

# Aesthetics of Posthumanism

## Reimagining Human Cohabitations

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This article introduces the aesthetics of posthumanism as a genuine trend in philosophical aesthetics that emerged in the early decades of the 21st century. Engaging with an innovative imagination of the cohabitation of various life forms, the aesthetics of posthumanism rethinks interspecies encounters across both cultural and natural environments, prompting us to consider ethically motivated images of environmental awareness and creative adaptation. Building on phenomenological, deconstructive, and schizoanalytic methodological insights, this article aims to highlight a turning point in contemporary aesthetic research that questions our anthropocentric, speciesist prejudices and presents them as obsolete in a world shaped by the global environmental crisis. To address the complexity of this topic, the article presents contributions that map various approaches to the 'posthuman situation' in the artistic and philosophical imagination of contemporary human identity. The first set of referred texts targets the multifaceted – environmental, social, and technological – disaster caused by the speciesist, self-centred humanism of the modern era, and the subsequent rupture of posthumanist art from it. This aesthetic perspective gives rise to resistance through posthumanist engagement. The second set of references addresses various problems related to anthropocentric aesthetics. By introducing thinkers who articulate distinct viewpoints on the politics of aesthetic imagination, this article presents two contrasting approaches to contemporary visuality: while one group welcomes the environmentally caring approach of post-anthropocentrism, the other advocates preserving the anthropocentric one. | *Keywords: Posthumanism, Anthropocentrism, Anthropocene, Deconstruction, Phenomenology, Schizoanalysis, Imagination, Critical Thinking, Cognitive Emotions, Cohabitation*

### 1. Introduction: What Politics of Aesthetic Imagination?

The aesthetics of posthumanism holds that it is time to call for an innovative imagination. We, humans, need to overcome the problematic legacy of the Enlightenment, with its wrongly justified racist, sexist, and speciesist prejudices of the otherness. We need to welcome otherness because we are living at the turning point of our legitimate fears.

Modern fear of alterity, which serves as a primary pretext for justifying human cruelty toward non-human beings, has been effectively challenged by postmodern thinkers. As they (Lyotard, 1984; Bauman, 2002) pointed out,

the modern era tends to ground its 'humanism' in the Enlightenment idea of human cognitive exceptionality, which also entails 'rationality'. Reflecting on the perplexing disaster of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake and tsunami flood splashing the ancient city, both Voltaire's sarcastic depiction of nature's ruthless power over human culture in *Candide* (2018) and Kant's aesthetic judgment of the sublime horror in contact with natural elements in *Critique of Judgement* (2009) were grounded in human fear of powerlessness, caused by failing imagination when facing monstrously excessive, enormous power of natural elements. While Voltaire fights back with sarcasm, Kant (2009) goes further. He turns to moral reason for guidance, aiming to use it to morally 'protect' human identity from non-human alterity. Subsequently, the industrial era of modern mass culture has nourished this seemingly legitimate fear of non-human beings through its decadent aesthetic imagination in the 'horror' genre. Contrary to posthumanist ecohorror, which overlaps environmental fear with symbiotic interfaces, modern horror movies, devaluing and reductively depicting spiders, mice, or snakes as numb 'monsters', distributed hate of animals across mass media. The modern culture industry economically profited from human xenophobia for over two centuries.

Posthumanism joins Lyotard's postmodernism in its call to stop and pause. It invites us to confront the modern exclusivism of 'human nature' grounded in anthropocentric reason. As Lyotard (1994) noticed, in the aesthetic experience of the sublime, it is not imagination that fails; it is reason. It is the imagination that opens a new, creative alliance with otherness, while the reason, unable to range it in its predetermined categories, remains confused and hostile. While precautionary rationality rejects alterity for safety reasons, creative imagination can face it and integrate it (Lyotard, 1991). Kant's aesthetic vision of the sublime, designed for a pre-industrial world, is hardly applicable to a world that has learned its lesson of modern industrialisation and is seeking to become post-industrial. Paradoxically, in a world heavily damaged by global industry, the chance of survival for the human species lies in its ability to question the rigidity of anthropocentric reason. It entails adopting an innovative, inclusive, and caring approach to reimagining mutual cohabitation in living environments (Steiner, 2005).

In the 21st century, we, humans, are living on the planet Earth, irreversibly damaged by the global effects of human warfare and industrial 'progress', right inside collapsing ecosystems, alongside disappearing plants and endangered animal species. Human hostility made many non-human beings vulnerable to the point of becoming massively extinct. In such a fragile environment, it is neither reasonable nor safe to continue cultivating attitudes of human superiority. The aesthetics of posthumanism assumes that if we wish make our future-oriented imagination responsible (Jonas, 1984), we can no longer support anthropocentric cruelty. Humans need to stop the systematic exploitation of other-than-human life forms and reimagine new ways of interspecies cohabitation. Joining the aesthetics of posthumanism means becoming human in a newly safe, caring, hospitable way.

## 2. Knowledge Gaps: Mapping the Limits of Anthropocentric Aesthetics

Posthumanism is a genuine trend in philosophical aesthetics that emerged in the early decades of the 21st century. Authors such as Cary Wolfe (2010; 2026) and Matthew Calarco (2008; 2015) have introduced posthumanism as a new perspective on aesthetic experiences and judgements regarding interspecies encounters. Their groundwork searching for paths beyond anthropocentrism and the human-animal divide was later completed by philosophers of art and embodiment working in the fields of phenomenology (Buchanan, 2008; Dufourcq, 2022), deconstruction (Still, 2015; Fritsch, Lynes and Wood, 2018; Mandieta, 2024), schizoanalysis (Massumi, 2014; Cimatti, 2020), cultural studies (Dürbeck and Hüpkes, 2020), ecofeminism (Harraway, 2003; Harraway, 2008; Cavalieri, 2001; Cavalieri, 2008), and performativity (Barad, 2003). By revising the aesthetic problems of symbiosis between human and non-human beings, these thinkers developed innovative approaches to the cohabitation of various life forms. The goal of their work is to rethink and reimagine human agency in personal encounters with various agents in the natural and cultural environments.

Building on their insights, this thematic issue aims to highlight a turning point in contemporary aesthetic research, focusing on the correlations among people, land, animals, plants, and other organisms in mutually inhabited environments. By questioning our shared expectations, it elaborates on the crucial role of responsible imagination in aesthetic judgements of our encounters with 'otherness'. Pre-Darwinian metaphysics held that philosophy could define and protect 'human nature' as grounded in a constant structure of the 'human mind', which could be clearly distinguished from that of other species and their cognitive abilities. These anthropocentric beliefs were plausibly challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection (Darwin, 1995), which demonstrated that no species is created once and for all. It does not emerge ready and recognisable at once. A species neither has an ideally predetermined form of life, nor does it generate a fixed type of 'mind'. Instead, species continually evolve by adapting to various environmental challenges and other species agency. A species, including the human species, cannot even exhibit totally constant, unevolving patterns over time, as such rigid patterns would lead to its extinction. Sharing Darwin's processual ontological views, posthumanism points to the instability of metaphysical concepts of 'human soul', 'human mind', or 'human nature'.

Contrary to social Darwinism's tendency to classify and judge people according to racist (Galton, 1904) and sexist (Weininger, 2005) prejudices, posthumanism promotes cultivating mindfulness toward living beings and inclusive engagement in both social and interspecies cohabitation. Inspired by the ethically pioneering works of Schopenhauer (1995), Montaigne (1943), Rousseau (2009), and Bentham (1970), posthumanism enhances the moral and aesthetic frames of Western metaphysical thinking by focusing on its potential for improvement. From the perspective of the aesthetics of posthumanism, a plausibly adapted form of life could be achieved through a shift in the contemporary politics of shared imagination. Such a shift requires

a complementary ethical and aesthetic turn, prompting us to consider images of environmental awareness and creative adaptation. One of the 20th century's plausible ethical examples is Hans Jonas's work *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1984), which has overturned Kant's moral imperative related to 'sublime' forces of nature. In his view, Kant's sublime connection between the aesthetic and the moral, constructed for the pre-globalised and preindustrial era of the Enlightenment, fails in a world shaped by a human-caused global environmental crisis. Humans are morally responsible for the state of the natural environment they leave to future generations. Therefore, in the era of the Anthropocene, characterised by the global climate crisis, caused by toxic industries and massive destruction of natural ecosystems, we shall not protect ourselves from nature; we shall protect nature from ourselves (Jonas, 1984). Subsequent ethical and aesthetic initiatives invite both everyday actors and recipients of art to take responsibility by daring to feel (Aaltola, 2012; Aaltola, 2018) and perform (Barad, 2003) beyond the limits of anthropocentrism.

Let us now focus on the main knowledge gaps in traditional anthropocentric thinking regarding the cohabitation of human and non-human beings. The first knowledge gap concerns our conception of tamed or cultivated non-human beings as an otherness that might be found to be too close, too familiar to humans. Although posthumanist critical thinking welcomes an inclusive imagination of alterity to rethink symbiosis in interspecies cohabitation, it does not conflate this with a homogenising identity achieved through training or cultivation. This topic is echoed by Donna Haraway, who raised concerns about the humanisation of pets in American culture (Haraway, 2008). In her view, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with other species does not entail humanising them. Respecting animals' otherness does not mean normalising their behaviour and appearance to make them look more human-like (Haraway, 2008). She even argues that playing the expected role of human 'best friend' is a demanding job for a dog: "Commonly in the US, dogs are attributed with the capacity for 'unconditional love.' According to this belief, people, burdened by misrecognition, contradiction, and complexity in their human relationships, find solace in unconditional love from their dogs. In turn, people love their dogs as children" (Haraway, 2003, p. 33). To challenge this cultural habit based on misleading expectations of dogs, Haraway formulates a manifesto to establish new ethics and politics that would take dog – human relationships seriously, as a human relationship with "significant otherness" (Haraway, 2003, p. 3). Although pet relationships nurture this sort of love, she still considers that "Being a pet seems to me to be a demanding job for a dog, requiring self-control and canine emotional and cognitive skills matching those of good working dogs. Very many pets and pet people deserve respect. Furthermore, play between humans and pets, as well as simply spending time peaceably hanging out together, brings joy to all participants. Surely that is one important meaning of companion species" (Haraway, 2003, p. 39). Her subversive work invites us to imagine walking a dog in a manner attentive to the dog's specific needs. Can we even conceive of paying attention to both species-related and individual animal needs, without disciplining

or hygienising them? Could we be open to doing things with them in their own way? Even such a simple pleasure as sitting together on the grass, leaning to each other, while aesthetically enjoying our interspecies company, 'peacefully hanging out', as Haraway writes, is not evident for anthropocentric minds.

The second knowledge gap in anthropocentric aesthetics concerns the conception of non-human beings as otherness that is considered too distant to be imagined inclusively. These situations arise when humans identify so closely with their own species that this identification impedes their creative thinking about alterity. By insisting on the ultimate limits of their human identity, they cannot even imagine feeling for a non-human being when they see them suffer. As a remedy for such situations, posthumanist aesthetics might seek to articulate creative artistic imagination in relation to the ethics of cognitive emotions. Introducing her moral theory of cognitive emotions, philosopher Martha Nussbaum proposes an innovative understanding of compassion as a socially enhancing emotion directed not only toward humans but also toward animals. Specifically, she turns to the problem of compassion toward animals, beginning with the view of compassion as a 'basic social emotion' (Nussbaum, 1996), understood as a fundamental human capability to cohabit with others, including other species. In her pioneering work on human and animal capabilities (Nussbaum, 2004; Nussbaum, 2006), she finds compassion toward other species inseparable from the recognition of their dignity and of their worthy, decency-demanding lives. Placed between wonder and outrage, namely between the amazement at animals' ways of life and behaviours and the indignation arising from the recognition that the animals' 'striving is wrongfully thwarted' (Nussbaum, 2023), compassion is a valuable moral emotion responsive to the embodied experience of reality. Compassion is an emotion directed towards animals as beings with which we cohabit the world according to different levels of affective proximity (pets) and distance (wild animals) within a variety of shared spaces that can be directly experienced or imaginatively reconstructed. Its specific artistic and aesthetic imagination offers various visions grounded in cultivating socially virtuous cognitive emotions, such as empathy, sympathy, and compassion. An ethically advanced emotional intelligence is capable not only of considering social cohesion but also of imagining new forms of interspecies togetherness, compassion, and care.

From this post-anthropocentric perspective, humans can survive the global environmental crisis only through interspecies cohabitation and mutual adaptation. A plausible cohabitation with non-human beings does not simply entail cultivating, training, or humanising them. The posthumanist aesthetic rather proposes meeting them halfway through a balanced use of critical and creative thinking. To tame a dog, not only do I let the dog be the dog, but I also willingly partially follow him in his dog expressivity into our mutual process of becoming a pack. To tame means to gain one's trust, to become fellows, and to befriend, in the sense of consensual company and closeness based on mutual voluntary care. A plausible cohabitation with non-human beings,

however, means neither withdrawing myself from feeling for them. When addressing the problem of pushing the non-human otherness to an extreme distance from humans, this ethically charged imagination calls for improving human emotional intelligence by recognising the richness of nonverbal communication in non-human beings. Such ethical resetting of our aesthetic imagination helps us to stop bragging about our own humanity while exploiting and mistreating other species. Enabling this shift requires recognising that cultivating arrogance toward the natural environment contributes to human extinction. An environmentally aware 'human species' cannot protect its children by professing anthropocentrism; it can only protect them by having them reimagine and redesign their future. Contemporary continental philosophy offers several effective methods for addressing this problem.

### 3. Methods: Fostering Post-Anthropocentric Imagination

Posthumanism focuses on systematically shifting its aesthetic imagination toward active engagement with creative and critical thinking, thereby challenging anthropocentric phobias of non-human *xenos*. Let us examine three of its methodological roots.

The first important inspiration for posthumanist aesthetics is phenomenology, particularly eco-phenomenology, which creatively rethinks intersubjectivity as interanimality and connects embodiment to the idea of human kinship with nature. Although empathy through imaginative reconstructions does not resolve Thomas Nagel's (1974) famous enigma, *What is it like to be a bat?*, phenomenology does not dismiss the existence of non-human worlds, pointing to the fact that Nagel's question can be plausibly reformulated in a relational sense, 'What is it like to be with a bat?'. Rather than persuading Nagel of the mysterious forces of empathy, phenomenology makes room for intersubjective aesthetics that fosters the imagination of interspecies kinship.

More specifically, phenomenology proposes that we question the limitations of anthropocentrically framed ethics and formulate a new ethical conception of interspecies cohabitation grounded in compassion and hospitality extended to non-human animals. In *The Structure of Behaviour* (1963), Maurice Merleau-Ponty outlines a theory of kinship between humans and animals that aims to bridge the gap between consciousness and life while preserving their distinctness. It offers the key tools for acknowledging that human and non-human animals share the same imaginative being. In his phenomenological work on embodiment, Merleau-Ponty prefers *Gestalt* psychology to the objective understanding of nature. *Gestalt* consists of the systematic interplay between virtual and actual through the living body. In Merleau-Ponty, animals are autopoietic and sympoietic beings; they consist of affective and active reference to a specific virtual theme operating within oriented ontogenetic, phylogenetic, and behavioural processes. Both human and non-human animals experience the world through their bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2003). Moving bodies show the phenomenality of animal lives – they perceive and imagine others. Through embodiment and empathy, intersubjectivity gives rise

to interanimality in interspecies relations. Thanks to interanimality, we are not isolated from the world; we are inside it and with it.

In her revision of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Anabelle Dufourcq understands imagination as a form of experience – an as if – of the object. The experience is physical and emotional, and it can range from clichéd images or abstract representations to quasi-experience. As she puts it in *The Imaginary of Animals*,

Living beings in general and animals in particular are to be fundamentally defined by an elusive 'to be and not to be' or 'phantom-like' being, which entails their intrinsic relation to meaning, essences, and the virtual. To make my case, I draw upon Merleau-Ponty's concept of Gestalt. I argue that this concept can become a key to framing the relation between the imaginary and animal life in its most fundamental form, as a relation that pervades the morphology of the living body, metabolism, animal attitudes, and behaviours. (Dufourcq, 2022, p. 79)

*Umwelten* of the non-human animals belong to what she calls 'imaginareal'. The 'imaginareal' is a transcendental field that precedes human-made dichotomies between subject/object, real/imaginary. It consists of a flow of sensible appearances that echo and disrupt each other. In the lives of both human and non-human animals, it holds three dimensions: the real (metaphors), the imaginary (images), and the imagination (fantasies).

To advocate for better cohabitation with non-human animals, phenomenology proposes to bridge the gap in anthropocentric thinking by a shift in human imagination. While Merleau-Ponty's 'interanimality' implies thoughts on interterritoriality, Dufourcq's imagining 'with' animals supposes a shared 'imaginareal'. Demonstrating that animal agency is enacted through imaginative thinking that transcends the rigid dichotomies of identity/alterity and human/non-human, the phenomenology invites us to join an inclusive imagination of embodiment that honours interspecies kinship.

The second important inspiration for posthumanist aesthetics is deconstruction, which subverts our prejudices and invites us to care for the marginalised, liminal beings. It allows us to ask questions such as: How can we improve symbiotic relationships among species as they adapt to ongoing environmental change? How to advocate for liminal animals? Because liminal animals live thoroughly among human beings, they cannot be managed simply as wild animal populations. As Colin Jerolmack notes, what a rat is depends upon the meanings that humans ascribe to rathood – pestilence, vermin, filth: "Animals that disgust us, such as rats, are often associated with the most undesirable urban interstices such as sewers" (Jerolmack, 2008, p. 74). Given this, one cannot speak for rats without speaking 'for' pestilence and filth. But, since speaking for pestilence and filth is, almost by definition, absurd, the attempt to speak for rats is absurd and usually treated as such (Wyckoff, 2015).

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida (2008) describes this imaginary interval between human and animal being that was traumatically cut and divided by the hostile authority of human Law. When commenting

on our alienation through anthropocentrically biased 'zoopoetics', Derrida points to the metaphysical violence of this cut. Because neither philosophy nor poetry can entirely free itself from the metaphysical construction of language, they can achieve subversive playfulness only by occasional interpositions. To fill the gaps between animal life and human law, he claims, philosophy shall integrate autobiographic poetry, and poetry shall become philosophically vigilant towards prejudices built into its words' meanings. Improving this cooperation may help overcome the trauma of 'zoopoetics' by developing an innovative, poetically inclusive language for human-animal cohabitation.

Following Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that no individual human being has any 'common' sensation with other humans or other beings. Insisting that there is literally no general 'human mind', Nancy deconstructs the metaphysical prejudice of the 'five senses' in human perception of the world. Because individuals have slightly different senses, each sensorial perception is strictly individual and singular. There is always a gap between individual perceptions, a delay between sensual perception. If one is to be approached and understood by others, one's sensations need to be 'ex-scribed', exposed to others' perception through technical constructions, shared representations, and constructed mediations. In *Being singular plural* (2000), Nancy opts for this mode of existence as 'being-singular-plural', which also means being-with-others, having a common essence, a 'co-essence' (Nancy, 2000, p. 57). Because there is no common human or animal body, there is no common sensorial perception. We can only create poetic technologies of the common – common techné of individual bodies – which help us negotiate our singular sensations with others.

Derrida's concept of 'zoopoetics' and Nancy's concept of 'techné of bodies' might help improve our aesthetic thinking about interspecies imagination. It enables the deconstruction of human hostility toward liminal beings by advocating a willingness to subvert anthropocentric prejudices and to imagine ourselves in their places. Although I will never know exactly what other animals or other humans actually feel, I can empathise with them by imagining their joy or suffering. Put otherwise, deconstruction activates caring imagination through poetic mediation. Such aesthetic engagement can occur through inventive technologies that construct our new, imaginary 'co-essence'. In Nancy's words, the success of interspecies cohabitation only depends on who we allow to enter 'our' plural – who we decide to share with and care for.

The third important inspiration for posthumanist aesthetics is schizoanalysis, especially its emphasis on creative becoming. In this processual ontology of becoming, affective rituals and everyday routines engage living beings in repetitive practices that produce their own territorialisation and entrain other species into mutually beneficial agency, called *sympoiesis*. Such a mutually enjoyed routine can help us understand interspecies cohabitation to the extent that this ethico-aesthetic mannerism is formed through the interspecies rituals of affective bonding – through pollination, the wasp becoming the orchid's sexual organ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Contrary to psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis regards animality as a 'line of flight' along which human beings escape their Oedipal identification. While the Oedipal complex theory claims that the father figure suppresses the primary sexual desire, operating a traumatic 'castration', schizoanalysis refuses to accept that this 'dirty family secret' plays a crucial role in human ontology. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari claim that the unconscious is a machine that produces desire and designs the future, rather than a theatre that represents the trauma of past displacement. In contrast to psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis assumes that desire is everywhere: the libido does not need to be sublimated to be invested economically or politically. To dissolve the psychoanalytic burden of human identity, they introduce the concept of the 'desiring machine', understood as a socially produced unconscious desire that flows in intensities and evolves through delirious imagination of 'becoming-animal', enabling one to experience non-human intensities, to 'go wild'.

In her book *Unbecoming Human* (2020), Felice Cimatti describes this becoming as a mutual process, which involves human participants in unbecoming human. In this process,

New and previously unconsidered vital possibilities are thus disclosed: combinations that transcend the boundaries of the body, forming fluxes in which distinguishing among who is active and who is passive, who is a subject and who is an object, who is human and who isn't, no longer has any meaning. 'Becoming-animal' is thus a twin process of 'deterritorialization' (the process of opening up frontiers, thus blurring the lines between territories) and 'territorialisation' (the process through which new territories, new aggregates and new fluxes are born). (Cimatti, 2020, p. 161)

When a cat spontaneously joins its human in bed while sleeping and trustfully leans next to him, their joyful intensities are produced by psychoanalytical desire neither to turn animals into a father figure nor to turn wilderness into family, but rather by the schizoanalytical desire to be entrained into unbecoming human.

Following Deleuze and Guattari's and Cimatti's schizoanalysis, the aesthetics of posthumanism invites human imagination to access other, non-human perspectives. Contrary to the typical territorialisation of the 'human world', which puts such emphasis on verbal communication, interaction with animals is nonverbal and sensorial – olfactory, haptic, cinematic, and proxemic. When one runs, mutters, or relaxes with non-human beings, one feels the intertwining intensities of physical connection, speed or calm. Thanks to schizoanalysis and its sensitivity to otherness, one can imagine the aesthetically satisfying togetherness of the pack or the flock. Posthuman imagination, open to such processual experiences, helps us appreciate routines that intertwine human and animal habits and assemble them into a sympoiesis of their cohabitation.

#### 4. Articles: Exploring Imagination in Aesthetics of Posthumanism

The articles gathered in this thematic special issue encompass these aspects of the aesthetics of posthumanism. To address the complexity of this topic, the issue presents contributions that map various approaches to the 'posthuman situation' of human identity by rethinking new possibilities and eventual limits of shared human imagination, affectivity, and attention. It introduces evolutionary topics such as social disintegration and ontological strangeness, hostility and hospitality, symbiosis and sypoiesis, insiders and outsiders, alterity and hybridity, solidarity and cohesion. The articles call for awareness of interspecies vulnerabilities. Their creative work, grounded in posthuman imagination, evokes a moral responsibility to protect vulnerable nature from human destructiveness. Their aesthetic thinking is therefore designed as an ethico-political agency that prompts environmental sensibility and care in the Anthropocene.

The first set of articles targets the multifaceted – environmental, social, and technological – catastrophe of modernity, and the subsequent rupture of postmodern art from it. The perspective of artists and their works, presented in this first part of the special issue, critiques the self-centred, narrow-minded humanism that has given rise to resistance through a posthumanist engagement approach. Posthumanist critical thinking through art invites us to overcome the traditional anthropocentric dichotomies grounded in pretentious humanist binaries such as subject/object, human/animal, and culture/nature. New ethical imperatives of biocentrism and ecocentrism call for symbiotic, intertwined, and more collaborative interspecies relationships. Posthumanist ethical concerns lead them to advocate the integration of feeling and knowing, which is central to any morally motivated aesthetic experience. The discussed artists and philosophers suggest overcoming anthropocentric limitations in our aesthetic judgements by encouraging morally engaging cognitive emotions towards vulnerable non-human beings and ecosystems.

Among these contributions, Gabi Balcarce and Andrea Torrano's article *Contaminated Survivals in Inhalaciones territoriales* by Ana Laura Cantera offers a pointed critique of environmental hypocrisy. It introduces Cantera's artistic collaboration with Demian Ferrari and explores the urban spaces of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Bangalore (India) using a device for collecting ambient CO<sub>2</sub>. Drawing on the perspectives of Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, and Vinciane Despret, the authors examine the sympoietic landscape of this artwork, aiming to establish the posthuman coordinates of coexistence and multispecies solidarity, alliance, and collaboration as a vigorous response to the Anthropocene.

Similarly, Vít Pokorný's article *Urban Reality as the Main Motive in China Miéville's Posthuman Aesthetics* introduces the specificities of one of the key artists of posthumanism. Focusing on artistic imagination that engages with social disintegration and interspecies fluidity in dark urban environments, Pokorný demonstrates how Miéville's work, both theoretical and fictional, mobilises critical thinking to reassess the human condition. As the author

emphasises, through the lens of posthumanist sensitivity, Miéville embraces perspectives and negotiations that extend beyond the supposed human and non-human divide.

Another artwork of posthumanism is examined in Jaya Sarkar's article *Posthuman Animality: Situating Theories of Companion Species and Becoming-with in Netflix's Love, Death and Robots, Volume IV*. Criticising anthropocentric prejudices rooted in humanist binarism, the author analyses *Love, Death and Robots* (2025) to explore how animality can be reimagined and recreated through posthuman aesthetics. By engaging with Donna Haraway's concept of companion species and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal, this paper examines the connections among the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of the way we imagine animals. Far from privileging humans over nonhuman animals, Sarkar demonstrates that posthuman aesthetics challenges traditional humanist aesthetics, calling for an alliance across different realms and ecologies.

Panda Prasenjit and Udbhas Kumar Bhoi bring attention to Samantha Harvey's posthumanist work *Orbital*. In their article titled *Non-Human Perception of Aesthetics and the Phenomenon of Overview Effect in Samantha Harvey's Orbital*, they examine how stages represent aesthetic perception under post-terrestrial and post-anthropocentric conditions in outer space. The experiential shifts in aesthetic experiences depicted in *Orbital* are mediated by the cognitive and nonhuman sensorial phenomena known as the overview effect. By situating them alongside their literary representations, the authors demonstrate that spaceflight both shapes and dismantles the anthropocentric aesthetic perception. They argue that the overview effect represents a posthumanist aesthetic experience of the 'postbody', which conceptualises the convergence of shifting perceptions in non-human spaces.

In the next article, *Interweaving Ecohorror and Symbiotic Associations. The Posthuman Aesthetics of Sundarbans in Selected Works of Amitav Ghosh*, Moumita Sahu and Mallika Ghosh Sarbadhikary notice that Sundarbans portray a world that is post-anthropocentrically hybridised. The artworks of Amitav Ghosh highlight multi-layered imaginary environments with frequent human-wild engagements as part of daily survival. The dual character of the Sundarbans reveals the perilous yet intimate bond between the human and the natural world, evoking ecological horror as well as awareness within the anthropocentric realm. Ghosh's posthumanist imagination focuses on the islander's struggle to survive in such complex landscapes in the backdrop of the region's rich socio-cultural history depicted in his ecological texts – *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama* – that simultaneously overlap ecohorror with symbiotic interfaces. Using posthumanist ecohorror as a theoretical framework, the paper argues that Ghosh's illustrations of various environmental catastrophes and social conflicts constitute a posthumanist aesthetic position that enables one to live symbiotically despite precarious circumstances and oppressive political establishment.

The second set of articles addresses various problems related to anthropocentrism. By introducing thinkers who articulate distinct viewpoints on the contemporary politics of aesthetic imagination, it presents two contrasting approaches to human manipulation of the natural environment: while one group proposes creating a caring visuality of post-anthropocentrism, the other advocates preserving the anthropocentric one.

Posthumanist creative thinking, as presented in this second part of the special issue, examines human agency through a philosophical lens and argues that a new moral direction for cognitive emotions can lead human imagination to humbly situate ourselves in the precarious position of non-human beings. Recognising that no being can instantly change its body, posthumanists do not seek to overcome anthropocentric specieism in contemporary aesthetics by modifying our limited possibilities of perception or sensation associated with human bodies. Instead, they focus on how these perceptions and sensations relate to morally biased cognitive emotions and the collectively shared imagination of interspecies encounters. Their call for a shift from humanism to posthumanism, or rather from anthropocentrism to post-anthropocentrism, in contemporary politics of aesthetic imagination arises from ethical poles. Their plural call to imagine interspecies alliance and solidarity demonstrates the necessity of the posthumanist call for a new visuality.

First of these contributions, Michaela Fišerová's article *Aesthetic Frames. Jacques Derrida and Gardener's Cultivation of Hostility*, examines the seemingly obvious traditional aesthetic frames of gardening. To critically address humanist hypocrisy in the gardener's gaze, she proposes that we understand plant cultivation as a division between hospitality and hostility. Following Derrida's critical reading of Kant's beautiful frames and Austin's performative fails, she argues that the gardener's performativity delimits the beautiful and cultivated order of his garden from the wild and chaotic 'outside' he cannot govern. Based on her deconstructive revision of gardening genres, the author concludes that an environmentally engaged aesthetics might redefine the limits of the gardener's hostility towards unselected non-human beings.

The next contribution offers a critique of aesthetic hypocrisy in the tourist gaze, which seeks to appreciate attractive landscapes while ignoring the environmental damage produced by mass tourism. In their article *Contemporary Regimes of Visuality: The Avatar Mountains*, Paolo Furia and Ru Ying focus on our technologically perverted relation to nature. Using Zhangjiajie Forest Park in China as an example, the authors analyse how cinema and digital media have transformed this natural landscape through increased visibility and economic development. From posthumanist perspectives, they examine the drawbacks of such inconsiderate visuality, notably the encouragement of unsustainable practices, such as overtourism, and the technologically programmed aestheticisation of natural beauty.

Another case of anthropocentric hypocrisy is targeted in Tereza Arndt's article *From Forests to Rabbits: Reconsidering Human and Nonhuman Agency in Concentration Camps*. She argues that Nazi concentration camps blurred the

line between human and nonhuman by juxtaposing dehumanised prisoners with animals kept in camp zoos and the SS Angora project. Drawing on survivor testimonies, comic books, and philosophical posthumanism, the article explains why overcoming anthropocentrism is essential for rethinking perspectives on human domination and rigid species boundaries. By treating nonhuman actors as witnesses, the author opens a new space for a posthumanist imagination of interspecies solidarity and shared vulnerability.

The following article draws upon Deleuzian concept of deterritorialisation to show how it can disrupt dominant spatial regimes and enable new forms of spatial relations to emerge. In his article *Spatiality, Place and Territory: An Outline of Landscape and its Experience*, Felipe Matti explores the aesthetic experience of landscape through the conceptual triad of space, territory, and Earth. Focusing on marginalised groups, he argues that territory is the semiotic structuration of space, whereas landscape remains unassimilated, functioning as a site of desubjectification and spatial openness. He concludes that access to landscape is essential to the possibility of otherness and spatial transformation beyond institutional constraints.

Also, Adam Lovasz's and Mark Horvath's article *Opening Aesthetics. Posthumanism and the Crisis of Form in the Anthropocene* reexamines traditional human relationships to Earth. The authors focus on the ongoing collapse of the Earth System's functionality, which is fundamentally reshaping our thinking about nature and the conditions of existence on Earth. Defining the Anthropocene as an era of ontological destabilisation, they described its 'dark ecology' as radically challenging our sensibilities and reforming our imagination of functional relations between non-human nature and human culture. Through multidisciplinary attempts to grasp this new nature-cultural regime, they introduce the post-anthropocentric 'Anthropocene aesthetics' as an encounter with the more-than-human forces of the Earth System that goes beyond traditional art forms and aesthetic strategies. Highlighting the posthumanist dimension of the Anthropocene, they present posthumanist art as a foreground for the nature-cultural forces that define and shape life on our planet. Aesthetic sensibility, which is adequate to these forces, gives humans of the Anthropocene hope for a possible adaptation.

A similarly hopeful approach to posthumanist imagination is presented in Jiří Klouda's article *The Atmosphere of the Living. Gernot Böhme and Adolf Portmann on the Boundaries of Aesthetics and Ethics of Life*, which creates space for a reinterpretation of Böhme's phenomenological aesthetics in relation to the phenomenal morphology of biologist Adolf Portmann. Both of these projects aim to radically reform their disciplines by moving beyond the subject-centric and logocentric foundations of modern anthropology. Using Böhme's concept of atmosphere, the author develops Portmann's notion of the self-manifestation of living beings. Based on this phenomenology of shared living, Klouda formulates a posthumanist ethical call for innovative aesthetic imagination.

We now turn to the critique of these posthumanist standpoints. In her article *De-humanise! Reflection on Psychological and Ethical Limits of More-than-human Aesthetics*, Tereza Hadravová opts for anthropocentric certainties. Her paper examines contemporary artistic critiques of anthropocentrism by focusing on two claims: that aesthetic experience can temporarily displace human perceptual frameworks, and that such displacement carries ethical value. Drawing on selected international artworks, she situates them within a debate from Hume's 18th-century views on human nature to Nagel's 20th-century scepticism about the possibility of adopting non-human points of view. Because she believes there is no space for empathy, she advocates neither pursuit nor valorisation of the posthumanist imagination in art.

Similarly, Šárka Lojdová's contribution avoids the engaged positions of posthumanism within contemporary aesthetics. In her article *Stories Told to Hide the Truth: Climate Disinformation, Animal Behaviour and the Nature of Narratives*, she focuses on Marta Tafalla's recent study, in which the philosopher invites us to learn about global climate change by listening to animals and the stories nature tells us. Based on her comparison of Tafalla's and anti-environmentalists' narrative structures, the author concludes that one can learn about climate from animals' stories only (and only) if one acknowledges that stories are human-made.

What makes this collection of contrasting theoretical contributions relevant is that it proposes considering the contemporary state of aesthetic research across its diverse positions. While one side of these divisive approaches addresses cohabitation with non-human beings as a call for a new visuality of inclusive and caring imagination, the other side of the discussion questions the posthumanist shift in aesthetic imagination. Hopefully, these bipolar negotiations will continue until a common ground is eventually reached.

## 5. Conclusion: Bridging the Anthropocentric Gaps

The aesthetics of posthumanism aims to articulate a complex theory of imagination that supports kinship, care, and sympoiesis in the cohabitation of human and nonhuman beings, without evading the potential philosophical tensions and discrepancies present in current aesthetic discourses.

What makes this post-anthropocentric aesthetic research original is that it proposes methodological approaches grounded in a reconfiguration of the current politics of aesthetic imagination. Compared with environmental aesthetics, the posthumanist aesthetic is mostly rooted in post-structural and phenomenological philosophical traditions. To fulfil its objectives, it combines methods of philosophical work with imagination derived from either Deleuze's, Guattari's, and Cinatti's schizoanalytic expressionism and *sympoiesis* in interspecies becoming, Derrida's and Nancy's deconstructive readings of troubling prejudices that might be subverted into care for liminal beings through an innovated 'zoopoetics', or Merleau-Ponty's and Dufourcq's phenomenological descriptions of embodiment that open paths to 'imaginareal' and kinship with nature. Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of *sympoiesis* as co-becoming is mostly used

to address both similarities and differences in human and non-human territorial negotiations, and to approach hospitality, curiosity, and care in the local politics of interspecies cohabitation. Deconstructive comparative reading focuses on critically revising aporias and knowledge gaps in contemporary conceptions of environmental aesthetics and in the aesthetics of care, which has been predominantly human-centred. Phenomenological descriptions primarily address the roles of imagination, intentionality, and intersubjectivity in human compassion toward animals across various habitats and modes of cohabitation. Explaining the necessity of an intersection between ethics and phenomenology helps clarify the intersubjective basis of compassionate relations with living otherness. These cases can be further described through ecocentric and biocentric aesthetic perspectives that emphasise creative adaptation and a desire for symbiosis.

Whereas the post-Kantian philosophical tradition has prioritised human intellectual and rational capacities as the modalities through which we encounter and develop an understanding of the natural world, more recent developments within phenomenology and deconstruction emphasise that we establish our relations with animal life and natural environments through imaginative capacities, affectivity, and embodied experience. Combining these methods, the aesthetics of posthumanism focuses on the particular challenges of contemporary interspecies cohabitation in the era of Anthropocene, characterised by postindustrial transitions and environmental revitalisations. Besides regulated human contact with companion animals and unexpected encounters with 'invasive' plants and 'liminal' animals wandering into cities from surrounding forests. Post-anthropocentric aesthetic approaches them as adapted to a certain degree of symbiotic cohabitation with humans. It also draws attention to hostility toward animals in human treatment, which is characterised by fear of losing control, manipulation, and regulation. Particular attention is paid to nonverbal communication between species, especially to the transformative potential of the human hand, in a double sense – both caring and harmful.

Following the current fields of environmental ethics, which argue that Western philosophy has the ideological conditions that enabled practices that have led to the current ecological crises and biodiversity loss, Haraway's new materialism identifies transcendentalist conceptions of human nature as fostering exploitative attitudes toward nonhuman nature (Haraway, 2008). Kantian transcendental idealism is thus regarded as the culprit in moulding our intellectual and scientific culture into a stance that regards nature as distinct from the autonomous human subject. Post-Kantian philosophy, committed to human superiority and exceptionalism, fails to recognise the non-human agencies that actively shape our aesthetic experiences with the others and with the shared environment.

The aesthetics of posthumanism, attentive to these issues, is a relatively new direction within the humanities that advocates a turn in contemporary politics of aesthetics toward reassessing the relations among humans, non-human animals, territories, and ecosystems. Motivated by the need for social and

interspecies care, it introduces an ethically grounded shift in the contemporary politics of aesthetics, promoting kinship with nature through caring imagination. This post-anthropocentric movement in aesthetic thinking acknowledges that we, humans, do not stand above nature. What we call nature is not external to our life-form (Fredriksson, 2011). In this context, the notion of kinship between the human and non-human has become an important critical tool in renegotiating aesthetic appreciation and judgement. To reimagine ways of creating an environmentally hospitable cohabitation, it focuses on creative imagination. It proposes to reevaluate the industrial disaster of the modern era through artistic observations of human communities living with damaged landscapes (mines, brownfields, polluted rivers, degraded ecosystems) and by imagining how restoration, conservation, and green infrastructure projects generate conflicts over land, risk, and future visions (Pokorný, 2024). By shifting attention from ‘crisis management’ to the imaginary and poetic ‘future-making’, the aesthetic research of posthumanism aims to demonstrate how mutually beneficial symbiotic cohabitation between human and non-human beings can be. By resetting the shared imagination, it can generate transferable lessons for the contemporary era of Anthropocene, turning the experience of transition into a relevant source of aesthetic innovation.

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