones (Haraway 2003; 2008); from the critique of disembodied information as a vision that reinforces the liberal solipsism of the humanist project, and the possibility to rethink the reciprocal articulations of human-animals and computing machines in the paths opened by the cybernetic tradition (Hayles 1999), to the affirmative (vitalist and materialist) advancing of a posthuman ethics and politics that recognises the immanent possibilities offered by a network of relations to the becoming of human subjectivities (Braidotti 2013); from the questioning of the pretences of superiority of the ontological anthropocentrism of the humanist tradition and the advancement of a "conjugative" (combinative) perspective in which culture is the temporary result of hybridative events with non-human alterities (Marchesini 2002; 2014; 2017); all of these proposals, in their complex and distinctive questionings, overlap on the recognition of an inescapable ecological relationality – that (albeit by varying degrees) is not merely ontological, but ethical, political as well as epistemological (Barad 2007). As both the anti-representationalist proposal of diffraction and the proto-dimension of aesthetics intimate, relationality entails an entangled and embodied, historical and stratifying situatedness that challenges the false premises (at the heart of representations) of a separationist conception of a world that might be meaningfully charged, acted, and mirrored at a hierarchical distance.

However, such a field of relationality has also recently become the object of confrontation from the speculative realist standpoint, which equally signs contemporary developments in continental philosophy, and in particular the advancement of the so-called "non-human turn" in critical theory and cultural studies (Grusin 2015). For this reason, before touching upon the axis of perception and delving into the embodied materiality of a posthuman aesthetics, here it is worth making a clarification especially in the light of recent developments within realist philosophies – in particular regarding so-called "object oriented ontology" (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman 2011; Harman 2018). This clarification implies what we call the difference between correlationality and scalar relationality (which we also label cosmological relationality): a distinction that is central to our sketch of a posthuman aesthetics, aligning with the current achievements of critical posthumanism and, in particular, the ones of so-called "neo-materialist" positions (see Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010).

Simplified to the extreme, critical posthumanism shares with contemporary realist positions the anti-anthropocentric criticism to the superiority of human reason. Indeed, reason, according to anti-realist metaphysics, has the capacity to access and acknowledge the world and its phenomena. As such, anti-realism implies that the world is not independent to human mind. As suggested by Lee Braver (2007), this is the "Kantian root" of contemporary philosophy that, since the end of the eighteenth century, has concluded: "phenomena depend upon the mind to exist" (p. 39). However, contrary to this established view, the recent expansion of speculative realism departs from a strong rebuttal of such a dependency, and disagrees with what, after Quentin Meillasoux (2008), is well recognised within continental philosophical circles as "correlationism"[5].

Expressed simply, correlationism precisely defines the dependency of the world on the human mind, implying the consequent possibility for the latter to access a pure knowledge on existing entities – to know the thing in-itself. This knowledge is assumed to be achieved through the greatest of human capacities, which for centuries has allowed the cultural animal to elevate himself from the rest of living and non-living alterities: reason. As the speculative turn emphasises, anti-realist metaphysics offer human subjectivity a privileged position. The existence of phenomena is presupposed as being dependent upon the human cogito, and its ability to establish a relation to, and represent, them. The misadventures of representationalism that have been discussed in the first section extend and partially coincide with such a position, shaping and informing the academic fields of inquiry that gravitate towards and touch upon the aesthetic one. For example, the understanding of media culminates in the presupposition of their existence as ancillary tools to transmit human cultural expressions. Similarly, culture is pre-supposed to be the result of representations that, via analysis centred on human signifying semiotics, can disclose an exclusive reality – a secondary level of symbolic separations.

In order to detach the relational plane traversing critical posthumanist proposals from the critique of correlationsim, the difference between relations of interiority and exteriority needs to be strongly underlined. Indeed, following such a distinction, relationality pertains to the aesthetic field as perceptive and capable of leading towards novel processes of subjectivation. However, it does so without implying an a priori connectedness that necessarily determines the terms of the relation, working instead at different scales that are as potentially expansive as the cosmological unfolding of the spacetime continuum itself.

[5] For overviews and critical accounts see Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman (2011); De Sanctis (2017); and Harman (2018). For applications and developments see also Ferraris (2012); Harman (2011); and Morton (2013).

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic relations occupies place in various passages of the collaborative work between Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (especially throughout the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; 1977; 1987), although always without being systematised or explicated as such. Rejecting the dominant idea in Western philosophy of self-sustaining entities that, thanks to a stable interiority, transcend the physical word, Deleuze (1991) had already explored this problem in his first book on David Hume's empiricism. However, it is with the emergent and processual relationality of machinism that this idea is extended to encompass other instances (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; 1987). Machinism, and the machinic assemblages that articulate it, aligns with our understanding of cosmological relationality. However, this conceptualisation does not imply that anything is related to anything else, or that this happens through relations of interiority or intrinsically – the sustainment of a sort of ahistorical and vital panpsychism that re-reifies and re-transcend the networks of pure emergency as an indistinct and fluid interconnectedness of the inner character of biotic and abiotic "materialities". Rather, scalar relationality, which can be also read in the ecosophical proposal of Félix Guattari (1995; 2000), implies relations of exteriority: machinic assemblages, or *agencements* according to the original French terminology, operate through extrinsic relations[6]. These relations permits temporary encounters between different materialities, however, these "components" can also enter in new relations that exceed their stratifying actuality, thanks to latent capacities that can emerge at specific times, without them being fully explained by their intrinsic properties[7]. The difference between relations of interiority and exteriority suggests that the terms of such relations are neither presupposed as pre-existing nor even flattened within an absolute withdrawal, as in the case in the extremes of the correlationalist and object-oriented one perspectives. Against a dualist opposition between the two, the externality of relations, of an immanent world of relations, has the capacity to enable variations amongst relations of interiority:

[6] The distinction is rigorously followed by Manuel DeLanda (2006), particularly with the aim of differentiating the hierarchic and stable nature of totalities with the open and processual one of assemblages. However, as stated above, Deleuze and Guattari never thought of a systematised theory for assemblages, always implying a critique of rigid and structured modes of thinking and investigating. Instead, DeLanda (*ibid.*) conceives a specific "assemblage theory", which seems to abandon experimentation in favour of a more rigorous analytical approach to societal facts.

[7] This equally means that, contrary to the critique of a pure relationality, a processual logic is always implied; one that is capable of dealing with historical stratifications – that is, the relation of the actual in the virtual or the differential of a "power to" that is not purely immanent (and particularly not so immanent to reach a pure transcendence of contingency), but that rather depends on the non-dialectical materiality of long and stratifying historical trajectories.

this is the "element" of scalarity that composes the relation amongst relations.

On the second axis, we posit perception (2). As argued by Cary Wolfe (1995), critical posthumanism stems from the legacy of second order cybernetics, and in particular the development of the work of biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980) who, "Between the Scylla of Realism and the Charybdis of Idealism" (Wolfe 1995, p. 52) traced "a middle path" (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991, p. 172). This is the path of "experiential realism": an anti-idealist account that addresses the idea of mutual specification – the emergent co-determination of organisms and environment – pivoting around the development of embodied action towards the concept of "enaction" (*ibid.*). Quoting in length the early phenomenological insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1963), Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) posit perception at the core of their enactive proposal. Rather than being "simply embedded within and constrained by the surrounding world", they suggest that perception "contributes to the enactment of this surrounding world" (ivi, p. 174). Enaction is a lived cognition in which the sensory and motoric processes of the organism are inseparable: it consists of an action that is guided by perception within a circular path[8].

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (*ibid.*) propose their investigation of living cognition as the continuation, albeit by other means, of the work of Marleau-Ponty, who, starting with *The Structure of Behaviour* (1962) and *Phenomenology of Perception* (1963), explored the chance of moving beyond the antipodes of a scientific objectivism made of pure empirical explanations and an intellectualism dictating an internal projection that subjectively shapes phenomena (but preserves objectivist forms of understanding). Via perception, Merelau-Ponty establishes the possibility for a relational embodiment as the primary source of exploration and description of a shared world: "We witness every minute the miracle of related experience, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships" (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [2005, p. xxiii]).

However, as we have already argued elsewhere, the experiential realist path inaugurated by the phenomenological structure of embodied perception and continued by its broadening towards enacted cognition shows an evident zoocentrism and an excessive ontological reductionism to the detriment of the vegetable and mineral realms, which are reduced to a generic and undefined "environment" (Micali and Pasqualini 2018). The experiential re-

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[8] The argument of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) balances the development of the Maturana and Varela's (1980) proposal of autopoiesis, particularly recognising the topological maintenance of the internal equilibrium of living organisms. "Autopoiesis" is a concept proposed by Maturana and Varela in 1972: *auto*, in English means self, while *poiesis* is creation. The term was suggested to detach the understanding of life forms from a mere instrumentality.

alist proposal exposes the problematic separations between organism and environment, contesting the dualisms between a presupposed internal and an external, and between subject and object, as such opening a path to the constituent relationality between intrinsic and extrinsic unfoldings, yet still holding a biocentric perspective that tends to hierarchise the real, privileging the animal kingdom[9]. The guiding principles of perception seem to privilege the biological kingdom of Animalia, "exceptionalising" the facticity of specific biotic embodiments. However, here we think instead of a perception that is capable of intensively breaking the privileging site of the human-animal, as well as of other biological organisms, thus overlapping and intersecting with a scalar idea of cosmological relationality and as such avoiding an absolute withdrawal that might flatten such relations. This understanding of perception can be sketched from the intensive reading of affects and percepts that has been put forward by Deleuze and Guattari (1994), and the prehensive proposal of Alfred North Whitehead's (1929 [1978]) pragmatism.

The decentralisation of perception from the human gravitational centre, with an attentive eye to the aesthetic ambit, is pushed forward in Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) last collaborative philosophical effort. Whilst philosophy works with the pedagogical creation of concepts, and science is driven by the origination of the elements of functions (functives), according to Deleuze and Guattari, at stake in art is sensation and, more distinctively, percepts and affects (*ibid.*). Aesthetic figures are the intensive result of the "power-to" (*potentia*) of affects and percepts, which are the "way of thinking" of art. The work of art emerges then as a "bloc of sensation", a "compound of percepts and affects", a non-celebratory monument that temporarily holds such intensive forces thanks to the expressing power-to, the expressionality of matter (ivi, p. 164). Deleuze and Guattari (*ibid.*) link percepts to the intensive domain of affect. They recognise the attempt – particularly done by phenomenology of art – to look for an a priori that does not bound perception to the lived one; but this effort leads to a quest on flesh that is still too anchored to experience. Such a phenomenological investigation would maintain the lens on that which is already individuated, on individuated being. Instead, by connecting percepts to affects, Deleuze and Guattari (*ibid.*) make of them a pre-individual bridge to sensation, or better an element that fully participates to individuation. Percepts, beyond human-animal embodiments, are thought of as being independent from the state of the subject that perceives them. They are detached from a strict biological realm and assumed to exceed "lived" bodies:

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[9] Plants, for instance, occupy an entire environment, whilst the honeybee – throughout the definition of enaction offered by Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) – always plays the part of the organism.

> They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself (*ibid.*).

Percepts make sensible – that is, "human" – non-sensible forces – that is pre-individual, affective intensity.

Similarly, perception is "loosened" from the grip of a biocentric standpoint and thought instead in a relational plane that equally involves the processuality of forces in the conceptualisation of prehensions (Whitehead (1929 [1978]). Without assuming here the pretension of fully exploring such an idea, it is worth mentioning, in its connection to Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) suggestion, since it equally intimates a rethinking of the perceptual axis. Within a metaphysics that does not privilege the ontology of certain entities (such as human beings) over others, Whitehead (1929 [1978]) views prehensions as the capacity to perceptually experience co-constituent relationality. Prehensions define what an entity is by a process of relating to and seizing others. The seemingly flattening drift of pure ontological equivalence is here rebalanced by a pragmatism that, via degrees of prehension, apprehends the differing magnitudes of events and occasions. Percepts participate to individuation, bridging towards the in-human; likewise, prehensions signal a sort of scalar relationality with otherness that always holds a perceptual processuality in its constituent and relating movement.

Following this line of reasoning and aiming to move from the conceptual limits of the enactive path, we advanced elsewhere the radical materialist proposal of *zoesis* as a way to comprehend the multiple action strategies of biotic and abiotic materialities thanks to a physics of inter-materico conjunction (Micali and Pasqualini 2018). On the one hand, our posthumanist proposal strongly refuses correlationism and instead, following the conceptualisations that come from a strong materialist account of action, implies a scalar view of processual relationality. Yet, on the other hand, the phenomenological account of perception is reoriented towards the in-human, and overlaps with the relational axis, implying a perceptual intensity that processually constitutes and exceeds living beings. Scalar relationality involves micro, meso, and macro scales in emergent and heterochronic temporalities, avoiding the reductionism of a zoocentrism that retreats to a strictly human-animal perception, whilst suggesting the intimate relational strategies that Karen Barad (2007) refers to as "mattering" – a creative "matter movement" that unfolds via differentiation rather than any fixed essence or property, and which always carries with it the stratifying processes that historically sediment such variations. We want now to deepen some aspects of this matter-movement in order to define our understand-

ing of a posthuman aesthetics, particularly by shedding light on the intimate participation of matter in artistic and creative processes.

The intimate companion of the creative process: Matter and posthuman aesthetics

Across the relational and perceptual axes, an anti-Cartesian plane surfaces. This is a scalar and material plane, a plane of co-constituency (further to consistency). Such a plane does not foster a singular point of origin, but rather a multiplicity of vanishing points, lines of flight that compose the constellation of the subjectivities of the world, within a universe made of caosmotic conjunctions and hybridisations[10]. Similarly, the aesthetic map we present here emphasises the fact that matter becomes an active and intimate constituent of creative processes, offering the possibility to re-orientate the relation and evolutions between human-animals and the other materialities of the world. Precisely by advancing from this re-orientation, we want to shift our attention to the ways in which the concatenation between the two main axes of our map knots with the relationship that exists between thinking and materiality (Clark e Chalmers 1998; Malafouris 2013; Rowlands 2009). We want to introduce an oxymoronic conceptualisation in order to involve the processuality of matter and, before considering two artistic instances that concretise the forces of that which we characterises as a posthuman aesthetics, detail the ontological materiality of embodied processes of creation.

Within the landscape of a posthuman aesthetics, the relation between the human and the non-human becomes *materico*[11] – from the onto-epistemological conjunction between materialities monstrous ethics and aesthetics emerge. This relational hybridisation draws from a "static" processuality – that is, from a dynamism that challenges a biocentric and motioncentric perspective, privileging a transversal and anti-hierarchic description. Within such a dynamism, action – the operationality of matter – implies ways of expression that are other than movement. Such "other" expressions of movement can be defined as *static dynamics*: they are forces or "potencies" (*dýnamis* in Greek) that, in the encounter between biotic and abiotic materialities, relate by fostering and permitting the static movement of others.

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[10] The explicit critique to the linearity of origin finds place in so-called post-structuralist thought, particularly coming from the re-reading of the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. It can be explicitly found in Deleuze (1983), and Foucault (1984).

[11] The term "materico" is used in the field of art history in order to describe the materiality of thick layers of colour (particularly in painting). Following this line of thought, we use the adjective to highlight the material constituency of becoming beyond the strict material character of colours. Recent ecological reflections on the materiality of colours can be found in Cohen (2013).

The oxymoronic conceptualisation of static dynamics expresses the ambiguity, complementarity and promiscuity that conjoin the organic plane with the inorganic one – "whose" ontological domains irreducibly face transitory definitions, often signalled by incoherent and perspectival descriptions that depend on the point from which are observed as well as the hybrid configurations that distinguish them. Such an idea underlines the possibility of considering the active-passive pair as not being an opposition, but a contamination of complementary states that are themselves scalarly and cosmologically hybrid and relational. Action, then, takes the path of a novel and different line of flight, in which the dichotomy of the active and the passive blurs by maintaining a weak contrast that, rather than oppositional, becomes complementary. This is a point that allows us to resist the fallacious temptation of describing the action of inert matter in motioncentric terms, attributing to it a form of agency that really seems inappropriate.

This conceptualisation re-inflects the nexus between the human and the nonhuman. Moreover, it permits a reformulation of the logic underpinning the relation between different materialities and, in the terms of a posthuman aesthetics, the different performative configurations of matter itself. The common constraints, limits, and distances between the artist and the work of art weaken, and the evolutions, roles, and values that are at stake in the creative process mutate. A hybrid, monstrous, and in-becoming conception of the human-animal is necessarily repositioned in the face of the non-human: from the viewpoint of a proxemics, but also of a *praximics*[12] – that is, through a redefinition of the configuration and operational (and as such gnoseological) "valence" of the human (Malafouris 2013). A will to re-devise the homo-res relation thus emerges[13]. Indeed, this relationship is one of power, relying on the same dichotomies – subject/object, biotic/abiotic, agent/acted, creator/created, etc. – that lie at the foundation of the humanist conception of man. Here, the monopoly of action and thought both focuses and circumscribes to the performativity of the homo, in which the idea,

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[12] Following the path that has been traced by Malafouris' "Material Engagement Theory" (MET), the term "praximics" expresses the practical relevance of the conjunctive and co-determining relation between human and non-human materialities. The mutual, reciprocal encounter and confusion that takes place between the human-animal and his/her alterities indeed operates on a plane of thought-action, on a field of praxis that overcomes the distinction between theory and practice, as occurs when rethinking onto-epistemology as an ontology that is already epistemological and vice versa. See Malafouris (2013; and Knappet 2008).

[13] The term "homo" is employed here as a critic reminder with the objective of recalling the heterogeneous range of species that compose the human-animal constellation. This contrasts the reductionist position that equates human-animals *only* with the sapiens species. Human-animal multiplicities, which have often been coeval throughout history, are the expression of manifold opportunities of hybridisation and involvement with non-human alterities.

ahead of the body, guides and is detached from it – the hand that executes and the thing that is acted upon, in which the dominion of the living and its imposition on what life is not, is taken for granted (Sennett 2008; Tattersall 1998). The most ancient traces of such a unidirectional passage (from homo to res), especially in fields such as archaeology and palaeoanthropology, lie at the heart of a widespread and widely accepted idea on the appearance of the homo genre – that is, the lithic "industry" of the Lower Palaeolithic. Similarly, we find such a dominating and mono-directional movement to be at work in understanding the early geometric decorations that were incised on ochre rocks or on shells, which would signal the evolution of the modern human and the birth of aesthetics. The production of stone tools, incisions, and rock paintings are thought of as epistemic markers, conventional and indirect ontological pointers, and triggers that are capable of incarnating and priming a game of mirrors; a play in which the human-animal reflects him/herself into the nonhuman, and the latter becomes the keeper, the empty and hard husk holding and giving back throughout millennia the forms, perimeters and traces of what is usually defined as humanity[14].

From this viewpoint, what is generally referred to as "human" is then explicated by the internal, biological properties of a structure of the body, as well as simultaneously being thought capable of extending beyond it. This extension, as said, moves in one direction, establishing a sort of "passage of essence" through which the stone "humanises" itself, which means that, by becoming *artificium*, it loses its *naturalitas* as well as acquiring human essence, to the point of acting in his/her place (i.e., in the archaeological record). To the imposition of the human hand and consciousness on inert matter is added the "spiritual" one: the ontological intimacy of matter (which is manipulated and perturbed by the human) is reassessed, suffering a metamorphosis that seems to exclusively involve it. Its morphology is clearly modified and reshaped in accordance with that which appears as "internal" – models within the human mind, desires that, projected to the external through the eye, lead the able hand. Therefore, the contrasting definition of the homo-res contiguity in terms of static dynamics offers crucial interpretative access to a posthuman aesthetic map such as we propose, as well as a better comprehension of the relationality that underpins our posthuman becoming and lies at the heart of our cultural, and thus artistic, production.

The distance from the things around us is, indeed, enclosed in the perspectival illusion of a body that is the centre of a projection of the world. In

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[14] Examples of such anthropocentric readings can be found in the vast majority of scientific publications on the archaeological and paleoanthropological fields of research; e.g. Davies (2012); Henshilwood *et al.* (2002); and Tattersall, 1998. For a philosophical discussion of the raw and singular materiality of stones that are not "domesticated" by the human-animal in forms such as craft or art, see Cohen (2015).

the schizophrenic middle of projections of estrangement *from* (as an effect of anthropocentrism) and approach *to* (as an effect of anthropomorphism), the (human) animal vibrates in-between the experimenting of a reality of which he/she is irreducibly part, but that at the same time is perceived and interpreted as separate. In addition, acting within and on this world indulges such an experimentation, living a cosmos that is *other from* and *other yet similar to* him/her[15]. Thus, a posthuman aesthetics, as we propose here, goes beyond any reductionist form of essentialism and vitalism, and implies a reassessment of the previously discussed homo-res distance as well as a novel tension with it. This tension is a vibratory repositioning in which the artistic process mutates. It transmutes from an expression of the human-animal, from a representation and external extension of the internal inspirations of the mind as a demiurgic manipulation of a passive and inert non-human matter, to an enactive and emotive deposition of stratifying, contaminating, and conjoining multiplicities – multiple related alterities that between them reinstate a posthuman conceptualisation of the homo-res coupling.

Such an aesthetics requires the intimate and full participation of an incarnated body with other bodies, a situated process that is exalted via art. It is an encounter between materialities, one showing a preferential apparatus through which often-silent concatenations and conjunctions, as well as invisible, distant, and close mutations are brought on an experiential plane. Matter becomes as such an active part of the creative, proto-aesthetic process: a freakish muse that, from a platonic inspiration for the human soul, turns into the carnal copula of an embodied mind. From the rock paintings and the incisions of the early Palaeolithic to contemporary digital installations and performances, the lasting combination of the anthropos with non-human otherness has constituted and inspired the metamorphic and creative process at the root of aesthetics. The plane of relationality between the human-animal and his/her alterities is made of reciprocal contamination and collective determination: it is a conjunction in which art promises a faithful and heretical ostentation; a cultural stratification in-between manticism and mnemonics.

In first place, it is interesting to note that, for ten of thousands of years, in different stages and cultures of the Palaeolithic, figures of non-human animals were the principal subjects of cave art and such figures adorn the caves of many European regions. Various heterospecifics took, and still take, part in the process of aesthetic production. This is a production that involves – in its static dynamism and leading becoming – multiple forms of vegetable and mineral materialites: from the hands of the *homo* that drew those lines, to the carbon that, following the calcareous conformations to

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[15] In the process of anthropopoiesis, the expression "other from" has a declaratory value that is widespread, in space and time, and finds places in many perspectives and cosmologies of different human groups; see Viveiros de Castro (2009).

which it is solidly tied, composes them, right up until the painted figuration. On the axis of relationality then, rock painting incarnates a conjunction between heterogeneous materialities. Independently from the body into which they are incarnated, human narrations are hybrid strata that are composed by in- and non-human concretions: partners that are so intimate and pervasive as to model the same thought (Malafouris 2013), a thought with which they bodily stratify.

Moving to the perceptual axis, an enactive and extended logic that employs an anti-representationalist and distributed tone is crucial if we are to comprehend, from a posthuman perspective, the aesthetic process that sustains in this instance Palaeolithic art. In the case of rock paintings, the image, in its embodied materiality, is a stratum of space-temporal geometries; it is a plane of experience in which the human and the non-human trace trajectories that are no longer contiguous but conjunctive. The image collapses in a common, intensive horizon of percepts. This is a domain able to recall and reiterate in space and time a state of coercive tension that implies both terms of the relation. The image here is a space of desire that can alter the spatial and temporal perception of reality, opening itself to other, novel relations. The rock paintings of the Palaeolithic are an epimeletic impulse, the effect of an "animal appeal" (Marchesini 2003) and beyond this, they are signs that seem to trace an illusory distance from alterity, but that rather suggest a desire of proximity. The paintings are the wills of a fossil memory that throughout millennia have not lost their magnetic tension and power to trigger, in the human-animal, a perceptive-emotive process that is made of pareidolic images: a huge optical illusion, the deceit of which is impossible to avoid[16]. The sketched profile of a rhinoceros on a rock wall is not a representation of an internal image that only springs from the human mind, but rather the detonation of an hetero-chrono-topic relation between the rhino-animal, human-animal, colour pigments, and the rock layers. It thus is a perceptive relation, in which matter does not merely substitute or externally hold the endemic projections of the mind by giving them a bodily form: that is, matter does not host thought, it does not give it an outline and/or a substance, but is itself thinking. The remains of a material culture of aesthetic interest are still considered as witnesses of a pre-modern symbolic thought[17], a thought usually understood as a transcendent propriety underlying action, as being

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[16] Very recently, academic works such as that of Katherine Hayles (2017) showed the limits that emerge from an anthropocentric projection that traditionally connects the capabilities of advanced thinking to a conscious cognition by leaving out what she calls "unconscious cognition". Similarly, pareidolia is a kind of very quick illusion that involves subconscious cognitive processes (Nihei et al 2018).

[17] As for instance happens in so-called "evolutionary aesthetics; e.g. Voland, and Grammer (2003).

detached from the body, a body that is detached from the world as well as from other bodies: fossil thought or, better, pareidolias of a fossil thought.

We consider thought to be material and distributed, its processuality not exclusively human, but multidimensional, multichronotopic, and multimateric – the object and the subject as partners confusing and conjoining each other. This is a monstrous thought or, more speculatively, "heavy thought" (to use the etymology of the Latin *pēnsāre*, meaning "to carefully weight"). Diverging from a panpsychist metaphysics, we are not claiming that all bodies, all materialities think, or that everything is thought or possesses a way of thinking. Rather, we argue that thinking is not easily localised in a specific organ, in an area of the body, or in the body itself. Thinking emerges as a process in-between the intrinsic and extrinsic relations of human and non-human bodies, in the milieu through which a thought is embodied and embedded. As such, thinking is not an exclusive activity of the mind or the body[18]. The phenomenological intentionality of thinking, which equates to thinking about something or the idea that thought always tends to something else, is misleading since we always think *with something else* and do not think about something else. Therefore, heavy thought is anchored to materiality, to which it belongs, and to its multiplicity, to the bodies, and to the materialities of the world.

Going beyond parietal art – an instance of the expression of Paleolithic aesthetics – our considerations broaden, for example towards all that is thought of as human mark making and that, following Malafouris, cannot be considered as "a passive representational object but as an active prosthetic perceptual means of making sense" (Malafouris 2013, p. 180). As we have discussed, in fact, the concept of a heavy thought allows us to reassess the artistic process in the terms of a degree of prehension in which diverse bodies and different dynamics are simultaneously and complementarily involved. This is a reassessment that clashes with the idea of the creative practice of the art form as an external, autonomous and detached somatisation of an internal content of the mind (which comes from a singular point of origin and evolves in one unique direction: to the art work or to the public). Spanning millennia, Paleolithic figurative art exemplifies the ontological promiscuity and chronotopic heterogeneity of such a process of creation, or proto-aesthetic, which can obviously be extended to non-figurative art too, as well as to the contemporary landscape of digital mediation. In the instance of sound bodies, as it happens with music, or performing ones, as in the case of dance and so on.

The second instance that we want to take in consideration shift our focus to a contemporary context. It is a recent work of the Italian artist Cristina

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[18] A similar point has been recently advanced by Sampson (2017).

Ghinassi (2016), who has recently explored the relational and perceptive axes that bring forward a co-constituent rethinking of embodied materialities, characterising what we imagine of a posthuman aesthetics. The artwork *Code Switch #1* (2016) questions the possibility of epigenetic changes in the participation of individuals to the artistic process – it aesthetically investigates the ways in which performance and video art can alter the practitioner of the art form, that is the embodied actuality of the artist (within him/herself, but also conceptually extending to the bodies of all the participant that might be affected by artistic performances). The art piece, or better the artistic project, draws from, and connects with scientists working in the field of, epigenetic research: a branch of biology that, beyond a mere separation of bodies and their environments, investigates their genetic interactions[19]. Extending the tradition of endurance art, the artist repeated a one-hour performance in front of a digital camera for twenty-eight consecutive days – combining this effort with a very strict diet and a regulated life style. Her epigenetic signatures were also measured before and after the endured performance, reporting that over three hundred genes were differently expressed, particularly in connection between the artist's epigenetics and genes that are related to exercise, neuronal, and psychological influence[20].

Rather than pointing towards a representational output explicitly framed within a presupposed posthuman aesthetics, the art piece engages with the relationality between different materialities, letting the body of the performer occupying the central stand, but without downplaying the individualising forces of alterities intervening on, and reciprocally shaping it. Beyond the scientific results (that we do not want to address in this case), the relation between the human-animal and technological mediation produced an embodied perception that differentially individuated her, co-constituting part of the processes of subjectivation of the artist. The performance did not merely mirrored the encounter with the recording materiality of the digital camera (or with the recurring patterns of lifestyle), being this instead approached via a mutual specificity; a reciprocal contamination that allowed a diffractive result, a co-contamination that was later extended via the production of five short videos aiming to condense the oscillating rhythms and sensations Ghinassi felt in her repetitive encounters with the medium. As such, the vid-

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[19] In writings on epigenetics it is easy to spot the zoocentric limit we discuss in relation to the enactive proposal, in which the organism hierarchizes a generic and unspecified "environment"; an example can be found in Gilbert (2002), who – despite analysing ecological interactions – focuses on the biocentric idea of the "developing body". A discussion of epigenetics in relation to posthumanism can be found in Nayar (2014); while some remarks in relation to transhumanism can be found in Fuller (2014).

[20] Ghinassi conceived the art project in collaboration with geneticist and science communicator Edward Duca. More details can be found on the personal web page of the artist: www.cristinaghinassi.com/ (Retrieved 01-02-2019).

eos perform her bodily attunement; they are a journey of individuation: the slight accumulation of ontogenetic strata, from an early alignment of body reactions with the new imposed life cycle, passing then through its refusal of the constrains and daily repetitions, and culminating with a relief that anticipates the end of the cage-like days spent under systematic self-observation. These video pieces set the stage for, and accompanied, a theatrical performance that, one year later, at the St. James Cavalier Centre of Valletta (Malta), broadened the artistic project and its perceptual processuality towards a lived audience, aiming to openly involve the public in it (Ghinassi 2017).

Challenging the anthropocentric perspective, the posthuman domino effect alters the other stratification of gnosis; it produces an ethico-onto-epistemological tremor in which the human animal, by no longer being the centre of his/her universe, is neither the centre of his/her thought or of his/her aesthetics. Becomings follow a scalar dynamism, vibrating and contracting between difference and repetition, between relation and perception. One of the first aesthetic acts that involves and produces the human-animal, and can cast further light on our understanding of a posthuman aesthetics, is collecting.

Collecting is an ancient form of violence: it selects, holds, and vaunts ethico-aesthetic relations by building forced ties, establishing hierarchies, gathering the configuration of that which is possible in the range of similarity and in the negation of sameness. Collecting is a cosmological practice, a rule of attraction, a fractal machine that produces instants and subjectivities. It is an obsessive research of repetition in difference, and the will to promptly find difference in repetition. Collecting is an active, plural, processual disposition of forces, in which the aesthetic streams (that such a practice seeks to follow and implies) co-emerge. This play of percepts and affects incarnates in the divergent forms of recurring bodies and in the desire to reunite them; it actively involves the molecular concatenations that those bodies evoke by configuring them in kaleidoscopic and polyhedral pareidolias. Nevertheless, the collector does not collect *something*; or rather, he or she will surely say to collect, let say, shells. However, the collected materialities are the efforts to insert him or herself in a more-than-human embodied relational network, in a plurality of shelling processes that vibrate between difference and repetition, making of that shell a shell and simultaneously another, different shell. The relationship between art and collecting is both triggered by, and triggers, onto-epistemological relations; it surfaces along the axes of perception and relation by tracing – in-between enaction and emotion – an aesthetic region. This is an extent in which artists, works of arts, and participating publics insert and conjoin, self-materialising and co-determining themselves.

From such a viewpoint, Palaeolithic rock paintings as well as the concatenations of digital video pieces that might enable a performance are pareidolic collections. Even though the sense beyond the images that are produced by

these two distant aesthetic forms cannot be fully accessed via our interpretations, a more immediate point stands out: human art traces the profiles of, and is incised along, the bodily anatomies and geometries of the non-human; it favours an alterity that has always colonised and contributed to its thinking and its symbolic protocols[21]. Posthuman aesthetics is a constellation of individuating ontologies and active performativities in which attraction is intensively powerful, triggering mechanisms and techniques that are capable of recalling and repeating extremely magnetic forms and gestures. In parietal art, the bodies and actions of large mammals can be easily recognised and imitated, whilst in the case of *Code Switch #1*, performance art shapes and actualises the subjective individuation of the artist – her ontological becoming. The rock paintings are sketches of phylogenetic DNA that move, from the organic into the inorganic and vice versa. They infect the walls of the cave and encyst the rock, at the same time by sedimenting and calcifying the trauma of such an involvement, and giving back conformations to the lithic thought: cognitive stalactites and stalagmites working as dendrites of electrolithic synapses. The body of Ghinassi absorbs the encounters with the digital recording device, transforming herself and embodying the mutations that are provoked by enduring performance. Rock inlays are scars of an ontological explosion whilst the epigenetic changes arising in Ghinassi's body testify to such a hybridative contamination that defines a posthuman aesthetics. Therefore, the materico exchange with alterities is not a mere means of transmission, nor a raw container; an empty medium that autonomously and in isolation transmits or contains human-animal forms. Rather, non-human materialities are an active, co-determinant part of the processes of individuation that we usually refer to as "human".

Conclusion

The map we have attempted to sketch, following and intertwining the main ideas of relationality and perception, offers a posthuman aesthetics that does not reinforce the ontological supremacy of the living and biological human-animal. This is an aesthetics that is ethical on the Spinozian line that was followed by Guattari (1995) – one that is capable of intensively working on the relations it is part of via perception. From our viewpoint, a posthuman aesthetics does not simply mirror the world, offering artistic representations, but rather is capable of recognising the range of its ethical imperatives, which clearly involve a responsibility in the face of the creative process – of the creative conjoining forces of the cosmos. The simple recognition of the relation

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[21] In this sense we can say that it is also a collection of metaphors, of paralogies.

with alterities via novel perceptual forms does not seem sufficient, particularly in times that are so strongly marked by actual and virtual cataclysmic events. Indeed, as we argued in the first part of our article, this merely mirrors identity without offering a space for constituent encounters. Instead, a posthuman aesthetics needs to take advantage of the inhuman character that entails its becomings, diffractively intervening in the diverse ontologies it is capable of co-individuating. It has to build upon a perceptual relationality in order to co-constitute positive individuations; processes of subjectivation that are open to the externality of forces.

Our proposal endeavoured to offer an advancement into thinking about relationality and perception whilst not framing these ideas in terms of a pure horizontal connectedness and a felt point of departure that exclusively defines human embodiments. Rather, we hinted at a shift towards a relationality that crosses between different scales, involving the intensive possibilities that perception might offer. Centering our attention on the ties between human and non-human materialities has offered to our map a privileged site from which to understand the artistic process that creatively and constantly places into contact those that previously seemed two extremes, but that conversely have an intimate and reciprocal partnership which defines them both.

As we have discussed with two main examples, the emergence of another form of thinking, of a different language or artistic expression, is foremost and simultaneously another kind of relation with non-human otherness, another form of enactive action and, as such, another type of "con-sistency" – a consistent togetherness or common existence. Figurative and abstract collections of rock art do not bear witnesses to, or affirm, pre-modern symbolic thought. They are a different aesthetic operationality; an aesthetic mode of acting by homo sapiens that differentiated him and her from other species of homo – that diffractively individuated him/her. Similarly, the case of the epigenetic project of Ghinassi shows the ways in which the repetitive practice of art performance has the capacity to act on the body, to change and virtually trigger different processes of individuation and subjective formation.

In his book dedicated to the artistic work of Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Deleuze (1981 [2003]) writes about a common problem that concerns the arts and the creative process: "In art, and in painting as in music, it is not a matter of reproducing or inventing forms, but of intercept forces ("*de capter des forces*") (2003, p. 56; *transl. ours* 1981, p. 77). The French word "*capter*", which does not mean "capture" (as in the original English translation)[22], precisely expresses the capacity of aesthetics to intercept, to catch, but at the same time to be impacted by, forces – that is, to relate, by offering a percep-

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[22] The French word *capture* is instead used in the famous passages on the apparatus of capture in *A Thousand Plateau* (1987) and is the correct word Deleuze (and Guattari) uses to express the act of capturing.

tual juncture. According to Deleuze, Bacon's figures have been amongst the best responses in the history of painting, capable of making visible – seizing and releasing, catching and freeing – the intensive forces of individuation. In the map we have proposed, a posthuman aesthetics seems to work by offering novel ethico-onto-epistemological possibilities to our human animality.

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Estetica posthuman: Percezione e relazionalità, mappare il campo tramite la lente del post-umanesimo critico

Il post-umanesimo critico offre gli strumenti per superare i limiti dell'umanesimo. Questi limiti riguardano un epistemologia di dominio sull'alterità, ed in particolare su quelle non-umane che, dalla posizione umanista, finiscono con l'occupare una posizione ancillare dell'animale umano. Perciò l'estetica dovrebbe essere ripensata oltre questi limiti, rifiutando un idea che si abbina ad una nozione trascendentale del bello, concepito in quanto forma ideale. Al contrario, il punto di vista del post-umanesimo critico permette di allinearsi con una nozione di estetica che pertiene un campo di relazionalità e percezione. Muovendosi su questi due assi, questo saggio propone una mappa di una estetica post-umanista con l'obiettivo di segnalare le modalità tramite le quali la materia diviene una parte intima e attiva del processo creativo: una musa mostruosa che, da ispirazione platonica per l'anima umana, diviene copula carnale della mente incarnata. La relazione ecologica tra l'umano e l'alterità non-umana è di reciproca contaminazione e co-determinazione: una relazione nella quale l'arte rappresenta una ostentazione fedele ed eretica, una stratificazione vibrante. Muovendosi da un mero processo creativo e uni-direzionale verso un campo di relazionalità cosmologica e processualità percettiva, una estetica posthuman è, dunque, il divenire di questa contaminazione plurale che permette forme differenti di individuazione e soggettivazione.

PAROLE CHIAVE: post-umanesimo critico, percezione, relazionalità, materialità, estetica posthuman

Posthuman Aesthetics: Perception and Relationality, Mapping the Field through the Lens of Critical Posthumanism

Critical posthumanism offers the tools to overcome the epistemological limits of humanism. These are the limits of an epistemology of domination over otherness, particularly non-human alterities that, from the humanist standpoint, end up occupying an ancillary position with regard to the human-animal. As such, aesthetics needs to be rethought beyond these limits, rebutting an idea that matches with a transcendental notion of beauty, conceiving it as an ideal form. Rather, the viewpoint of critical posthumanism permits an alignment with a notion of aesthetics that pertains a field of relationality and perception. By drawing from these two axes, this article proposes a map of a posthuman aesthetics that aims to signal the ways in which matter becomes an intimate and active part of creative processes: a monstrous muse that, from a platonic inspiration

for the human soul, becomes the carnal copula of an embodied mind. The ecological relation between human and non-human otherness is one of reciprocal contamination and co-determination: a relation in which art represents a faithful and heretical ostentation, a vibrant stratification. Moving from a mere creative and mono-directional process to a field of cosmological relationality and perceptive processuality, a posthuman aesthetics is, then, the becoming of such a plural contamination, allowing different forms of individuation and processes of subjectivation.