Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism

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In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order . . . only one . . . has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. And that appearance . . . was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared . . . one can certainly wager that man would be erased. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

At the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism—a humanism made to the measure of the world.

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*

The struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves.

Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument"

Feminist Studies 39, no. 3.

As Michel Foucault observes in the quotation above, the concept of "man" is a relatively recent production—a mutation. In US academe, Foucault's observation that "man" is a historically contingent formation is often credited with establishing what has become a scholarly imperative: namely, that the question of "man" be a central object of humanistic inquiry, interrogation, and critique. It is commonly held that Foucault's work set the stage such that any later attempt to naturalize "man" or depict this formation as inevitable would typically be met with skepticism. Many fields, including posthumanism, have been inspired by the legacy of Foucault's generative critique.

Yet, I worry that to suggest a seamless, patrilineal link between poststructuralist criticism and posthumanist theory could potentially display a Eurocentric tendency to erase the parallel genealogies of thought that have anticipated, constituted, and disrupted these fields' categories of analysis. For instance, fifteen years before Foucault's publication of *The Order of Things*, Aimé Césaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, set before us an urgent task: How might we *resignify* and *revalue* humanity such that it breaks with the imperialist ontology and metaphysical essentialism of Enlightenment man? Césaire's groundbreaking critique was hastened by a wave of decolonial resistance that arguably provided the historical conditions of possibility for Foucault's subsequent analysis. Like Césaire, critics commonly associated with the theorization of race and colonialism, such as Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, anticipated and broadened the interrogation and critique of "man" by placing Western humanism in a broader field of gendered, sexual, racial, and colonial relations. Their work, like that of Foucault, is similarly invested in challenging the epistemological authority of "man," but they also stress that "man's" attempts to colonize the field of knowledge was, and continues to be, inextricably linked to the history of Western imperialism. They maintain that the figure "man" is not synonymous with "the human," but rather is a technology of slavery and colonialism that imposes its authority over "the universal" through a racialized deployment of force.

With the full-fledged arrival of posthumanist theory in the 1990s, the epistemological integrity of "man" was subject to a heretical critique, as posthumanists challenged a range of conceptual pieties rooted in Enlightenment thought. Posthumanists attempted to reorient our

Books Discussed in This Essay

HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language. By Kalpana Rahita Seshadri. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture. By Michael Lundblad. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect. By Mel Y. Chen. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

understanding of human agency by underscoring human subjectivity's interdependency and porosity with respect to a world Enlightenment humanists often falsely claimed to control. Demonstrating a profound skepticism of subject/object distinctions and dominant ontologies, the first decades of posthumanism generated vital critical concepts, such as "cyborg,"[1] "autopoiesis,"[2] and "virtual body."[3] Together, these concepts stressed the processual and co-constitutive nature of human embodiment, knowledge production, and culture in relation to environment, objects, nonhuman animals, and technology. (Human) agency was reconceived as a network of relations between humans and nonhumans, replacing the figure of sovereignty with the process of enmeshment such that intentionality is de-ontologized.[4] What posthumanists held in common was a critique of the Enlightenment subject's claims to mastery, autonomy, and dominance over material and virtual worlds.[5] Posthumanist theory powerfully demonstrated the constructed and often spurious conceptual foundation of Enlightenment humanism. However, its critics maintained that the acuity of posthumanism's intervention was undercut when its scholars effectively sidestepped the analytical challenges posed by the categories of race, colonialism, and slavery.[6] In short, while posthumanism took note of the challenge posed by Foucault, I argue that it still too often bypasses the earlier one posed by Césaire.

However subversive posthumanism's conceptual points of departure, posthumanism remained committed to a specific *order of rationality*,

one rooted in the epistemological locus of the West, and more precisely that of Enlightenment man—Wynter's "Man."[7] While posthumanism may have dealt a powerful blow to the Enlightenment subject's claims of sovereignty, autonomy, and exceptionalism with respect to nonhuman animals, technology, objects, and environment, the field has yet to sufficiently distance itself from Enlightenment's hierarchies of rationality: "Reason" was still, in effect, equated with Western and specifically Eurocentric structures of rationality. Thus, the very operations of rationality used to evaluate the truth claims of the Enlightenment subject remained committed to its racial, gendered, and colonial hierarchies of "Reason" and its "absence."

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that during the 1990s some scholars of race expressed ambivalence about the stakes and promise of calls to become "post" modern and "post" human. Some believed, like Africana philosopher Lewis Gordon, that black people must be humanists for the "obvious" reason that "the dominant group can 'give up' humanism for the simple fact that *their humanity* is presumed," whereas "other communities have struggled too long for the humanistic prize."[8] However, I would argue that these, and similar, sentiments have been largely misunderstood. It is not that critics such as Gordon simply sought admission into the normative category of "the human"; rather, they attempted to transform the category from within, and in fact they hoped to effect a greater understanding and appreciation of the transformative potential of Africana thought more generally. The hope was not that black people would gain admittance into the fraternity of Man—the aim was to displace the order of Man altogether. Thus, what they aspired to achieve was not the extension of *liberal* humanism to those enslaved and colonized, but rather a transformation within humanism.

Even here, as I observe the customary practice of providing a brief genealogical sketch of the field, I find myself amid troubling gendered and racialized citational waters. I wonder how the conceptual touchstones that have come to define posthumanism and its emergent expressions might be altered if a philosopher such as Wynter—associated with the different but not unrelated field of Caribbean literary criticism—were to be widely perceived as belonging to posthumanism's genealogy. Cuban-born Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter, writing during the same period as posthumanism's most commonly

named progenitors—Margaret Boden, Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, and Bruno Latour[9]—developed a remarkably dexterous transdisciplinary critique of antiblackness that was as engaged with the anticolonial thought of Césaire and Fanon[10] as it was with key theories now commonly associated with posthumanism. Wynter utilized many of posthumanism's critical concepts, including autopoiesis, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics, but more importantly she interrogated the racialized and gendered relevance of these thematics, often transforming posthumanist concepts in the process.[11] For instance, Wynter's critique of the metaphysical and ontological imperialism that underwrites the globalizing equation of "woman" with a biocentric conception draws on Francisco J. Varela's argument that all "self-organizing systems depend for their autonomy on a mode of systemic closure, both cognitive and organizational."[12] In Wynter's view, the current order of Man, its auto-institution and telos of stable replication, effectively ignores the incommensurable cultural motivations and meanings that shape the divergent subjectivities of those it deems "woman" according to its biocentric model. In other words, Man's culture-specific mode of identity, and the self-referentiality of its code, potentially leads to cognitive and affective closures, even in Western feminisms. While a fuller engagement with Wynter's work is beyond the scope of this review essay, her provocation is worth considering: Might there be a (post) humanism that does not privilege European Man and its idiom? Posthumanism's past and, arguably, ongoing investment in Europe as standard-bearer of "Reason" and "Culture" circumscribes its critique of humanism and anthropocentricism because it continues to equate humanism with Enlightenment rationality and its peculiar representation of humanity, "as if it were the human itself."[13] Is it possible that the very subjects central to posthumanist inquiry—the binarisms of human/animal, nature/culture, animate/inanimate, organic/inorganic—find their relief outside of the epistemological locus of the West? Perhaps the "post" human is not a temporal location but a geographic one—a matter I will return to at the end of this essay.

Currently, the field is revising its commitments, likely due to the challenges posed by past and emergent interlocutors working in such diverse fields as biopolitics, animal studies, object-oriented ontology, actor-network theory, assemblage theory, systems theory, affect

theory, cognitive science, feminist new materialism, neovitalism, and ecocriticism. Posthumanism is rapidly evolving, and a number of recent texts seek to demonstrate posthumanism's potential for feminist of color theory, queer studies, postcolonialism, disability studies, and material feminism, and vice versa. It is to this emerging critique that my analysis will now turn. I will discuss recent work emerging at the threshold of a posthumanist animal studies that takes the politics of race as its point of departure, challenging the exclusion of racial subjects and themes in posthumanism while also resisting the lure of liberal human recognition as a potential salve for the persistence of bestializing social logics.

All of the texts featured in this essay demonstrate the promise of reciprocal contribution between scholars of feminism and those of posthumanism. In this scholarly reciprocity, they establish the importance of feminist philosophies of race for posthumanist critiques of what Cary Wolfe has called "the discourse of species."[14] Undeniably shaped by the aims and preoccupations of posthumanism, they expand the field from within by bringing to the forefront incisive analyses of race, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. Posthumanist articulations of animal studies have centrally challenged the semio-material practice of casting "the animal" as the opposable limit to "the human." The suggestion that the human humanizes himself through the negation of his animality, they argue, has historically been "fundamentally biopolitical in its effects."[15] For feminist and queer theorists, animal studies may appear to open up new resources or even renew interest in ecofeminism's earlier and ongoing critiques of anthropocentricism—critiques that are currently being expanded under the rubric of feminist "new materialisms."[16] The texts that are the subject of this review essay contribute to the rising scholarly momentum challenging the logic and biopolitical practice of human-animal binarism, each offering a unique critique of the regulatory power of discourse.

Kalpana Rahita Seshadri's *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* is a careful and generative study of the intersections and divergences subtending Jacques Derrida's, Giorgio Agamben's, and Foucault's philosophies of language and power with respect to ethics and politics. Drawing on varied sources such as J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Charles Chesnutt's "The Dumb Witness," and aerialist Philippe Petit's *Man on Wire*, it takes as its central task the disruption of the hierarchical binary that

purports to distinguish speech from silence. Seshadri argues that the figuration of silence as privation has been central to the law's biopolitical expression with respect to race and nonhuman animals. Namely, power conflates law's peculiar speech with the capacity for speech, and this conflation is then equated with being human. Law, in turn, denies those it deems "inhuman" access to speech and law, thereby producing the inhumanity it excludes. Thus, the "inhuman's" putative privation of speech, the very figure of inhumanity, is in fact an effect of law. Seshadri questions the presumption that "speech" distinguishes human from inhuman by reminding the reader that "language" encompasses speech and silence. Silence, according to Seshadri, is "not identical with not speaking;" rather, it is an "empty space" where the regulatory power of discourse is inoperable (34). For Seshadri, what Derrida termed "trace" possesses the transformative possibilities of this "empty space": trace is not the underlying logic or historical origin of a particular discourse, but rather the "self-canceling and instituted origin," "the condition of all conditions of possibility" for speech and its play of *différance* (xiv). Thus, "silence" is a space of possibility for something other than the law.

Rejecting the authority of law, Seshadri maintains that the figure of silence—the space and movement between law and language—possesses alternative ethical and political possibilities that lie beyond the purview of law. Seshadri suggests that "silence" is a political realm, a site of contestation. While silence can function as an alibi for power, it also holds the converse potential for the neutralization of power's characterization of silence as privation and therefore inhuman. Thus, silence is both an instrument and disruption of what Agamben has referred to as the "anthropological machine," or the recursive attempt to adjudicate, dichotomize, hierarchize, and stage a conflict between "the human" and "the animal" based on the putative presence or absence of language.[17] If it is possible for language to be liberated from law, to some extent, then perhaps silence holds open the possibility for power's neutralization.

Much current scholarship in the field of animal studies is in the midst of grappling with the implications of a powerful legacy—that of "animal rights," and Seshadri's text expands and deepens a growing critical consensus in the field that justice should not and cannot be equated with liberal humanist investments in law and rights.

Within the field of animal studies, prominent animal rights advocates such as Tom Regan and Peter Singer[18] have been heavily critiqued for taking for granted the subject of ethics—namely, they have been criticized for both reinscribing a faulty liberal humanist conception of human subjectivity and elevating this flawed construction to the status of an ethical standard. Such a standard has been thoroughly dismantled by a range of interdisciplinary critics, in particular posthumanists and scholars in disability studies, who allege that Singer's and Regan's philosophical frameworks actually undercut an appreciation for the difference they claim to respect.[19] In other words, rather than undermining liberal humanism's hold on the ethical imagination, the animal rights framework expands and deepens it. Furthering this line of critique, Seshadri's text disarticulates an equation between law and justice. In *HumAnimal*, ethics are no longer beholden to law, and ethical possibility lies beyond the boundaries of law. Moreover, as the measure of ethical right and belonging, "the human" standard is revealed as fundamental to law's injustice for both people of color and animals.

Seshadri models a form of careful reading that shows how Derrida, Agamben, and Foucault open up and shed light on the other's investigations of biopolitical themes, contributing much creativity and insight to our reading of established thinkers in the area of biopolitical theory. However, Seshadri's astute reading would have benefited from more engaged consideration of race theory and postcolonialism. *HumAnimal* opens boldly and provocatively: "This book aims to make a contribution to the philosophy of race and racism in terms of the questions raised in studies of animality and human propriety" (ix). While I believe Seshadri's reading of race in light of posthumanist theory contributes much insight for future work, the view I have put forth in this essay suggests that there is much humanity, and even humanism, that *post*humanist theory has yet to pass through. Posthumanists have not yet sufficiently interrogated the claims of posthumanism in light of the theoretical practices and ways of living humanity foregrounded in the work of thinkers such as Cesaire and Wynter. If posthumanists were to do so, I have argued, this engagement would deepen posthumanist thought. Similarly, *HumAnimal*'s intervention into philosophies of race would be more effective were it more closely tied to specified theorizations of race. For instance,

thinkers including, but not limited to, Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe come to mind as possible interlocutors.[20] Both have not only thought seriously about the antiblack racialization of speech acts and silencing but also the ontological entanglements of animality and blackness—in Mbembe's case with Agamben, Derrida, and Foucault in mind. Nevertheless, what *HumAnimal* does exceptionally well is reveal the foundational violence of law, which certainly contributes to antiracist critiques of law.

Like *HumAnimal*, Michael Lundblad's *The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* grounds its arguments in the close reading of (mostly) literary texts, engaging the works of Henry James, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, and Edgar Rice Burroughs. Lundblad persuasively argues that an analysis of what he terms the "discourse of the jungle" is essential for our understanding of the convergence of race and animality in the Progressive Era. The "discourse of the jungle" emerges at the intersection of Darwinism and Freudianism (1). While Darwinian thought laid the groundwork for imagining that the human was of "animal descent," the popularization of Freudian psychology and sociology made it common to interpret human animality in a particular way: the purportedly observable behavior of "real" animals comes to represent humanity's "natural" "animal" instincts. According to this view, humans were instinctually "heterosexual in the name of reproduction and violent in the name of survival" (4–5). What was once seen as a betrayal of Protestant codes of conduct was now, in the new Freudian framework, understood as a failure to control one's innate animal instincts or, in the case of homosexuality, as a threat to Darwinian reproduction.

According to Lundblad, the discourse of the jungle provides an understanding and a framework for the Progressive Era's racist regulation of exploitative behaviors in the form of eugenics, imperialist conquest, labor exploitation, lynching, penal reform, and animal abuse. At a time when an understanding of human behavior was increasingly reliant upon a construction of an "animal" human psyche, the discourse of human animality bifurcated along racial lines. From this insight emerges Lundblad's most powerful and potentially field-transformative intervention. In the discourse of humane reform, white humans, especially those with class privilege, were distinctive in that they had the capacity to restrain, control, or repress their

"animal instincts," unlike black people who were possessed by "savagery" and "passions." This racially bifurcated view ostensibly preempted a racially neutral conception of human animality in the discourse of humane reform. The black "savage" was placed below the ranks of those that possessed animal instincts—white humans *and* animals—even if the point of humane reform was to rise above one's animal instincts. According to this view, white society's restraint and progress in humane reform was a marker of evolutionary superiority; conversely, black people were not only inhumane but also displayed a passion for and a delight in cruelty that was even absent in the "lowest" animals. Thus, at the moment when the conception of "the human" was reorganized such that humanity was understood as coincident with "the animal," humane discourse relying on this new understanding simultaneously reformulated blackness as inferior to both "the human" and "the animal."

Lundblad not only traces the racialized development of the jungle as a discourse but also highlights cultural texts that resist its powerful sway, demonstrating that this discourse is "more recent, complicated, and significant" than the existing scholarship tends to suggest (2). In fact, Lundblad reinterprets a number of texts that would appear to emblematize the "jungle," such as Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. In Lundblad's reading, London's texts articulate queer resistances to heteronormativity's emphasis on "genitals acts" as the grounds for privileging or pathologizing sexuality and identity (31). Building on the work of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and in light of Foucault's famous declaration that during the nineteenth century the homosexual had become a "species," Lundblad argues that turn-of-the-century discourse on homosexuality was intimately related to the contemporaneous discourse of animality, as the term "species" might suggest.[21]

Taking Lundblad's argument a step further, I would argue that the cross-discursive connections drawn between species and homosexuality appear to invite a much wider conversation about how the discourse of race shaped the "discourse of species" generally and the invention of the "homosexual" in particular. For example, Siobhan Somerville's "Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body" has shown that the methodologies and iconography that drove dominant scientific ideologies of race were subsequently

taken up in the scientific pursuit of an emerging discourse of sexuality during the same period.[22] Somerville queries, "Is it merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively policing the imaginary boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies?"[23] The word homosexual, itself, seemed to conjure for some people anxieties about miscegenation, as the "barbarously hybrid word" was a mix of Latin and Greek.[24] While it may have emerged during the Progressive Era, the jungle's reach extends well beyond this period as it continues to possess explanatory and justificatory power, constructing the nature of "the beast" both in terms of human and nonhuman animals (see 125–135).

Mel Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* complements Seshadri's and Lundblad's analyses of the racialized discourse of animality by extending posthumanist inquiry into biopolitics beyond the bounds of the human/animal distinction. Analyzing dehumanizing insults, film, environmental illness, toys, and Asian/American art, *Animacies* illuminates how animacy and affect subvert and, indeed, queer the putatively stable, hierarchical, ontological boundaries dividing human, plant, animal, and stone. *Animacies* is groundbreaking in that it brings queer of color theory, affect theory, disability studies, feminist new materialism, feminist science studies, and critical animal studies to the field of posthumanist theorization of biopolitics. More to the point, *Animacies* is important because it places queer, trans, and/or disabled people of color's subjectivity at the center of posthumanist investigations of biopolitics, demonstrating that said subjectivities experience biopolitical violence in ways that are correlated with particular kinds of intensity, but which ultimately have ramifications far beyond those "marginal" identities.

According to Chen, a thorough study of the representational politics of hierarchies of animacy is key to parsing the anxieties that surround the production of "the human" in contemporary times. Chen argues that the initiation and operations of the dominant animacy hierarchy queers ontology and intimacy by subverting the taxonomical borders it putatively erects between humans and animals or humans and metals, for example. Biopolitics is enacted through the arbitrary coding and recoding of rubrics and the referents the hierarchy claims to index. Betraying its own ontological propositions,

biopolitics unmoors the very boundaries and hierarchies it initiates, thereby producing incalculable slippages and contaminations. Rather than acknowledge the fundamental failure of the prevailing animacy hierarchy as a philosophy and ethics, these endemic slippages and contaminations are instead cast into biopolitical terms as the failure and toxicity of queers, women, people of color, and the disabled.

For Chen, dominant hierarchalized animacy scales not only produce indefensible ontological propositions but also misrecognize the ways that affect subverts these linear hierarchies as nonhuman matter—animate and inanimate—makes affective demands on humans. Building on work such as Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*, and Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* and *Queer Phenomenology,* Chen tracks affect, rather than presume that it is restricted to a particularized and bounded subject. In *Animacies*, affect can engage many bodies at once and emanates from (non) human bodies, organic and inorganic. Chen's analysis is highly attentive to the ways biopolitics choreographs transgressions of putatively discrete categories and linear teleology, and yet Chen does not cede all of animacy's transgressions to the machinations of the biopolitical, since matter itself is fundamentally irreverent to prevailing hierarchies. Inanimate matter and nonhuman animals have affective power, shape human subjectivity, and alter human perception. In fact, nonhuman matter animates biopolitical realizations and affectivity. In *Animacies*, Chen creates a conceptual archipelago where we can think anew about the quotidian commodities that make up our daily lives in the West: the specter of white children's toxic interactivity with Chinese manufactured lead toys calls forth and enacts a biopolitics that provides matter and substance to posthumanist theories of process and porosity between humans and objects, animate and inanimate, East and West, and black and white, but such moments also exceed the prior preoccupations of biopolitical theory and posthumanism.

Animacies provokes the subterranean topic of animism, which, I believe, haunts posthumanism and related fields such as animal studies, neovitalism, object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, panpsychism, and feminist new materialism. Chen's *Animacies* explicitly critiques the Eurocentric discourse of animism, which is important because those who want to expand the field of agency beyond

"the human" run the risk of being deemed animists. Along these lines, I believe we should actually place greater pressure on the distinction (and even hierarchy) between cosmology and philosophy/theory. Indeed I wonder if posthumanists are willing to go one step beyond a critique of the discourse of "primitivity" by also engaging the knowledge production of those deemed primitive?[25] I wonder how a collapse of the hierarchical distinction between philosophy/critical theory and non-Western cosmology might alter posthumanist analysis.

In conclusion, if we take Wynter's cautionary note that Man is a genre[26]—not to be equated with "the human," because to do so would only instantiate colonialism's authority—then might it be possible that an alternate geography of humanity may yield another modality of be(com)ing human other than Agamben's "anthropological machine"? While Seshadri's powerful reading of silence persuades me of such a possibility, I am reminded of the racial and colonial practice of silencing non-Western epistemic systems and philosophies. I suggest that we need to reimagine "the human" as an index of a multiplicity of historical and ongoing contestations and to identify the relational operations of such contestations rather than take "the human's" colonial imposition as synonymous with all appearances of "human." It has largely gone unnoticed by posthumanists that their queries into ontology often find their homologous (even anticipatory) appearance in decolonial philosophies that confront slavery and colonialism's inextricability from the Enlightenment humanism they are trying to displace. Perhaps this foresight on the part of decolonial theory is rather unsurprising considering that exigencies of race have crucially anticipated and shaped discourses governing the nonhuman (animal, technology, object, and plant).

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire called for what Foucault would later describe as the epoch of man "perhaps nearing its end," to do just that—end, as the epoch of man, its hegemonic mode of rationality, was and remains an effect of slavery, conquest, and colonialism. If, as Foucault proposed, man is a mutation, then by definition, as R. L. Rutsky notes, it "cannot be seen as external randomness that imposes itself upon the biological or material world—nor, for that matter, on the realm of culture. Rather, mutation names that randomness which is always already immanent in the processes by

which both material bodies and cultural patterns replicate themselves."[27] Man's authority, its process of auto-inscription and auto-institution, was and continues to be predicated on slavery and colonial imposition.

According to Wynter, a mutation at the level of the episteme, one as transformative as that which ushered in the epoch of Foucault's "man," is required if knowledge is to break from Man's cognitive and conceptual structures.[28] Some of posthumanism's earliest critics interjected that the field would benefit from more attentiveness to the politics of gender, race, class, and ability, as they believed that the field had unwittingly reinscribed Western exceptionalism, technological fetishism, and ableism in its embrace of "prosthetically-enhanced futures."[29] It would, however, be a mistake to narrowly interpret such criticism as simply a matter of access and identity, something like "posthumanism for everyone." To do so would miss the larger point, which concerns posthumanism's stated promise and even responsibility to break with Enlightenment's order of consciousness. As Wolfe notes in *What Is Posthumanism?*, one of the hallmarks of liberal humanism "is its penchant for that kind of pluralism, in which the sphere of attention and consideration (intellectual or ethical) is broadened and extended to previously marginalized groups, but without in the least destabilizing or throwing into radical question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralization."[30] A call for a transformative theory and practice of humanity should not be mistaken for the fantasy of an absolute break with humanism, which has animated so many "post" moments. Rather, in the best work, the "post" marks a commitment to "work through" that which remains liberal humanist about their philosophy. Neil Badmington, in "Theorizing Posthumanism," makes the latter point, arguing that a rigorous posthumanism must strive to reach beyond (liberal) humanism while acknowledging that there is still much (liberal) humanism in the posthumanist landscape to work through.[31] While I started this essay by observing the customary practice of placing the works in context of a genealogy, what is truly exciting about this moment in posthumanism is that Seshadri, Lundblad, and Chen are charting a new path for future work rather than reinscribing preexisting paradigms. All three of these texts produce much enthusiasm in this reader about what is to come for posthumanism.

Notes

1. Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149. Haraway's "cyborg" articulates a (female) human body that is both organic and inorganic, human and animal, nature and culture, initially conceived as a challenge to fantasies of naturalism, purity, and essentialism in feminism and society writ large.
2. Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1980), 78. Taking the form of a self-generating feedback loop, autopoiesis refers to a closed system that continuously generates the components for its own self-perpetuation.
3. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 20. About the term "virtual body," Hayles writes, "I intend to allude to the historical separation between information and materiality and also to recall the embodied processes that resist this division."
4. Pyyhtinene and Tamminem provide a careful and succinct overview of the development of alternate theorizations of "flat ontology" in posthumanism and related fields. Olli Pyyhtinen and Sakari Tamminem, "We Have Never Been Only Human: Foucault and Latour on the Question of Anthropos," *Anthropological Theory* 11, no. 2 (2011): 135–52.
5. Neil Badmington's *Posthumanism* provides a cogent overview of the first decades of posthumanist theory. Neil Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).
6. Judith M. Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Halberstam and Livingston provide one of the earliest attempts to acknowledge and remedy the critique that posthumanism's interventions into humanism had been far too context-specific and that it had not yet become accountable to the politics of race, gender, and colonialism.
7. In Michel Foucault's quotation "man" is lower case, so when I reference his conceptualization I will observe his nomenclature. "Man" will be capitalized whenever I refer to Sylvia Wynter's critical revision of Foucault's genealogy. Man, as in Wynter's epigraph at the start of this essay, names a subject that is coterminous with a specific order of rationality that casts "European man" as both the apex and normative measure of all of humanity. Wynter has spent her entire career refining this concept; however, her essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" is a good place to start. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

8. Lewis Gordon, "African-American Philosophy: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy," *Philosophy of Education 1998*, (1998): 39 (italics in original).
9. Margaret Boden, *Artificial Intelligence and Natural Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Gregory Bateson, "Conscious Purpose vs. Nature," in *The Dialects of Nature*, ed. David Cooper (London: Penguin, 1969); Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. B. Dutton, 1974); Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*; Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
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23. Somerville, "Scientific Racism," 247.
24. Ibid., 258–59.
25. I thank Marques Redd for continuing to push me regarding the issue of "alternative systems" as it pertains to my own investigation into the ontological and epistemological intersections of race and species discourses in Western science and philosophy.
26. David Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter," *Small Axe* 8 (September 2000): 183–97. The phrase "genre of the human" was developed by Wynter in order to provincialize Enlightenment-based humanism, or "Man," and challenge its claims to universality. The phrase suggests that Man is one genre of "human" and not "the human" itself.
27. R. L. Rutsky, "Mutation, History, and Fantasy in the Posthuman," *Subject Matters: A Journal of Communication and the Self* 3, no. 2 and 4, no.1 (2007): 110–11.
28. See Scott, "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism," 195–97.
29. Mark Dery, *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 136.
30. Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 99.
31. Neil Badmington, "Theorizing Posthumanism," *Cultural Critique* 53 (Winter 2003): 10–27.