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**More-Than-Human
Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America**

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Maya Manzi

Abstract

In the context of our current planetary crises, in a world that continues to be shaped by capitalist, colonialist, androcentric and anthropocentric visions, we are faced with the urgency of reconsidering, at the deepest levels, the way we relate with other human and nonhuman beings. This working paper aims to contribute towards that end by looking at human-nonhuman relations through the concept of conviviality, understood as the everyday living together with difference, and how it intersects with inequality. In the first part of this paper, more-than-human conviviality-inequality is investigated by critically analyzing onto-epistemological and methodological approaches that question, subvert or reproduce hegemonic thinking and worldviews on human-nonhuman relations like historical materialism, new materialisms, transhumanism, posthumanisms, and indigenous relational ontologies. In the second part, I look at particular relational dimensions like incompleteness, translation, and affect, which can help us create new understandings of more-than-human conviviality-inequality in Latin America and beyond.

Keywords:

conviviality | more-than-human | nonhuman | Latin America

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1. Introduction

This synthesis paper aims to contribute to the knowledge dimension of conviviality-inequality in Latin America by critically analysing different epistemologies, theories and concepts on human-nonhuman relations with-in Latin America and beyond.¹ I first present and contrast different fields of knowledge that take “matter” seriously and that attempt to go beyond the modern human-nonhuman dualism: (1) historical materialism; (2) new materialism(s); (3) transhumanism; (4) posthumanism(s); and, (5) indigenous relational ontologies.

To understand how conviviality-inequality between humans and nonhumans is worked out and envisioned within these different epistemological and ontological approaches, I focus on three main dimensions: (1) incompleteness and alliances; (2) mediation and translation, and (3) the politics of affect. These dimensions were chosen based on their analytical, conceptual and epistemological salience for studying the nature and dynamics of convivial and unequal relations between human and nonhuman beings.

I use the term “nonhuman” to refer to animate and inanimate beings including those considered as pertaining to the “natural realm” like animals, plants, rocks, etc., those of the “technological realm” like objects, computers, informational networks, robots, institutions, etc., and even those of the “supernatural realm” like spirits, souls, energies, magical phenomena, etc. In other words, any of the stuff that makes up our world and our everyday lives but that modern Anglo-Eurocentric epistemes have constructed as being outside of, and inferior to, the constructed category of human(ity).

In order to study conviviality-inequality with “other-than-humans”, I will present different materialist and humanist approaches that have contributed to expand our understanding of nature-society relations. Materialism has been broadly defined “as an underlying philosophy of explanation and framework for engagement – that which accords ontological priority to the material conditions of existence, and rejects non-material (e.g., spiritual, metaphysical, and other transcendent) prime causes” (Kirsch 2013: 435). However, the examination of indigenous, historical and “new” materialism will show alternative, more complex, conceptions of materialism that can help us understand how different forms of human-nonhuman conviviality are configured within unequal societies in Latin America.

¹ I use the term “with-in” to emphasize the possibility of perspectives coming from “within” Latin America but also the possibility of alliances “with” perspectives coming from outside Latin America. In this sense, it points to the relational dimension that characterizes knowledge production and that makes impossible the idea of a strictly and purely Latin American epistemology. Finally, the dash between the “with” and the “in” is also used throughout the text when defining conviviality as a way to refer to the relational (with) and situated (in) dimensions of conviviality when understood from a Latin American perspective.

Studying human-nonhuman relations necessarily implies including epistemological and ontological considerations on the relationship between subject and object, culture and nature, mind and body, self and other among other modern binaries. As many scholars have shown, these dualistic relations are increasingly difficult to sustain, as hybrids and cyborgs are proliferating more than ever in our contemporary times, due to technological advances and globalized capitalist relations. These unprecedented impacts that humans are having on others on the Earth and on their own constitution as a species are now manifested through multiple scales, from the genome to the global effects of climate changes. These continuous manipulations, restructurations, destructions and re-inventions of life are having profound, and in some cases irreversible, implications for life on Earth. How can we use these epistemological and ontological contributions in the face of such ecological crises? This study, therefore, is grounded in a political ecology perspective that questions dominant narratives and conventional wisdom about nature-society relations while attempting to make good use of theoretical and conceptual tools that can work towards making more livable worlds possible.

Examining human-nonhuman relations also requires problematizing universal ontological claims and accounting for the multiple meanings, conceptions and forms of relating and being with the “nonhuman” depending on different perspectives and subject positions (Cadena 2015; Ulloa 2017). It implies acknowledging the historical contributions of indigenous and other non-western knowledge systems that have been systematically silenced, devalued and excluded (Panelli 2010; Sundberg 2014; Todd 2016).

Some authors have called for the need to decolonize posthumanist studies by re-centering the work of indigenous, African and Afro-descendent scholars and their fundamental contributions to this field. For instance, Sundberg’s (2014) geographical engagement with posthumanist thinking includes two decolonizing performances: to locate theoretical approaches in their biographic, historical and geopolitical terms, marking as provincial what is otherwise naturalized as universal and to foster “multiepistemic literacy” through sustained engagements with indigenous (and other non-western) epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies.

I use the concept “conviviality” to refer to the “everyday living together with-in difference” (Mecila 2017). I follow Mecila’s (2017, 2018) conceptual framework in my attempt to understand conviviality in relation to inequality in Latin America. The notion of conviviality is inspired by a wide and diverse literature that uses conviviality or other similar terms like *konvivenz* (Ette et al. 2014) and *convivialisme* (Convivialistes 2013)² to explore different ways of thinking about coexistence: as a normative post-industrial approach

2 See Sérgio Costa’s (2006) review of this literature.

to social and nature-society relations (Illich 1973), as an everyday life alternative to neoliberal multiculturalism (Gilroy 2004), as a postcolonial critique to African state-society relations (Mbembé 2001) or as a way to reveal the unequal power relations that subsume convivial relations in domestic labour (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011), to name just a few contributions (Mecila 2018).

The term *inequality* is used to refer to the disparity or asymmetries within a group, society or social network in terms of access to goods, services, opportunities, power, status and privileges. Inequality operates through socially constructed differences like gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, generation, (dis)abilities, among others. Social differences are ways of distinguishing between individuals or groups based on attributes that pertain to specific (historically, symbolically and culturally constructed) systems of valuation. When naturalized and internalized, social differences become the basis for the reproduction of inequalities. Inequalities are (re)produced through a wide array of power-laden economic, cultural, geographical, spatial and environmental relations. However, and as will be argued in this paper, inequality and difference do not exclusively pertain to “social relations”. They also define the relationship between “human” and “nonhuman” beings. The difference between what we conceive as human and nonhuman is also socially, historically and culturally constructed. Therefore, one of the objectives of this paper is to assess which aspects of these aforementioned theoretical, epistemological and ontological materialist and humanist perspectives can better account for our human-nonhuman convivial-unequal configurations and possibilities.

This brings me to another important concept that needs to be examined more thoroughly – the notion of power. Power can be defined as the ability to influence other peoples’ behaviours and actions and to control the course and outcomes of events. In our capitalist society, power depends heavily on economic growth, control over the means of production and capital accumulation. This entails that power is intimately associated with the idea that some human and nonhuman beings are more exploitable than others. When thinking normatively in terms of more equal human-nonhuman convivial relations, it is crucial to question the terms under which power and equality are set forth. How can we truly overcome human-nonhuman inequality if our conception of welfare is set on Western standards of living? Post-development approaches and worldviews like “*buen vivir*”, Degrowth, and Radical Ecological Democracy (RED) have shown how we must find an “alternative to development” (Escobar 1995) – and not another development alternative – if we truly want to tackle problems of poverty, injustice and inequality. For this, we need to go beyond capitalist imaginations and work towards developing ways of thinking and being in the world that are not based on accumulation

and exploitation. This entails a profound reassessment of our value systems, desires, affects and conceptions of well-being and conviviality.

Before going further, I would also like to define three other basic terms that will be used throughout this paper: ontology, epistemology, and knowledge. Drawing from feminist theories, I use the concept of knowledge in its broadest sense, as to encompass its symbolic and material dimensions. In this sense, knowledge is simultaneously ontological and epistemological. I understand knowledge as situated practices and as sites of production, distribution, consumption, representation and reproduction.

Ontology can be conceived as “an inventory of kinds of being and their relations”, i.e., any way of understanding the world that make implicit or explicit assumptions about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on (Scott and Marshall 2005 in Blaser 2012: 3). As Blaser (2012) cautions:

Staying just with this definition of ontology, however, opens it to the now well-established postcolonial critique that a focus on this “inventory” might recall old ethnographic conventions where an essentialized “Other” is constructed in a way that homogenizes both the West and the rest and occludes on-going colonial relations (Blaser 2012: 3).

Epistemology is often contrasted to ontology as pertaining to the ideological and theoretical realm while ontology would pertain to the concrete and material realm. It deals with the nature and sources of our knowledge about the world (Nutter 1987), the perspective, framework or theory through which we structure the statements that count as knowledge in particular times and places. However, ontology and epistemology are often conflated and confused, precisely because the two are not so easily separable, especially if one does not subscribe to the idea of an objective reality – “out there”. Feminist theory has significantly contributed to challenge the binary opposition between epistemology and ontology by showing how the two are entangled through an embodied understanding of knowledge, that is, “through a focus on the importance of being as a mode of knowing” and by privileging “affect as a marker of their intertwined relationship” (Hemmings 2012: 148). This view does not argue that there is no ‘real’ world or no ‘real’ knowledge, it argues that all reality and all knowledge is “situated” (Haraway 1988; Harding 1992).

This paper also seeks to contribute to decolonizing efforts by examining how particular indigenous knowledges with-in Latin America can add to our understanding of human-nonhuman relations and how these contributions can refine and complexify the concept of conviviality-inequality in Latin America. Following Sundberg (2014), I make an analytical distinction between indigenous knowledge and other Western knowledges,

as an ethico-political move towards decolonizing some of these posthumanist and materialist studies. This performative act does not impede the recognition that these knowledge systems are highly interconnected and co-constituted. However, the historical silencing of non-European knowledges requires their affirmative recognition as a way to engage in decolonizing processes.

2. Perspectives on Human-Nonhuman Relations

In this second section, the objective is to introduce different epistemological and ontological perspectives on human-nonhuman relations, including: historical materialism; new materialisms; transhumanism, posthumanism, and indigenous relational ontologies.

2.1 Historical Materialism

Historical materialism has been around since Marx but it is Engels who first coined the term (Mann 2009). This perspective focuses on the historically specific material conditions of human production and reproduction (Choat 2017). Historical materialist approaches tend to draw attention on pressing macro political-economic concerns like the valuation, appropriation, expropriation, commodification, marketization and financialization of globalized capitalist natures (Braun 2015). Within these approaches, nonhuman nature is seen as having agency but this agency often appears as external and as a mere response or resistance to (capitalist/neoliberal) human practices (Braun 2015). For instance, authors drawing directly or indirectly from this perspective have examined nonhuman agency by describing how “socionatures” do not always succumb to neoliberal practices because of their “uncooperative”, “recalcitrant” or “unruly” behaviours (Bakker 2009).

While Marx’s historical materialism does not deny nature’s central role in social production and reproduction, it still tends to socialize nature through its focus on labour and its understanding of the economy as a social relation. In that respect, it tends to maintain a modern anthropocentric perspective based on a hierarchical and dualistic understanding of nature and society. As Gramsci notes:

Historical materialism takes the physical (chemical, mechanical, etc.) properties of matter into account, of course, but only insofar as they become an “economic factor” of production. The issue, then, is not matter as such but how it is socially and historically organized for production, as a human relation (Gramsci 1996 [1930-1932]: 164).

In geography, Marxist historical materialism has been used as a methodological tool to critically analyse capitalism's ecological impacts and to counter both the bourgeois technocentrism of environmental economics and the radical ecocentrism of "nature-without-people" environmentalism. It has contributed to three theoretical perspectives which have developed critical understandings of nature-society relations: (1) ecomarxism; (2) the social construction of nature; and, (3) the production of nature (Castree 2000).

Ecomarxism emerges in the context of the global environmental crisis and as a result of Marxists' concern to compensate for Marx's Promethean disregard for nature. James O'Connor, one of the founders of this perspective, brought "nature" into the center of Marxism through his theorization on the environmental crisis as the "second contradiction of capitalism" which he describes as resulting from a process of under-production, not in the sense of a lack of commodities but in the sense that under capitalism, nature (upon which all material production depends) is under-valued and treated as a "free gift of God". This makes "nature" appear as if it did not have to be produced, as an unlimited resource, fully and eternally available to human's demands and desires. However, as Castree (2000) argues, ecomarxism tends to adopt a naturalist perspective that maintains an ontological, theoretical and normative separation between the social and the natural realms.

The term "social construction of nature" encompasses different perspectives that can be classified into two broad categories: the first relates to the epistemic critique of empiricism and positivism, which posits that "nature" is not merely an objective reality "out there" but rather the result of cultural constructions. As a result, "nature" means different things depending on the subject perspective and position. The other approach refers to the social construction of nature in the physical and material sense (Demeritt 2002).³ These approaches question the nature/culture divide, and other associated dualisms, by showing that what has been constructed as separated entities are actually in constant and dynamic "dialectical" and "metabolic" relations (in Marxist terms), or as "entangled" and "mutually constituted" (in poststructuralist terms).

The "production of nature" thesis originates in the work of geographer Neil Smith (2008) who attempts to go beyond the nature-society dualism found in both naturalist and constructivist perspectives within Marxism. According to Smith (2008), and similarly to Schmidt's (2013) or Harvey's (1996) "social constructivism of nature", nature in our contemporary world is always already socially delimited. In this sense, there isn't anymore something that we can call "first nature". Katz (1998) and Escobar (1996) describe this epochal change in capitalist relation as a shift towards a more intensive

³ Some aspects of this second "social construction of nature" approach are very similar to the "production of nature" approach.

form of socially produced nature – the commodification of all aspects of nature and of life itself from plant, to genes, to human organs (Castree 2000). This perspective goes beyond the traditional nature-society dualism by arguing that “capitalism does more than merely “interact with”, “appropriate” or “articulate with” nature”, “nature itself becomes internal to the economic system” through intentional production (e.g., GMOs) and unintentional production (e.g., atmospheric pollution) (Castree 2000: 26). Through this process, nature is commodified and therefore, the use-value of nature becomes embroiled with the logic of exchange value (Castree 2000: 26). In other words, the “production of nature” thesis seeks to go beyond the nature-society binary by showing how nature and capitalism are mutually constituted in dynamic and contingent ways. While nature is seen as being socially produced, it has a materiality which cannot be ignored, and that materiality is time and place specific (Castree 2000: 29). This breaks with the tendency of some Marxists to make absolute, generalizing or universalizing statements about capitalism and nature (Castree 2000: 30). This means that the production of capitalist natures is not inherently good or bad, and that it differs depending on where, how, for whom and by whom they are made. In that sense, capitalist natures are classed, gendered and racialized since their effects is unevenly distributed. Therefore, the production of nature also leads to the production of differences and inequalities or what Smith (2010) calls “uneven development”. According to Castree (2000: 30), “the production of nature” thesis remains anthropomorphic without being anthropocentric (i.e., making humans the only or pre-eminent concern of politics).

As Bakker and Bridge (2006) argue, “the production of nature” remains limited because it tries to solve nature-society binary opposition by internalizing “nature” as a social product. Since it considers that all nature is now “second nature” (i.e., nature already transformed by human labour), it “ends up squeezing out any productive or generative role for ecological or biophysical processes” (2006: 9). On the other hand, historical materialist perspectives tend to be more attentive to forms and dynamics of power and ownership within human-nonhuman relations and their historical variability. In addition, historical materialism asks the important questions of how, where and who owns, produces, controls and uses knowledge and technology and how it affects land and labour relations (Choat 2017).

The tendency of historical materialism to emphasize the “social form” of matter, i.e., how nonhumans are socially used, what is their role in a specific production process, within a specific power grid and set of social relations (Choat 2017) can lead to the fetishization of nature or “crude idealism”. To avoid this fallacy, some Marxists and post-Marxists have attempted to bring nature’s agency back into the centre of attention through a perspective known as “new materialism”, as will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 New Materialisms

New materialism emerged mainly through the work of Sciences and Technology Studies (STS) scholars such as Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, and Karen Barad. Their approaches to human-nonhuman relations is based on what some of them have called a “relational” or “flat” ontology, which has been inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic approach, Foucault’s biopower, Spinoza’s monist and immanent philosophy, Bergson’s metaphysics of transformation and Whitehead’s processual philosophy, among others.

This scholarship has generated a wide range of materialist perspectives which do not always converge and bear different denominations: “Actor-Network Theory” (Latour 2005); bodily or “corporeal materialisms” (e.g., Braidotti 2012); “cosmopolitics” (Stengers 2010), “vibrant materialism” (e.g., Bennett 2009), and “assemblage theory” (e.g., DeLanda 2016), among others. Some of these authors sometimes refer to themselves as realists (e.g., Latour 2004; DeLanda 2016) in the sense of stating the existence of a fundamentally relational reality; others prefer the terms “posthumanism” and “post-anthropocentrism” (e.g., Braidotti 2013) by emphasizing the importance of a materialist ethics, based on non-hierarchical relations, with a sensibility for affect and for complexity.

While historical materialism tends to carry a more structuralist and dualistic perspective, new materialism is post-structuralist in its relational and processual understanding of the world but tends to reject the dominance of discourses and metaphysics in post-structuralist approaches. In that sense, it comes in reaction to the cultural or linguistic turn of the 1980s and 1990s which produced scholarship that put a disproportionate emphasis on symbolic rather than material practices. However, the cultural or linguistic turn was an important critique to the natural sciences’ empiricist tendency to reduce knowledge to sensory experiences and characterize them as something that could be objectively analysed, through testing and scientific experiments. Post-structuralism instead shows how the material world “out there” is imbued with our subjective interpretations and representations. However, some post-structuralists like Foucault and Deleuze were able to counter the hegemony of empiricism and positivism without neglecting the materiality of social relations, by showing the importance of the body and territorialities among other material relations.

New materialism draws on complex system theories, emphasizing the indeterminacy, irreducibility, emergence, non-linearity, contingency and unpredictability of human and nonhuman relations. Complexity theories also highlight the self-organizing (autopoietic) capacities of nonhuman adaptive systems. It relies on a wide range of scientific theories like quantum mechanics, chaos theory, fractal modelling, artificial life, cellular

automata, and neural nets (Thrift 1999: 34), which originate from the “hard” sciences’ disciplinary fields like physics, biology, neurosciences, and computer sciences. New materialisms are also influenced by theories from the humanities and social sciences like affect theories and non-representational theories. Their approaches seek to bridge theories from the “natural” and “social” sciences, contributing in making their separation increasingly irrelevant. In that sense, new materialism has contributed to promote a re-engagement with the sciences which had been undermined by post-structuralism and post-modernist vehement criticism of scientific knowledge and positivist regimes of truth. New scientific research from the natural sciences have increasingly demonstrate how nonhuman beings are much more complex, intelligent and proactive than we ever thought. For instance, it has been scientifically proven that plants and trees can communicate and share nutrients with each other, through far reaching and dynamic underground networks and that bees have very sophisticated forms of communicating with other members of their colony by performing dance patterns that provide very detailed information about the direction and distance to different kinds of resources such as pollen-yielding flowers, water sources and new nest sites.

In terms of agency, new materialism challenges the idea of human mastery by showing that matter is not passive. Through contemporary phenomena like global climate change, the emergence of super bacteria, and the spread of GMOs, this perspective emphasizes that the ways nonhuman entities and processes operate and respond to human actions are not all controllable and may have unpredictable and irreversible consequences. However, nonhuman beings do not only react to human actions, they have a life of their own which profoundly influences the way humans act. Thus, new materialism expands the notion of “agency” beyond intentionality. Latour’s (2005) conceptualization of “actors” (or “actants”) locates humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects, animate and inanimate beings on the same footing. All of the world’s entities, be them humans, birds, chairs, forks, rocks, bacteria or smoke can perform as actants (more abstractly) or actors (more concretely) (Latour 1996: 373). Barad (2007) uses the term “intra-action” instead of interaction, to account for the entanglement of a multiplicity of agencies, showing that human intentionality is always already conditioned and thwarted by other forms of agencies outside and within human bodies. Within this perspective, agency is understood, in the Spinozian sense, as a “power to act” in terms of producing effects by persevering in existence (*conatus*) and not in the conventional sense of “doing” with function and intentionality (Deleuze 1981).

This idea of breaking with modern hierarchies by locating all the world’s elements on an equal footing is one of the central tenets of what some authors call a “flat ontology” (DeLanda 2006; Latour 2005). Flat ontology is based on the idea of non-hierarchical assemblages of humans and nonhumans and on the notion of irreducibility – the idea

that there is no single origin, no essence or primary substance that can hold itself alone. According to Latour (1993: 158), the principle of irreducibility is that “nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else” and that therefore, “there are only trials (of strength, of weakness)” and resistance to these trials is what makes something real. However, no entity is more real than any other. What differentiates them is their capacity to produce effects. Actants exist as effects or in terms of their relations with others rather than as substances in and of themselves. Therefore, as Harman puts it: “Latour’s philosophy can be read as a monadology without indestructible monads” (Harman 2009: 39). In that sense, new materialism helps to avoid both naturalistic and sociological reductionisms, which assume that something exists as a causal effect of something pre-existent (Choat 2018). Instead, it understands phenomena as assemblages or networks of elements (both human and nonhuman) that act on the same ontological plane but with different gradients of strength or resistance. In that respect, “new materialism has been described as an ontology of immanence; in other words, as not dependent upon a foundational or transcendent power such as God, fate, evolution, life-force, Gaia, mechanisms, systems or structures” (Fox and Alldred 2018: 2).

In geography, new materialism has been perhaps best represented by the work of Sara Whatmore (2006), who has emphasized how materialism helps to reveal the “vital connection” between the bio (life) and the geo (earth). Whatmore pertains to a line of materialism inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s “geo-bio philosophy” and from authors from science and technology studies like Callon and Latour, whose ANT (Actor Network Theory) has been also highly influenced by the work of the aforementioned French authors. Whatmore (2006) argues that these not so “new” materialisms are re-turns to the “livingness of the world” that “shifts the register of materiality from the indifferent stuff of a world ‘out there’, articulated through notions of ‘land’, ‘nature’ or ‘environment’, to the intimate fabric of corporeality that includes and redistributes the ‘in here’ of human being” (Whatmore 2006: 602). She redefines “landscapes” not as human fabrication but as “co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth”, taking these nonhuman participants as productive subjects and redistributing subjectivity to the “outside world” (Whatmore 2006: 603). Whatmore’s use of the term “more-than-human” is of interest here as it helps to break the dichotomy between human and nonhuman, showing how the “nonhuman” is entangled with the “human” while always also exceeding it.

In this scholarship, materiality is being engaged as both symbolic and physical, as relational, processual, transformative, and distributed (Gregson and Crang 2010; Tolia-Kelly 2013; Kirsch 2013). “Matter cannot be destroyed, it can only transform, mutate, morph” (Davies 2011 in Tolia-Kelly 2013: 155). The same materialities embody both

creative and destructive forces, they generate both liberating and enslaving potentials and processes, depending on which purpose they are used for, which phase of their life stage they are at, or which trajectories they take. For instance, the oil spill on the Northeast coast of Brazil renders visible the destructive powers of a substance that has been systematically made invisible by the ways through which it circulates globally, being distributed through pipes and cargos that allow it to seamlessly penetrate the world's fragile ecosystems.

Whatmore (2006: 604) distinguishes four main commitments within these materialist "re-turns" or "realignments": (1) a focus on practice that relocates social agency in bodily performances rather than discourse and an understanding of discourse as practice; (2) a shift from meaning to affect, as a force of intensive relationality, not limited to individuated bodies; (3) more-than-human modes of enquiry through multiplicities of subjectivity and agency by attending to senses, dispositions, capabilities and potentialities of the socio-material worlds; and, (4) a shift from a politics of identity to a politics of knowledge such as the multiple knowledge practices and communities that bear on the framing of inherently uncertain socio-technical problems.

Within this perspective, "culture is reconceptualized as a material entanglement of human and nonhumans" (Anderson and Perrin 2015: 2). However, as Anderson and Perrin caution, these monist perspectives foreclose a materialist engagement with humans whose existence does not belong anywhere within the binary categories of humans and nonhumans. This brings us to Braun's call for "vigilance, rather than transcendence, for if we assume that we have left humanism behind, discredited and abandoned for all time, we risk being blind to its traces, to how it haunts the posthuman" (Braun 2004: 1353).

Braun (2004) explains the problematic use of Haraway's "cyborg" ontology when attached to a sense of temporality. As he explains, these works tend to emphasize that technocultures have led us into an age in which human-nonhuman distinctions are increasingly blurred. This may inadvertently and paradoxically construct an essentialist view of pure human nature in the past. In reaction to this, many scholars have turned to philosophers like Spinoza, Bergson, Deleuze and Serres to argue that humans have no essence and that they are always already "in-folding" with the world. Within that perspective, humans are an effect of ontological play. As Braun puts it:

From this emerges a different politics, no longer a celebration of transcendence, nor a politics of recovery (both ultimately work with the same assumption about "Man" and his passing), but a politics attuned to humans as always in the middle of multiple becomings, always an effect of politics, rather than that which grounds politics (Braun 2004: 1354).

Following Latour, Anderson and Perrin (2015) claim that “everything is material” because every “thing” is constructed out of a variety of elements that are conceptual and concrete, human and nonhuman, and that, for this reason, we cannot reject humanism or human exceptionalism on the basis of its association with idealism, but rather, as a “material configuration” (Anderson and Perrin 2015: 4). Within this perspective, then, what has been conceived as immaterial (like the human soul or the human mind) are not non-existent fantasies, they are material elements that must continue to be accounted for: “It is not, therefore, a matter of rejecting humanism because it is “constructed”. Rather, insisting on the materiality of this constructedness” (Anderson and Perrin 2015: 4). The question, then, is not if but how things are constructed. And, as the authors continue, if humanism is understood as a shifting and contingent material configuration of ideas, practices and technologies, then, it can also be configured otherwise.

Thus, the authors show that materialist or monist perspectives are not inherently anti- or post-humanist. Depending on “how” materialism is configured and performed, it can also lead to human exceptionalism. For instance, anthropocentric ideas have been historically legitimized by scientific claims that humans are different (superior) from animals because of their biologically and physically distinctive features (bigger brains, upright position, etc.). The same kind of materialist account has formed the basis of scientific racism, like in the case of 19th century craniometry – the measuring of human skulls from different world regions to construct racial hierarchies and justify white supremacy (Anderson and Perrin 2015). With these historical accounts, the authors reveal “a certain slippage in the new materialist critique, which dismisses humanism as if it were made of different ontological stuff” – humanism, the authors emphasize, always is a material configuration (Anderson and Perrin 2015: 8) and it must be historicized rather than bracketed off by universalizing it as a stable, consistent and invariant immaterial belief.

Tolia-Kelly (2013) makes a conceptual distinction between “material geographies” and “surface geographies”. As she explains, the latter tend to be reduced to superficial descriptions and representations characterized by a lack of critical engagement with their theoretical, historical, and political contexts:

Surface geographies depoliticize and make palatable the material world. By embodying a “looking-onto” rather than “being-with” orientation in the process of research makes the encounter sterile, palatable and benign; the nature of “material” politics becomes reduced to picturing a collage of materials observed, not felt. The vitality and life of things thus become framed, reflected and filmic – a negation of networked meanings, values situated in a political world, with political grammars and aesthetics. This result of mirroring, mapping and reflecting

materialities as found objects risks the loss of remembering the genealogies of doing the material (Tolia-Kelly 2013: 157).

Instead, she calls for a “material geography” that: (1) acknowledges material’s places, arrangement and names; (2) considers spatial orderings (hierarchies, patterns and significations); and, (3) unravels their performance (their role, effect and marked absences) (Tolia-Kelly 2013: 154).

Critiques of new materialism point that its tendency to emphasize multiplicity and incompleteness ends up undermining any possible political action since responsibility is divided and dispersed into innumerable forms of agency and indeterminate practices. In addition to this risk of depoliticizing materialism, new materialism tends to be ahistorical by naturalizing and universalizing the properties and capacities of all actants (Choat 2017). When the agency of nature is overemphasized, it risks acquiring a positivist aura, reminiscent of environmental determinism. The emphasis on the agency of matter can also lead to reification (i.e., the thingification of social processes) or “crude materialism”, which regards “social relations of production as though they are natural properties inherent in things” (Howie 2010: 46-47).

Despite these limitations, new materialisms have contributed to questioning and re-conceptualizing our epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives about human-nonhuman and nature-society relations. By focusing on more-than-human agency, bodily performances, multiple subjectivities, networks of alliances, and the politics of affect, new materialisms can provide us with a rich array of concepts to analyse how conviviality and inequality are (dis)configured among and between human and nonhumans.

2.3 Transhumanism

Transhumanism is another perspective that attempts to question and blur the divide between humans and nonhumans, particularly with respect to the relation between humans and technology. One of the aspects that most characterize transhumanism is its urgent concern and desire for human enhancement through contemporary technosciences. For Bostrom (2001), one of the main proponents of this international movement, transhumanism “promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology” (Bostrom 2001: 3).

The emerging and speculative technologies that transhumanists promote include genetic engineering, information technology, biotechnology, molecular nanotechnology, nanomedicine, stem cell cloning, transgenesis, artificial intelligence, robotics, brain-

computer integration, and cryonics, among others. Technology is also understood in its broader sense, not referring only to informational and medical development but also encompassing economic, social, cultural and institutional realms. The idea of human enhancement, which is at the heart of transhumanism, includes radically extending human lifespan, eradicating diseases, reducing human suffering, increasing human intelligence, physical and emotional capacities and well-being. It is also concerned with space colonization and the creation of super-intelligent machines (Bostrom 2003: 3).

Ferrando (2013) distinguishes three main variants of transhumanism: liberal, democratic and extropianist transhumanism. What is common among all these perspectives is their central interest in science and technology. Liberal transhumanists tend to emphasize the role of the free market in fostering technological advances for human enhancement and in guaranteeing the right to access it (e.g., Bailey 2005). Democratic transhumanism tends to integrate racial and gender politics into their discussions in their call for equal access to technological enhancement (e.g., Hughes 2004). Extropianism is best represented by Max More (2003: 1), who defines it as “an evolving framework of values and standards for continuously improving the human condition”. Max More (2003) delineates extropy through seven principles: perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society (information and democracy), self-direction, and rational thinking. According to this author, transhumanism can be understood as:

Philosophies of life (such as extropian perspectives) that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values (More and Vita-More 2013: 47).

Transhumanism has its roots firmly grounded in humanism and the Enlightenment philosophy (Bishop 2010).⁴ Their concern for human enhancement is a clear testimony of these two influences. It is a radical or “ultra-humanist” perspective since the goal is to strengthen human potential, power, capacities and well-being; it is all about making humans, “better” humans, even if, paradoxically, this humanity is increasingly and simultaneously reduced (and amplified) through technological interventions.

4 Badmington (2004) defines humanism as “a discourse which claims that the figure of ‘Man’ (sic) naturally stands at the centre of things; is entirely distinct from animals, machines, and other nonhuman entities; is absolutely known and knowable to ‘himself’; is the origin of meaning and history; and shares with all other human beings a universal essence. Its absolutist assumptions, moreover, mean that anthropocentric discourse relies upon a set of binary oppositions, such as human/inhuman, self/other, natural/cultural, inside/outside, subject/object, us/them, here/there, active/passive, and wild/tame” (Badmington 2004: 1345).

Transhumanism is a child of the Enlightenment because it is based on a vision of progress and on a rational use of science and technology, two central tenets of this modernist project. Transhumanists see human evolution as part of a linear and teleological process that goes from apes, to humans, to posthumans. As one of its proponents describes:

Transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways. Current humanity need not be the endpoint of evolution. Transhumanists hope that by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means we shall eventually manage to become posthuman, beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have (Bostrom 2003: 4).

For transhumanists, the current state of human is seen as an evolutionary transition towards an improved condition: the “posthuman”. The posthuman is a speculative project towards the future (Bishop 2010: 701). Humans represent for the posthuman what apes represent for humans. In this sense, transhumanists reproduce a hierarchical biological order, by locating the posthuman as a superbeing that would defy any biological limitations; a position that strangely reminds us of that occupied by God in the “Great Chain of Being” in relation to humans and other species (Ferrando 2013).

Transhumanists claim that their approach does not entail technological optimism since most of them acknowledge the potential dangers of technological misuse that could lead to greater social inequalities, environmental destruction or even to human’s extinction (Bostrom 2003: 4). However, they seem significantly optimistic about humans’ moral capacity to use and control these technologies wisely, both at the individual and collective level, for the best interests of humanity as a whole:

Transhumanists place a high value on improvements in our individual and collective powers of understanding and in our ability to implement responsible decisions... Our ability to implement responsible decisions can be improved by expanding the rule of law and democracy on the international plane (Bostrom 2003: 12).

However, as history has shown the rule of law and democracy do not guarantee the implementation of responsible decisions. The questions that must be asked are for whom these decisions are deemed “responsible”? Based on what value system? And who may benefit or suffer from these decisions? As Hayles (2011) points out, “at transhumanist Web sites, articles and books, there is a conspicuous absence of considering socioeconomic dynamics beyond the individual” (Hayles 2011: 97). For instance, the idea of eliminating aging is not accompanied by a thoughtful consideration of its demographic, ecological, economic and social implications.

To respond to widespread concerns about the risks involved in changing the human condition through technologies, ethical matters have become central to transhumanist rhetoric. For instance, Humanity+, an international non-profit membership organization with 6000 followers from more than 100 countries, states as its mission, that it “advocates the *ethical use* of technology to expand human capacities” (Humanity+ n.d, my emphasis).⁵ The site draws on More’s definition of transhumanism as “the study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the *ethical matters* involved in developing and using such technologies” (Humanity+ n.d, my emphasis).

Another issue with transhumanism is the idea that human enhancement could be made accessible to everyone. Bostrom (2003) considers “wide access” as one of the basic conditions for realizing the transhumanist project. However, he does not elaborate on how this would be guaranteed and instead insists on the idea of urgency, alluding to something akin to the idea of a trickle-down effect or to the self-correcting capacities of free market dynamics:

The full realization of the core transhumanist value requires that, ideally, everybody should have the opportunity to become posthuman. It would be sub-optimal if the opportunity to become posthuman were restricted to a tiny elite. The wide access requirement underlies the moral urgency of the transhumanist vision. Wide access does not argue for holding back. On the contrary, other things being equal, it is an argument for moving forward as quickly as possible (Bostrom 2003: 10-11).

This kind of reasoning echoes a liberal political philosophy based on a decontextualized conception of equality, one that obviates historically sedimented social differences and structural inequalities. This liberal tone of transhumanism is made explicit when they tackle the issue of governance. They claim that every individual should decide what kind of improvement they may want to favour, and that individual freedom and choice should not be restricted by government intervention. However, this ignores that individual decisions are conditioned by historical, geographical, cultural, economic and social processes that are outside of one’s individual power. This shows how transhumanists place a disproportionate fate in individual agency and disregard fundamental social, political and economic structural conditions. As Hayles (2011) contends when analysing transhumanist rhetoric:

There is little discussion of how access to advanced technologies would be regulated or of the social and economic inequalities entwined with questions of

⁵ See also the World Transhumanist Association Website (<https://www.transhumanist.com>) which gives access to an extensive list of resources on the topic.

access. The rhetoric implies that everyone will freely have access... or at least that transhumanist individuals will be among the privileged elite that can afford the advantages advanced technologies will offer. How this will play out for the large majority of people living in developing countries that cannot afford access and do not have the infrastructure to support it is not an issue (Hayles 2011: 97).

Unlike Bostrom, some influential transhumanists have established parallels (Sorgner 2009) or direct influence (More 2010) with some of Nietzsche's concepts like that of the "overman" (Übermensch). Clearly, transhumanists have not been influenced by another of Nietzsche's core concepts – the "eternal recurrence", which goes directly against their idea of progress (More 2010: 1). More (2010) sees a direct influence of Nietzsche in transhumanists' critical rationalism, the idea of self-transformation, utilitarianism, slave-morality and heroism. In relation to the idea of self-transformation, one of the core transhumanist principles of extropy,⁶ Citing Nietzsche (1885), More (2010: 2) shows how it resonates with Zarathustra's declaration: "I am that which must always overcome itself". However, he acknowledges that Nietzsche never argued that this self-overcoming would be achieved through technology, pointing out that self-overcoming goes hand in hand with will and self-assertion:

Self-assertion in this case, of course, being not assertion of an existing self to preserve itself, but a striving to "become who you are". New technologies allow us new means of becoming who we are – another step toward posthuman ideals – and new ways of "giving style" to our character. As Nietzsche put it: "a great and rare art!" (More 2010: 2).

Fundamental to this idea of self-transformation is the critical area of reproduction, which as Hayles (2011: 96) argues, is tackled by transhumanists at three different levels: the reproduction of human individuals through children; the reproduction of the human species through biology and technology; and the reproduction of psychological, philosophical, social and economic institutions that facilitate or threaten the continued existence of humans as a species. In transhumanist thought, reproduction is conceived as an individual endeavor which can be controlled or upgraded through processes like cloning, cryogenic suspension, radical life extension, and uploading human consciousness into a computer (Hayles 2011: 97). These ideas of reproduction are based on conceptions of identity and consciousness as immutable and disembodied entities.

⁶ The term extropy, as an antonym of entropy (the properties and processes that determined the state of a system) was defined by Max More as "the extent of a system's intelligence, information, order, vitality, and capacity for improvement" (More 1998).

Transhumanism's optimism in enhancing the human species through technologies in some ways resembles its opposite – the neo-Luddites who radically oppose any technological endeavours – as both are attempts to impose universalizing principles about the future of human kind as if such crucial questions, with all of their complexities, implications and unintended consequences, could simply be resolved by some smart and well-meaning individuals with decision-making power. As Hayles (2011) argues, it is time that transhumanists (and their opponents) start reading more science fiction literature to begin imagining what these kinds of world vision foreground for the future.

In sum, a critical appraisal of transhumanism reveals how thinking of humans and nonhumans as mutually constitutive and as interdependent do not necessarily lead to less anthropocentric and less unequal relations. The kind of technological determinism that transhumanism brings forth shows us how we must remain always attentive to how epistemological and ontological perspectives can be appropriated and used towards radically different, and sometimes antagonistic, projects. Understanding how transhumanists think and work also tells us a lot about the cultural and moral content that undergirds people's visions of the future and the place of humans and nonhumans within these imaginaries. Once again, we must ask the important questions of “for what?” and “for whom?” these futures are laid out and how these can affect our living together with difference.⁷ The difference between transhumanism and posthumanism, as well as between different trends of posthumanism, will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Posthumanisms

Posthumanism is often confounded with transhumanism because both are concerned with a redefinition of the notion of the human, in the context of the onto-epistemological as well as scientific and biotechnological development of the 20th and 21st centuries (Ferrando 2013).⁸ As Ferrando (2013) argues, the reason for a general confusion between these two schools of thought may be that both emerged in the Eighties and Nineties, with interests to think beyond what we understand today through the category of the Human. While both conceive the human as a non-fixed and mutable condition, they have radically different roots, perspectives and objectives.

Posthumanism and transhumanism generally agree on the importance of technogenesis, that is, “the assumption that technology is involved in a spiralling

7 Difference should not be understood as necessarily (inherently) positive or negative. While affirmative actions by historically marginalized groups can lead to emancipation, some forms of particularism that exalt difference can also lead to xenophobic, racist and (neo)fascist movements.

8 Following authors like Karen Barad (2003), I use the term “onto-epistemology” to convey the mutual implications, the inextricable relation between the ontological and the epistemological.

dynamic of coevolution with human development” (Hayles 2011: 96). However, while critical posthumanism tends to analyse, discuss and reflect upon the past, present and future posthuman modes of being that technogenesis engenders, transhumanism tends to promote its increasing deployment, towards the creation of the posthuman. In that sense, transhumanists tend to be functionalist, propositive and proactive in relation to technology while posthumanists tend to be more historically, politically, ethically and ontologically reflexive about it.

Posthumanism has roots in postmodernism, feminist theories, cultural studies and literary studies. It aims to contribute towards a less anthropocentric and dualistic understanding and shaping of the world. One of the conceptual and theoretical contributions to posthumanism has been Donna Haraway’s (1990) concept of cyborg, which challenges modern dualisms and boundaries between human and nonhuman beings, between the physical and the nonphysical realms, the organic and the artificial, and ultimately, between technology and the Self (Ferrando 2013). Martin Heidegger (1977 [1954]) has also been influential for posthuman scholarship, with his essay “The Question Concerning Technology” where he states that technology should not be considered as a mere technical instrument but as a way of revealing. Seeing technology as a mode of revealing is what makes it ontologically significant for the posthuman project.

Drawing on Neil Badmington, Castree and Nash (2004) classify posthuman currents into three modalities: (1) the apocalyptic; (2) the ontological; and (3) the sceptic. The apocalyptic perspective is one that sees the posthuman as an incipient historical condition that threatens human nature. This view is best represented by Francis Fukuyama’s (2003) “Our Posthuman Future”, where he argues that:

The most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a “posthuman” stage of history. This is important, I will argue, because human nature exists, is a meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience as a species. It is, conjointly with religion, what defines our most basic values. Human nature shapes and constrains the possible kinds of political regimes, so a technology powerful enough to reshape what we are will have possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself (Fukuyama 2003: 7).

For Fukuyama, technology does not only threaten human nature, which he attempts to universalize and essentialize with statistical tricks, it also threatens human freedom and the global liberal project (so dear to him!). Against this kind of neo-humanist backlash to posthumanism stands the second and third more analytical-philosophical modalities

of posthumanism. The second conceives posthumanism as a set of ontological theses that call for a Latourian recognition that “we have never been human”. The third is a deconstructive reading of posthumanism; a skeptical approach to both humanism and its notional transcendence, best represented by the work of Badmington (2000; 2004) (in Castree and Nash 2004: 1342).⁹

Posthumanism challenges human primacy and exceptionalism while attempting to avoid the creation of other primacies. It conceives the human species on an equal footing with other species, in an attempt to overcome relations of domination and exploitation between human and other species and between human beings themselves.¹⁰ Indeed, posthumanists have shown how anthropocentrism not only results in the exploitation and destruction of other nonhuman beings but also produces inequality and power asymmetries between those considered “more human” (white, heteronormative, abled, men) and those considered “less human” (non-white, LGBTQ+, disabled, women). As Ferrando (2013) argues:

Posthumanism does not stand on a hierarchical system: there are no higher and lower degrees of alterity, when formulating a posthuman standpoint, so that the nonhuman differences are as compelling as the human ones. Posthumanism is a philosophy which provides a suitable way of departure to think in relational and multi-layered ways, expanding the focus to the nonhuman realm in post-dualistic, post-hierarchical modes... (Ferrando 2013: 30).

This approach emphasizes the need to decentre the human from its “exceptional” position as sole bearer of agency, rights, values, intelligence, language, morality and reason by showing that these so-called “human” attributes and everything that defines us as humans are in fact the result of the intervention and contributions of countless other beings. This fierce critique to anthropocentrism (and its associated androcentrism and Eurocentrism) is seen as a necessary and urgent step towards addressing our global environmental crisis and all of the other forms of violence that have been perpetrated in the name of humanism.

In sum, posthumanism has many overlapping arguments and perspectives with new materialism. However, critical posthumanism tends to be more aligned with post-structural feminist and cultural studies whereas new materialism tends to be more rooted in Marxist political economy approaches. Critical posthumanism gives us insights about the importance of decentring, de-essentialising while keeping an attentive eye on

⁹ Badmington (2004) importantly reminds us that humanism is still very much present within posthumanism and that, we should understand the “post” of posthumanism (and of any other “post”) not as a historical or epistemological break but rather as “a gradual working through of tradition... something very different from an ending” (Badmington 2004: 1349).

¹⁰ Discrimination based on species membership has been referred to as “speciesism”.

ethical responsibility and political engagement. Thinking of conviviality and inequality within these terms allows us to see what kinds of beings, lives and relations are valued or devalued and why. It also presses us to re-evaluate what kinds of alliances and translations are needed to produce more inclusive and horizontal forms of conviviality. In that respect, some critical posthumanists have called for the urgency of decolonizing posthumanism by putting indigenous knowledge politics and practices at the centre of our reflections upon human-nonhuman and nature-society relations.

2.5 Indigenous Ontologies

Indigenous perspectives on nature-society and human-nonhuman relations are generally associated, especially within the anthropological literature, with monism, holism, animism, and shamanism. Monism generally refers to something that is all encompassing – a totality. It emphasizes the unity or oneness of existence, origin, substance or essence. The whole is prior to its parts. Existence comes down to one single basic unit. As Viveiros de Castro argues, “If there is one virtually universal Amerindian notion, it is that of an original state of nondifferentiation between humans and animals, as described in mythology” (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 464). According to this indigenous perspective, this undifferentiated original condition of all humans and animals is humanity as opposed to animality as for the scientific Western worldview.¹¹ However, the post-mythical or present-day state of the world, still according to Amerindian worldviews, would be one of differentiation between nature and culture (similar to the Western nature/culture dichotomy) but instead of being the result of a transition from animality to humanity it would be the other way around, a passing from humanity to animality, humans being those who have kept their original state. As the author points out, this perspective has important consequences in terms of nature-society relations since it entails that all animals still maintain a human essence. The loss of humanity in animals would remain at a superficial level, at the level of appearance:

Thus, many animal species, as well as sundry other types of nonhuman beings, are supposed to have a spiritual component that qualifies them as “people.” Such a notion is often associated with the idea that the manifest bodily form of each species is an envelope (a “clothing”) that conceals an internal humanoid form, usually visible to the eyes of only the particular species and of “trans-specific” beings such as shamans. This internal form is the soul or spirit of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness (Castro 2004: 465).

¹¹ It is important to note that Viveiros de Castro (2004:464) uses these kinds of dichotomic representations when comparing Amerindian and Western worldviews as a heuristic tool with the risk of distortion but with the advantage of revealing the difficult and problematic process of cultural translation.

Thus, within this perspective, humanity is not a condition exclusive to humans but one that pertains to all beings. The idea of the bodily appearance as envelope or clothing is important as it confers a transmutability or interchangeability between different species or beings. It expresses the omnipresent process of metamorphosis that occurs when a spirit, the dead or a shaman assumes a nonhuman form. This cosmological transformism – the possibility for humans to assume the form of an animal, plant or object – and the subjectification of nonhumans (rather than their objectification) break radically from Western anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism.

While (indigenous) animism and (Western) naturalism are often represented as opposite poles, Descola (1996: 89) argues that

naturalism is never very far from animism: the former constantly produces actual hybrids of nature and culture which it cannot conceptualise as such, while the latter conceptualises a continuity between humans and nonhumans which it can produce only metaphorically, in the symbolic metamorphoses generated by rituals (Descola 1996: 89).

Viveiros de Castro (1998) also emphasizes their differences and similarities as follows: “Animism has ‘society’ as the unmarked pole, naturalism has ‘nature’: these poles function, respectively and contrastively, as the universal dimension of each mode. Thus, animism and naturalism are hierarchical and metonymical structures” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 5).

Viveiros de Castro also explains where unity and differences are created in each of these two contrasting cosmologies. Within Western cosmologies, there is physical (corporeal) unity between humans and nonhumans (we are organisms made of the same particles or atoms) and a metaphysical (spiritual) differentiation (humans are unique because they have a soul/spirit whereas animals, plants and objects don’t). In contrast, within Amazonian Indigenous cosmology, there is a metaphysical unity (humans, animals, plants and spirits all have a soul, intentionality and subjectivity) and a physical differentiation (humans, animals, plants and spirits have different bodies and therefore different points of view). This metaphysical continuity between all beings of the earth is what Viveiros de Castro calls “animism” and the physical differentiation is what he calls “perspectivism”: “the spirit or soul (here not an immaterial substance but rather a reflexive form) integrates, while the body (not a material organism but a system of active affects) differentiates” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 11).¹²

12 These binary oppositions between animism and naturalism or between Western and non-Western worldviews disappear altogether when we make a distinction between the official scientific discourse and the officious “real world” practices (Latour 1991).

Amerindian spiritual unity between humans and nonhumans does not necessarily result in completely horizontal and equalitarian relations, but it changes the terms of the relation between them. The dominant modes of human-nonhuman relation that characterize some of the Amazonian indigenous cosmologies include reciprocity, predation and protection (Descola and Pálsson 1996). The principle of reciprocity results from an understanding of the biosphere as a closed and homeostatic system and an understanding of vital energy as finite. Therefore, humans and nonhumans are equivalent and can substitute one another. The internal organization and general equilibrium of the system is maintained through constant exchange of services, souls, food or generic vitality between human and nonhumans. For instance, humans must provide retribution to nonhumans (by way of rituals, offerings, disease, death, etc.) for the food that they provide to them (Descola and Pálsson 1996). Bird-David (1992) calls this kind of reciprocity between humans and nonhumans the “cosmic economy of sharing” where “the environment shares its bounty with humans just as humans share with one another” (Ingold 2000: 44). On the other hand, predation can be defined as “the unintentional result of a general rejection of reciprocity, rather than a deliberate exchange of lives through bellicose intercourse” (Descola 1996: 90). Protection occurs when nonhumans are conceived as dependent upon humans for their reproduction and welfare, as in the case of domestication. As the author explains: “While this set of terms is now organised in a hierarchy, the social objectification of nonhumans is still structured by a relation of analogy” (Descola 1996: 91).

Shamanism is one instance of the human-nonhuman interchangeability that characterizes the “highly transformational world” (Riviere 1994: 256) of indigenous cosmologies (in Viveiros de Castro 1998: 3). Shamanism enacts the possibility of communicating between different worlds and of assuming, understanding, reading, and translating the points of view of extra-human beings. For David Kopenawa, “practicing shamanism is referred to as *xapirimuu*, ‘to act as a spirit’; to become a shaman is said ‘to become spirit’ (*xapiripruu*). These expressions refer to the fact that, during the shamanic trance, the shaman identifies with the ‘auxiliary spirits’ he is calling” (Kopenawa and Albert 2013: 490). Viveiros de Castro (1998) characterizes the perspectivism of shamanism as multinaturalism, a “cosmic politics” that he contrasts from western multiculturalism, a public policy based on cultural relativism which represents “a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature, which remains perfectly indifferent to those representations” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 10). In contrast, multinaturalism refers to the different perspectives located in different bodies (natures) that enable the coming into existence of different worlds – “One single ‘culture’, multiple ‘natures’” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 10).

Escobar (2015: 29) describes indigenous understanding of the world as a “relational ontology” in which “nothing (neither humans nor nonhumans) pre-exist the relations that constitute them”.¹³ As the author points out, this worldview is shared by many ethnic communities around the world and is also present in some western perspectives. However, these relational ontologies have been maintained in a subaltern position within the dominant scientific discourse and capitalist order, and have been threatened by practices of ethnocide, ecocide, epistemicide and feminicide. For instance, Federici (2004) shows how the relational ontologies that characterized the magical view of the world in pre-capitalist times was closely associated with the feminine practice of witchcraft:

At the basis of magic was an animistic conception of nature that did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit, and thus imagined the cosmos as a living organism, populated by forces, where every element was in “sympathetic” relation with the rest (Federici 2004: 141-142).

As she continues, “eradicating these practices was a necessary condition of the capitalist rationalization of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to obtain what one wanted without work” (Federici 2004:142).

Engaging with indigenous knowledge on “nature” means contributing to the “re/ placement of modern Native voices within constructions of nature and... to begin healing the disenchantment caused through the rupture between culture and nature in Western Science” (Johnson and Murton 2007: 121). As these authors argue, one way of doing this is to consider the localness, situatedness, and place-making function of knowledge:

Native science acts to mediate between the human community and the larger natural community upon which humans depend for life and meaning. This intimate and creative participation heightens awareness of the subtle qualities of place (Cajete 2000: 20).

Ulloa’s (2017: 175) work with indigenous people in Colombia describes a process of “environmental self-determination” that implies indigenous notions of justice based on a sense of responsibility and reciprocity with humans and nonhumans. It expands the established notion of “environmental justice” to a notion of “relational indigenous environmental justice” that considers nonhumans and territories as political actors with their own rights. Ancestral territories and “natures” are seen as “victims” of extractivism, climate change and environmental degradation and thereby deserve historical reparation

¹³ Relational ontology can be defined as a philosophical position that distinguishes between subject-subject, subject-object and object-object through mutual relation rather than substance (Schaab 2013).

in order to respect the indigenous principles of reciprocity and responsibility necessary for the “circulation of life”. A relational indigenous environmental justice therefore is directly related to territorialities, situated knowledge, complementarity, connectivity and the defence of life, in the broadest sense of the term (Ulloa 2017).

Finally, indigenous onto-epistemologies show us different ways of understanding nature, humans and human-nonhuman relations. They remind us how these forms of seeing and being have been systematically erased, excluded, and devalued to such an extent that they appear as false and ludicrous to so many. Indigenous knowledge allows us to change the terms of our relations with nonhuman others in our everyday interactions. Like critical posthumanism and new materialism, indigenous perspectives forge alliances with-in difference, through reciprocity and relationality. It opens up new worlds by shedding light on the unseen and by giving traction to what seems as fixed, immutable substances, reminding us that being in the world means embracing incompleteness and transformation through our constant inter-actions and intra-actions with multiple others.

3. Dimensions of Human-Nonhuman Conviviality-Inequality

Indigenous and African onto-epistemological perspectives have provided invaluable insights, knowledge and ways of being-in-the-world that have allowed for different forms of conviviality between human and nonhuman beings. Although not explicitly acknowledged, new materialisms and posthumanism appear to borrow heavily on these non-European cosmologies. However, they trace their genealogies on western philosophies like those of Spinoza, Deleuze, Bergson and Foucault. While new materialism and posthumanism share many principles and values, they do exhibit differences in the literature they mostly draw from. The term new materialism appears to be more widespread among the social sciences, especially among anthropology, sociology, and geography while the term posthumanism seems more commonly used in the humanities, especially in feminist, cultural and literary studies. Moreover, new materialism tends to focus more on breaking with the nature-culture divide by showing that “everything is matter” whereas posthumanism tends to focus on challenging the human-nonhuman divide and questioning the anthropocentrism and exceptionalism of humanism. Transhumanism also appears as an attempt to break the human-nonhuman binary, especially in terms of human’s relation with technology, but its aim remains profoundly humanistic and anthropocentric as it calls for human enhancement. Finally, approaches that draw on Marxist historical materialism show us that although some of its older and newer versions tend to maintain the primacy of the social over the natural, these perspectives contribute to politicize and historicize our understandings

of human-nonhuman relations and therefore should also be taken into account when thinking of conviviality-inequality with the more-than-human in Latin America.

This section will analyse how these different perspectives on nature-society and human-nonhuman relations help us understand and theorize about conviviality and inequality with-in Latin America. It examines how rethinking human-nonhuman relations through the concepts of alliances, translation and affect gives us new analytical tools to study forms and processes of “living together with difference” and the inequalities that are constitutive or implicated in these forms of coexistence. I have chosen these concepts based on their relevance in grasping the “living with” or “togetherness” of conviviality and inequality in the context of human-nonhuman inter-/intra-actions.

3.1 Incompleteness and Alliances

Scholars like Nyamnjoh (2017) have used the notion of conviviality to describe other possibilities of knowing and being in the world by engaging with non-European ontologies and epistemologies. As this author argues, popular ideas of what constitutes reality in Nigeria regards consciousness as something that “can inhabit any container – human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible – regardless of the state of completeness or incompleteness of the container in question” (Nyamnjoh 2017: 4). He suggests conceiving conviviality “as the recognition and celebration of incompleteness...to temper the quest for and opportunism in individual fulfilment” (Nyamnjoh 2017: 11). As the author explains:

Conviviality encourages us to reach out, encounter and explore ways of enhancing or complementing ourselves with the added possibilities of potency brought our way by the incompleteness of others (human, natural, superhuman and supernatural alike), never as a ploy to becoming complete (an extravagant illusion ultimately), but to make us more efficacious in our relationships and sociality. (Nyamnjoh 2017: 10).

In her work on indigenous-environment relations and politics in the Andean region of Peru, Marisol de la Cadena (2015) borrows Isabelle Stengers’ notion of “cosmopolitics” to emphasize the “relations among divergent worlds as a decolonial practice of politics with no other guarantee than the absence of ontological sameness” (Cadena 2015: 281). She discusses ontological alterity by showing how the Turpos’ indigenous knowledges and forms of being-in-the-world include and exceed modern and nonmodern practices. Sundberg (2014) calls for decolonizing posthuman studies by engaging with indigenous (and other non-western) epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies and by showing how they contribute to posthumanism. Critical posthuman scholars have begun to engage with American, Canadian and Australian indigenous knowledges (Watson and

Huntington 2008; Panelli 2010; Sundberg 2011; Larsen and Johnson 2012; Blaser 2012).

Feminist scholars have also long talked about alliances, affinities and affect to show how differences are meant to be added up and not split apart. They have shown how political power is not only about position but also about togetherness. As Latour argues, “actants are not stronger or weaker by virtue of some inherent strength or weakness harboured all along in their private essence. Instead, actants gain in strength only through their alliances” (in Harman 2009: 15). Therefore, alliances between human and nonhuman beings must be seen not merely as some sort of natural metabolic process but as political practices since they bear profound social and ecological implications.

Bingham (2006: 485) looks at the implications of “adding things to an already full world” taking biotechnologies as his object of study. His attempt is to examine how newcomers connect with the already existing collectivities in which they are introduced, using the concept of “friendship” to make sense of the types of convivial relations that are being configured between different forms of life. He draws on Derrida’s book *Politics of Friendship* (1997) where the French philosopher suggests “to think the friend not as another self but, rather, the other self as a friend” (Bingham 2006: 488) or what Haraway (2003) calls “companion species” or “significant otherness”, which expands our conception of social relation towards nonhuman beings. Thus, instead of determining friendship on the basis of the kind or form of the entity (human-like, animal-like, plant-like, etc.), it becomes characterized by “a certain quality of being open to and with others” (Bingham 2006: 489).

Blaser (2012) points out that the literature on the “more-than-human” in geography tends to omit or exclude the presence of other ontologies like those which include other non-visible but animated earth-beings such as spirits, gods and goddesses. As he explains, the attempt to avoid “othering” (attributing to the objectified other a difference that reinforces the primacy of the self) has led scholars in anthropology and other disciplines to (over)do “saming” (denying the objectified other the right to her difference and subjecting her to the laws of the self). This implies a tendency to universalize dominant viewpoints and categories, which ends up reinforcing Eurocentrism. As a result of “saming” practices, indigenous ontologies like the *pachamama* in Latin America have often been reduced to strategic essentialism; as ethnic political performances conducted by the subaltern to reach particular aims or to respond to particular interests: “Comfortable on the assumption that the subaltern cannot speak, we surrender any effort to hear about ‘things’ that our categories cannot grasp” (Blaser 2012: 4). This surrendering has reduced ontological differences to political instrumentality. However, for indigenous people of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, entities like the *pachamama* (what westerners would call a “creature of the imagination”) are considered as much present

and real as any rock, storm or corn field. So much so, that through “the mobilization of the heterogeneous assemblage that brings it into being, *pachamama* has forced its own constitutional recognition as a subject with rights!” (Blaser 2012: 3). However, expanding human rights to nonhuman beings amounts to reducing otherness to sameness (Bingham 2006). In other words, it is not only about including Others (women, indigenous, animals, etc.) into the dominant order (sciences, capitalism, modernity, laws, etc.) but rather, it is about finding ways to account simultaneously for both similarity and difference and for incompleteness and excess.

These concerns echo with the idea of the “fractal”, used by Donna Haraway (1991) for her notion of the cyborg – half-human, half-machine – which contains more than one but less than two, or by Strathern’s (2004) notion of “partial connections”, which she describes as “a connection between entities based on the fact that each realizes capacities for the other: each makes the other ‘work’” (Strathern’s 2004: 39). Gilroy (1993) also employs the notion of fractal to make sense of the “rhizomorphic” and “discontinuous” structure of Black Atlantic diasporic movements and transnational culture. Cadena (2015) explains how Wagner’s (1991: 163) concept of a “fractal person”, which he describes as “an entity with relationships integrally implied”, resonates with the indigenous concept of *ayllu*. As her indigenous teacher explains: “Ayllu is like a weaving, and all the beings in the world – people, animals, mountains, plants, etc. – are like the threads, we are part of the design. The beings in this world are not alone, just as a thread by itself is not a weaving, and weavings are with threads...” (Cadena 2015: 44).

Therefore, the fractal simultaneously performs similarity and difference, which is also how, according to this author, we should conceive indigeneity, as “both with (and thus similar to) and without (and thus different from) Latin American nation-state institutions, colonial and republican” (Cadena 2015: 33). This perspective challenges binary thinking and essentialized identities, defying both singularity and multiplicity, monism and pluralism, difference and sameness. In chaos theory, where this notion was first elaborated, mainly through the work of James Gleick (1991), fractals are geometric figures that self-replicate at any scale, within non-linear, dynamic and open systems, without losing complexity. These patterns are omnipresent in nature, like in flowers, river networks, snowflakes, coastlines, clouds, broccoli, blood vessel systems, etc. In the case of studying human-nonhuman relations, the fractal metaphor can help us account for the many ways in which our partial connections with the nonhumans create configurations of conviviality that have implications and repercussions at all scales, from the microscopic to the macroscopic levels.

How do particular alliances between biological and technological entities generate or disrupt different types of convivial configurations at different scales? For instance, we

could trace the convivial constellations formed by GMOs, in their production, circulation and consumption, across various scales: from the convivial and unequal relations that they create in their conception in terms of scientific knowledge production and distribution between the global North and the global South, to the convivial relations that they disrupt on the ground by interfering in the relation between plants and animals (like in the case of bee pollination), to their uneven impacts on human health, especially among those who cannot afford to pay for organic food, to their intra-actions with other micro-organisms once ingested into the human body. A fractal topography of human-nonhuman conviviality could thus contribute to our understanding of how these alliances (re)produce or (re)licate particular forms of convivial and unequal configurations at multiple and overlapping scales. It allows us to examine how human-nonhuman convivial constellations reverberate historically, socially, politically, and geographically.

Blaser (2012) shows the importance of shifting from a concept of “cultural difference”, which assumes that there is one universal reality and multiple cultural perspectives on this reality, to a concept of “ontological difference” which assumes that there are multiple worlds and realities. This reminds of Viveiros de Castro’s indigenous perspectivism, which offers a “multinatural” rather than a “multicultural” perspective. However, to avoid falling into an inconsequent substitution of culture by ontology and to prevent a (re) enacting of the modernist ontological assumptions that are being denounced, Blaser (2012: 5) suggests conceiving ontology as a way of worlding. If ontology is performed and produced, then it is always political.

A “political ontology” therefore must be attentive to how different worlds are disputing the way humans connect with the nonhuman and the way we produce worlds through these connections. For instance, as Blaser (2009) points out, the way capitalist appropriates nature as a “resource” for profit and land as private property is radically different from the way indigenous people have historically conceived earth beings as community members and land as something they belong to. If we understand reality as a pluriverse (and not as a universe), that is, “as the partially connected unfolding of worlds” (Blaser 2012: 7), then conviviality can become a critical analytical concept to study how these unfolding of worlds get connected or disconnected and what are the social, economic, ecological and political implications of these (dis)connections.

Collard, Dempsey and Sundberg’s (2015: 322) manifesto for “multispecies abundance” is inspired by indigenous and peasant movements and calls for “more diverse and autonomous forms of life and ways of living together”. For these authors, the urgency to act in the face of the ruins that characterize our Anthropocene condition should not, as Latour suggests, invite us to turn our backs to the past in order to take a different path towards the future. Instead, we must look back in order to denaturalize the state

of our ruins, understand how they have come to be, and think of how abundance (in terms of multiplicity of life forms and ways of living together) can become again part of our future realities.

3.2 Mediation and Translation

Indigenous ontologies, new materialism and posthumanism have included important metaphors to our academic lexicon and have created or re-signified useful concepts to help us grapple with new forms of conviviality with the more-than-human. The term “translation” is one of them. How can we think of translation not merely as an anthropogenic process, in its reduced linguistic form, but as a more-than-human material process that includes other life forms? How can a broadened concept of translation help us enrich and increase the analytical power of conviviality?

Feminist scholars have shown how translation is paramount to forge political alliances across gender, cultures, races and places. They have developed a rich theoretical body of work about “cultural translation” which can be defined as: “premised on the view that any process of description, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas and worldviews is always already caught up in relations of power and asymmetries between languages, regions, and peoples” (Costa 2014: 20). In her book, *Translation and Gender*, Flotow (1997) describes the act of translation as “what women do when they enter the public sphere: they translate their private language, their specifically female forms of discourse, developed as a result of gendered exclusion, into some form of the dominant patriarchal code” (Flotow 1997: 12).

How can this feminist understanding of translation help us imagine how translation occurs between human and nonhuman beings? Drawing on Latour, Harman (2009: 15) defines translation as “the means of linking one thing with another”. Acts of translation therefore involve efforts to mobilize and shape networks comprised of both humans and nonhumans (Law 1999 in Rock, Degeling and Blue 2014). Indigenous knowledge politics and practices have also grappled with the notion of translation to account for the form of conviviality that goes on between human beings and spirits or gods.

Translation is about representation but also about appropriation and transformation. As Costa (2014) argues, when studying global exports of concepts, many scholars like Bourdieu and Wacquant have contributed to reproduce a simplified dichotomic relation between US domination/imposition and subaltern submission/complicity by “neglecting the dynamics of ‘reading’ and ‘translation’ through which ‘foreign’ ideas come to be incorporated into national intellectual fields, each with its own historical trajectory, cultural formation and social mythologies” (Costa 2014: 22). Translation is

therefore the result of negotiated acts of reading (reception) and acts of appropriation (incorporations) defined by unequal power relations.

The art of translation between human and nonhuman beings and translocation between different worlds can be better understood through indigenous knowledge practices. As Cunha (1998) describes, shamans are “travellers in time and space, they are translators and prophets”, they try to re-organize what they witness in their travels by not naming what they see, by translating with twisted words, which “manifest the uncertainty of the hallucinating perception”, showing that their vision is approximative, particular and partial (Cunha 1998: 12). The main work of the shaman (or any translator) is the attempt to recreate meaning by establishing relations and connections and by assuming the point of view of the Other (Cunha 1998).

For Walter Benjamin (2011 [1916]),

The existence of language, however, is coextensive not only with all areas of expression of the human spirit, where language is always in one sense or another involved, but with absolutely everything. There is no event or thing in either animate or inanimate nature that does not in some way partake of language, for it is essential to each one to communicate its spiritual content (Benjamin 2011 [1916]: 251).

According to this author, language is not restricted to words or to humanity, language therefore is the expression or communication of spiritual content. Within that perspective, translation is not simply linguistic or logocentric, it is not simply the transposition of meanings to make them commensurable between different human languages. Instead, “translation is the carrying over of one language into another through a continuum of transformations” (Benjamin 2011 [1916]: 261) and these languages can pertain to both humans and nonhumans. The act of translating thus can be conceived as “enforced commensurability” (Smith and Morphy 2007). In that sense, putting a price on nature is also an act of translation. All measurement, ordering, representation and naming are acts of translation that reduce, fix and confine the otherwise dynamic and expansive process of being in language. “The translation of the language of things into that of man is not only translation of the mute into the sonic; it is the translation of the nameless into name of identity and similarity” (Benjamin 2011 [1916]: 261).

Cultural translations involve the acts of interpretation and representation and therefore the transformation of different ways of worlding. In this sense, they have ontological effects. For instance, Medina (2011) talks about a type of “dialogue between the deafs” when discussing the relationship between the western concept of development and the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir* (or *Suma Quamaña* in Aymara). The latter is

often simply translated for westerners as “To live well, not better” (*Vivir bien, no mejor*). However, as the author explains:

The Spanish translation loses the systemic and cosmobiological connotations of indigenous languages: it anthropocentricises, so to say and, with them in view, resorts to New Age languages to make themselves understood, with something that becomes similar to an American self-help book (Medina 2011: 2, my translation).

Similarly, Haidar and Berros (2015: 136) show how the translation of the Andean concept *Sumak Kawsay* (in Quechua) into living “in harmony with nature” and its institutionalization and inclusion in the “sustainable development” discourse has made this central principle of the *Buen Vivir* becomes a subtheme of, and subordinated to, the “sustainable development” project. It reduces the holistic concept of “living in harmony with nature” to one chapter in the more general issue of human health. As the authors argue: “Through its re-reading in holistic terms, the discourse of ‘life in harmony with nature’ ends up emphasizing the rhetoric of ‘integration’ and ‘conviviality’ (*convivencialidad*) that underlines the notion of sustainable development” (Haidar and Berros 2015: 147, my translation). Therefore, the authors show the distortions that occur when historically marginalized ways of worlding are translated, universalized and institutionalized into the language of national and international law and economics. Conviviality under these terms, is nothing more than a way of sustaining the global capitalist economy by making sure that we learn to better coexist with the material condition that sustains it. This form of conviviality is one embedded in an anthropocentric vision of the world that serves human economic interests. These terms of translation are also defined by the coloniality of power since it is the indigenous language that gets translated and distorted to fit within the dominant western way of worlding. Nonetheless, it is also through this process of translation that indigenous knowledge gets to penetrate into these spaces of power.

3.3 The Politics of Affect

Spinoza’s famous formulation that all bodies have the power “to affect and to be affected” has had a significant influence on scholars who have tried to think beyond the modern mind/body, human/nonhuman, culture/nature, object/subject divides. For Massumi (2015) “to affect and to be affected” is to be in encounter. A politics of affect thus appears as a central element of conviviality between and beyond humans. Affect, in Spinozian terms, does not simply mean emotion or personal feeling, it is rather understood as a transitional state, “a passing of a threshold”, a change of intensity, a way of connecting to others and to the world (Massumi 2015: 3-4). This is different

from emotion, which can be defined as “the way the depth of that ongoing experience registers personally at a given moment” (Massumi 2015: 4).

Affect is highly involved in the conformation of human and nonhuman relations and in the production of convivial configurations between human and nonhuman beings. How affect will bring about hierarchical or horizontal, oppressive or emancipating, cooperative or conflicting forms of conviviality depends upon the context in which affects are performed. As Emboaba da Costa (2016) argues, studies generally tend to “take the affective for granted as positive unifying force or ignore its role in shaping the appeal of dominant racial discourses on identity, nation and belonging” (Emboaba da Costa 2016: 24). Therefore, affects are always situated: “They emerge in a space delimited by a concrete historical and geo-political context, structured by inequalities” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2011: 3).

Affective relations towards nonhuman beings can produce what Sara Ahmed (2010: 22) calls “happy objects”, which are “objects that affects us in the best way”. As she explains, “such objects are passed around, accumulating positive affective value as social goods”. These “happy objects” are those towards which good feelings are directed and which provide “a shared horizon of experience” (Ahmed 2010: 21). Following Spinoza, human-nonhuman conviviality can be understood as the process by which objects are valued through their contact with human bodies: “we move toward and away from objects through how we are affected by them” (Ahmed 2010: 24). As in our social relations with other human beings, affect with other nonhuman beings holds a promise of happiness. Our affection towards animals, plants, food, technology, ideas, and spirits are all loaded with the notion that their presence in our lives will make us happy now and in the future.

Affection towards an object is also related to its geographical and temporal location. Its affect often expands towards that which surrounds it, by means of association. Following Ahmed, Emboaba da Costa (2016) analyses the notion of racial democracy as a “happy object” that simultaneously produces happy affective communities and unhappy affect aliens. The author shows how these happy objects produce “a political economy of hope that both differentially distributes hope and demands different commitments, investments and sacrifices from different people” (Emboaba da Costa 2016: 26). What makes certain natures become happy or unhappy objects is thus highly classed, racialized and gendered. Thinking of how we must create more affective communities between humans and nonhumans, must always remain attentive to the social differences and inequalities that it may also produce.

For instance, in the case of transhumanism, technology becomes a “happy object” that will help us overcome human limitations or living in the suburbs surrounded by

trees and grasshoppers or along the beach becomes a “happy object” that helps us overcome the chaos of urban life. As Emboaba da Costa (2016: 30) suggests, “the happy objects of the affective community emerge here through a set of processes that universalize certain notions of happiness in ways that exclude (1) other ways of being happy, (2) any rejections of these objects as happy and (3) the negative affects that emerge through investments in these very same objects.” As such, the collective affects that make certain objects happy have unequal lived effects and are unequally shared. For some, the happy object of racial democracy in Brazil means mixture and conviviality whereas for others, it means veiled racism (Emboaba da Costa 2016: 31). Thinking of conviviality in terms of affects therefore means taking into account the ways collective affect affects people differentially, how dominant attachments are assumed and cultivated and how unequal experiences of belonging are overshadowed (Emboaba da Costa 2016: 35).

Looking at the nexus between affect and conviviality through a materialist perspective also requires an examination of how they sometimes serve the interest of capital, especially within our informational and knowledge-based neoliberal economies. For instance, in her study of the relation between community and capitalism, Joseph (2002) suggests that NGOs in the United States fulfil an important supplementary role for capitalism through gift exchange. In contrast to commercial exchange, gift exchange is imbued with affect and is commonly viewed as free from utilitarian and economic self-interests. However, she draws on Mauss (2002), who problematizes gift exchange by suggesting that the gift also creates a sense of obligation and retribution and grants power to the giver. Therefore, gift exchange is not as altruistic and non-hierarchical as it may appear and not so distant from capitalist commercial exchange. As the author argues, community-based practices like gift giving appear as the constitutive Other of capitalist relations. In a similar manner, conviviality conveys a sense of community, solidarity and cooperation that seems to go against the individuality that constitutes the core logic of capitalism. However, conviviality and affect are also fundamental ingredients for capital accumulation. As Anderson (2012) argues, “the affective life of individuals and collectives is an ‘object-target of’ and ‘condition for’ contemporary forms of biopower” (Anderson 2012: 28-29).

4. Concluding Remarks

This synthesis paper has grappled with a dimension of conviviality that has often been neglected or disregarded: the conviviality that emerges out of the everyday living together with more-than-humans and its entanglement with inequality. I have examined how more-than-human conviviality is imagined and practiced by reviewing and analysing the work of scholars from different disciplines who have attempted to go beyond

anthropocentric worldviews by accounting for the many significant relationships that we often unconsciously create, develop and maintain with other-than-human beings and which are constitutive of our everyday lives, identities, and material conditions.

As I have shown, thinking about more-than-human conviviality-inequality asks for a closer examination of our assumptions about the world and about what makes “things” appear as more real, lively or worth living than others, or what makes some kinds of existence and worldviews more valued than others. A relational ontological perspective provides the possibility of creating new forms of conviviality with other-than-human beings who have been historically excluded from our worldings by value systems and ideologies that deny them “the right to have rights” (Arendt 1968 [1951]). It also offers new ways of relating to nonhumans, which have been historically and systematically classified and represented as external, inexistent or inferior to humans, and therefore as not worthy of concern and respect. As Krenak (2019) puts it:

In Ecuador, in Colombia, in some of these Andean regions, you find places where mountains form couples. There are mothers, fathers and children, there are families of mountains that are exchanging affects, they make exchanges. And the people who live in these valleys make celebrations for these mountains, they give food, gifts and they receive gifts from the mountains. Why aren't we enthusiastic about these narratives? Why do they get forgotten and erased in favor of globalized and superficial narratives that are telling us the same story? (Krenak 2019: 10, my translation)

“Amefrican”¹⁴ and Amerindian knowledges and worldviews have contributed to making possible the (re)emergence of other “worldings” that allow for the possibility to be affected by nonhuman others in ways that have been seen for so many, and for so long, as inconceivable. These new convivial relations may help to provincialize and progressively transform Promethean and depredatory kinds of humanism that threaten the survival of our species and of so many others.

New materialisms and posthumanism also bring important insights to our study of conviviality-inequality in Latin America since these approaches, by taking matter seriously, reveal the multiple ways in which nonhumans perform important tasks that are conventionally conceived or represented as human practices, thus ignoring the constitutive role that nonhumans play within social relations. These approaches relocate nonhuman agency at the centre of attention, through relational ontologies brought into life by a more promiscuous “intra-action” between the “natural” and “social” sciences.

¹⁴ The words “América” and “Ameicano/a” (Amefrican) were coined by Lélia Gonzalez (2018 [1988]) to give visibility to the Black people of Latin America. The expression has also been used as a transitive verb “Ameicanizando” (Amefricanizing) to refer to the move towards decolonizing knowledge politics and practices.

Within an open space of indeterminacy, fluidity and networks of connectivity, conviviality can be understood as the effect of stronger or weaker connections between different human and nonhuman “actants”. However, these connections, although conceived on a more horizontal plane, also involve processes of inclusion and exclusion, through different degrees of disconnection. What produces these kinds of (dis)connections? What makes them be more transient or permanent than others? What makes them more or less expansive than others? In other words, how do they configure different forms of human-nonhuman power relations and how does this relate to inequality? It is based on these kinds of questions that Blaser (2002) calls for a “political ontology” that can situate and historicize relational ontological practices in ways that can help us understand conviviality-inequality between human and nonhuman more critically and explicitly. This is what a combination between aspects of historical materialist and posthumanist approaches to human-nonhuman relations may help us achieve.

Historical materialism contributes to our understanding of the role of nature in capitalist relations, the way it is (de)valued, appropriated, commodified and fetishized. It brings the focus on how our relations with the nonhumans are profoundly conditioned by our market economy. In contrast, transhumanism is an extreme example of how an ontological perspective that acknowledges the mutual constitution between humans and nonhumans (in this case, technology) can also lead to an anthropocentric worldview that exacerbates inequalities. This is why a materialist ontological perspective must go hand-in-hand with a critical, political and reflective approach if we want to avoid falling either into naturalism, empiricism, environmental determinism or technological determinism. As Braun (2009) notes: “There is no hard and fast rule that a particular ontology leads necessarily to a particular politics, but neither can any ontology be said to be neutral” (Braun 2009: 31).

Based on the contributions of these different perspectives about human-nonhuman relations, I have focused on three dimensions which appear to guide most of these critical materialist and posthuman approaches: (1) incompleteness and alliances; (2) mediation and translation; and, (3) the politics of affect. Each of them brings important insights for our concept of conviviality-inequality in Latin America. Nyamnjoh’s (2017) notion of conviviality as the potency of incompleteness, Viveiro de Castro’s concept of indigenous perspectivism, Strengers’ notions of cosmopolitics, Strathern’s “partial connections”, Haraway’s “cyborg” and Cadena’s ontological pluralism all bring to the fore the importance of a pluriversality of ontology which should promote (selective) alliances rather than divisions and separations. If conviviality is the potency of incompleteness, then alliances and affect are its material manifestation.

A focus on incompleteness and alliances shows the importance of thinking about conviviality in terms of partial connections (Strathern 2004) or “fractal topographies”

which I have used drawing on Katz's (2001) critical appropriation of the term "topography" as a research method: "To do a topography is to carry out a detailed examination of some part of the *material world*, defined at any scale from the body to the global, in order to understand its salient features and their mutual and broader relationships" (Katz 2001: 1228, my emphasis). A "fractal topography" therefore brings forth the particular ways in which more-than-human convivial relations are configured across space, time and scale. Thinking of conviviality-inequality in Latin America in terms of "fractal topography" also means accounting for "multi-natural" perspectives (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Lorimer 2012) or multiple "ways of worlding" (Blaser 2012) in an effort to decolonize posthuman ontologies and to reveal and counter the epistemic violence inflicted upon indigenous and afro-diasporic knowledges and ways of life.

As argued, the "act of translation" can be conceived as inherent to the process of living together with difference, which helps us to understand the co-constitutiveness of conviviality and inequality. Understanding that translation, intentionally or not, often results in "enforced commensurability" (Smith and Morphy 2012) also helps us to identify the forms of conviviality that can lead to epistemic violence. Finally, looking at how affect is implicated in the configuration of human and nonhuman conviviality and inequality reveals that, like conviviality, affect is not inherently positive and can also become a central element in the reproduction of unequal power relations. On the other side, being able to be affected by other-than-human beings is a fundamental condition to think of other forms of worlding based on less destructive and hierarchical relations with human and nonhuman others.

This does not mean, as we have seen, that alliances and affect necessarily lead to emancipatory and more equalitarian forms of conviviality. Staying attentive to how these supposedly positive aspects produce differential effects (intentional or unintentionally) is paramount to a critical understanding of conviviality that can also open up space to examine how inequality plays out within diverse forms of "more-than-human" interactions. If conviviality is the everyday living together with difference, it thus requires constant translation. But if, as Benjamin reminds us, translation does not happen without transformation, we must become more sensitive to the ways in which we translate our inter-actions with the nonhumans. What does it mean to translate other-than-humans by categorizing, mapping, naming, re-presenting and pricing them? How can we learn from our experiences with cultural translation when doing "multi-natural" translation? A fractal topography may help us locate what is being translated and where, and how these translations are constitutive of particular forms of conviviality that can be reproduced across space and scales.

Finally, the approaches I have reviewed in this paper will hopefully help us to distinguish what kinds of materialism may bring us closer to a critical posthumanism that can

enrich and complicate our concept of conviviality. It is by engaging with – and making alliances between – feminist, Marxist, indigenous and other non-western knowledge politics and practices that we can contribute to strengthen the analytical and ethical-political character of more-than-human conviviality and inequality in Latin America.

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