

Coyote Figurations, Techne and Feminism

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Abstract

It is within the framework of situated knowledges in the field of biology and technology studies, in its relation to feminism that the coyote figuration is conceptualized by Donna Haraway. In what respect are they conceived by Donna Haraway to be figures of emancipation? What kind of affinity does it establish with the figure of cyborg, as figure of posthumanism? Certainly, Donna Haraway hypothesizes the privilege of a 'partial perspective' having to play a role in expanding the epistemic horizon of feminist thought. This paper probes into the potential role of coyote figures as metaphors illuminating feminist readings of the relation between philosophy and technology. However, coyote figures have a generic character of transgression, and hence, borders on epistemological reduction of its ontico-ontological phenomenality which Catherine Malabou problematizes. Malabou's eschewal of flexibility counters this binary by developing the role played by the "fantastic" in the espousal of plasticity of being. Being conceived in this originary mutability eliminates the interior-exterior division of beings. What are the comparable features of coyote figurations and the fantastic? And how does it add to the feminist understanding of philosophy of technology?

Keywords

Metaphor, coyote, plasticity, feminist figurations, feminist technologies, cosmotechnics, Donna Haraway

1. Introduction: Coyote Feminism

I like to see feminist theory as a reinvented coyote discourse obligated to its sources in many heterogeneous accounts of the world.¹—Donna Haraway

Donna Haraway evokes the metaphor of the coyote as a trickster figure who, instead of dwelling in subject-object dualism, posits the objectivity of science at the intersection of witty agents and prosthetic devices of meaning-making. The “coyote” figuration emerges in Donna Haraway’s work as a “metaphor,” insinuating the fragmentary constellation of situated knowledges. Extracting coyote figures from the traditional domains of mythical abstraction without thereby slipping into ethnic-naturalism, Haraway underscores that the Coyote figuration is regional but at the same time not reducible to the ethnic, human, or gendered nature, which thus escapes its appropriation as an overdetermination of the feminine. Its fantastic element is a critical figuration dwelling at many intersectionalities not reducible to each other. The pertinent question is whether coyote figures can escape anthropocentric concepts of nature and whether the subject-object nexus formed around them can support somatophilic rationality. In Donna Haraway’s conceptualisation, they are found to be lacking in these respects. Hence, transposing coyote figures into the conceptual framework of the plasticity of beings, this paper will discuss the viability of developing the notion of the “fantastic” postulated by Catherine Malabou as offering another dimension of crossing essences, which incidentally also moulds them into a deconstructive technique that trammels with the current mode of cyber-governmentalities in Katherine Hayles’s work.

In what way does the use of metaphor radicalise our understanding of the makings of scientific objects? In Haraway’s doctoral work, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, she compares the critical importance of metaphors to visual imageries.² Further, citing Ludwig Wittgenstein from his *Tractatus*, she postulates the importance of “showing” over “saying,” which can be more efficiently carried forth through the use of metaphors. She also attributes to metaphor a “predictive value.” Above all, for her, metaphors can invoke a sense of community, although in this work, her metaphors are drawn from the communities of scientists. In her analysis, the formation of a community mobilises a metaphor that is formed around a set of problems which demands a shift from one paradigm to another. Haraway pursues two fundamental problems in this work: 1) how we account for the change in the field of sciences and 2) the new equation these changes bring about in making sense of what may be termed as “nature.” In

1 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 48, no.3 (1988): 594.

2 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors that shape Embryos* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), 2.

particular, she provides an account of the change brought about in the field of “developmental biology” in the first half of the twentieth century, which saw a shift from the binary of vitalism-mechanism to synthetic organicism. In her justification for the use of “metaphors,” she compares it with another symbolic expression— the “paradigm”—that was quite in vogue during this time, being introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).

In comparison, “paradigm,” though, is a befitting metaphor to wield in the field of physics; in her analysis, it falls short in visual imageries to suit the field of biology. She defends this thesis with an explanation that “paradigm,” for Kuhn, embodies a set of shared values which result in the formation of a scientific community of “normal science” as a cumulative enterprise consolidated by a network of shared commitments. In contrast, she observes that community formation is of lesser significance in accounting for a paradigm change in biology, as it is unfurled by the coming together of a set of discrete scientific communities.

However, regarding the role metaphors play in emulating the explanatory power of a scientific paradigm, she is in agreement with Mary Hesse that a metaphor is an image that gives concrete coherence to even highly abstract thought.³ The intelligibility of metaphors arises from the fact that it is shared by a community. Though it is a property of language, it has concrete expectations shared by a community of users, which gives it its explanatory power; this is, nonetheless, not analogous to a logical structure or an archetype. In her doctoral work, she makes use of the potency of “crystal” as a metaphor juxtaposed with how the dynamics of an organism are explained under the framework of a “perfect form” in cell theory. Explaining crystal formation in terms of its organic processes will dispel the imagery of an organism as a hierarchically organised perfect structure in favour of a “discontinuous series of organisms” because crystal formation can be best conceived only as an intermediate state of organisation.⁴ This analogy, built on the potency of metaphors, travels a long way by the time it assumes the guise of a coyote figure.

As she affirms, coyote figurations are brought into the fold of a “kin group of feminist figures” in an effort to show possibilities towards a more liveable place “elsewhere” in the spirit of science fiction:

Figures collect up hopes and fears and show possibilities and dangers. Both imaginary and material, figures root peoples in stories and link them to histories. Stories are always more

3 Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 9.

4 Haraway, *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields*, 11–12.

generous, more capacious, than ideologies; in that fact is one of my strongest hopes...I want to know how to help build ongoing stories rather than histories that end.⁵

She adds to these feminist figures in the interest of conflating facts, history, and ideology. These figurations have roots in their formative histories of religious rituals. But they are figuratively placated off their historical links in order to transpose them as “tropes” that defer their literal meanings. Thus, the affinity towards cross-cultural tropes and metaphors is in the interest of etching a non-inherited kin group “elsewhere”:

There can be an elsewhere, not as a utopian fantasy or relativist escape, but an elsewhere born out of the hard (and sometimes joyful) work of getting on together in a kin group that includes cyborgs and goddesses working for earthly survival.⁶

The figure of the “cyborg” is Haraway’s much celebrated and popular imagery when compared to the “coyote” figure, which is one of the reasons why there is a dearth of discussions on the anti-racial, decolonial readings of contra-modern or alternative-modern readings of folkloristic imageries divulging the tensions built into their appropriations.

Haraway develops the concept of partial knowledges leery of the uncontested claims on objectivity upheld by the scientific edifice.⁷ Whether partial perspectives can be advanced as an account of radical historical contingency of all knowledge claims is a critical project, she ponders along with Sandra Harding, who advanced marginal perspectives representing the standpoint of the marginalised communities of scientific views emanating from their cultural origins as the starting point of scientific research.⁸ As she adds, the extension of this vision is the fundamental tenet of the critical practice of theory building needed for a “successor science” project that offers a better account of a world for the future. This she holds out as the feminist standpoint theory on objectivity, whose want Haraway recognises as the radical multiplication of local knowledges.

Though the Marxist tradition has been identified as a rich source of critiquing hegemony, it failed, in her analysis, in terms of bringing women’s subjectivity into its fold other than as an alienated wage

5 Donna Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

6 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 2.

7 Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 48, no.3 (1988): 575–599.

8 Sandra Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is ‘Strong Objectivity?’” *The Centennial Review* 36, no.3 (1992): 437–470.

labourer. The feminist extension of this tradition unmarks objectivity as a placeholder of unmarked positions of Man and White. Haraway's project is to mark the objectivist claims from multiple locations of situated knowledges. But as we are informed by the regimes of oriental and colonial anthropological scholarship, the "local" is no less of a marked position of "an aboriginal" purity. Thus, Haraway invites us to embody our vision in differential "dimensions of mental and physical spaces we hardly know how to name" in an effort to check the unrestricted vision promised by technological mediations, transcending all limits.⁹ The privileges presumed by the lens of peregrination are what Haraway brings under the critical gaze. Travelling lens ensconced in the imperialist economic privileges of capitalism, allied to its forms of mobility, grants us a false impression about the mightiness of prosthetic devices that they are "active perceptual systems equipped for translations" of specific partial knowledges. As she acknowledges, there is risk involved in appropriative claims on local knowledges—"danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions."¹⁰ Her critical gaze cuts through the relativist positionings of local knowledges, signalling the significance of aligning with the "subjugated standpoints" as they are deemed "in principle least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge."¹¹ Such preference for subjugated knowledges is translated as an argument for situated and embodied knowledges. Thus, the politics implied by the epistemology of partial perspectives situate them as an alternative to relativism, which she underlines is the "perfect mirror twin of totalisation," as both deny the stake implied by locations and embodiment. Equality of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry "falsely promising a vision from everywhere (instead of nowhere) equally and fully."¹²

However, just as any partial perspective will not do, as it would be a disguised form of relativism, the critical potential of partial-subjugated knowledges should signal hope for transformation. Whether this aspect of hope could be contaminated by a "fantastic" element—an extra-rational element of phantasm—is the pertinent question Catherine Malabou shoots into this debate.¹³ In other words, can the characterisation of partiality manifest itself as an alternative to the exhaustive rationalisation of the object of knowledge? Partial knowledges, when juxtaposed to equal positioning of relativism and universal positioning of totalisation, poises itself on a rational axis as another claimant of reason, masking its act of hegemonisation via channels of systematisation and erasure of differences and inequalities. By contrast, the paradox entailed by positioning partial knowledges as non-isomorphic

9 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 582.

10 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584.

11 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584.

12 Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 584.

13 Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, trans. Peter Skafish (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).

reason leaves the element which injects imbalance to exhaustive reasoning mysterious, or least of all, unexplained. And it is at this juncture that Haraway imagines “metaphors” as the intermediary link that sutures the non-isomorphic subject positions and interstitial connections between locations of knowledges:

In these metaphors, we find means for appreciating simultaneously both the concrete, “real” aspect and the aspect of semiosis and production in what we call scientific knowledge.¹⁴

In other words, as one can notice from the above quote, the coming together of heterogeneities constituting partial knowledges is leveraged on an absence of grounds for an ontology of the subjugated. At first glance, the choice of this figuration is quite apt to her project of re-defining “objects as boundary projects,” where boundaries acquire the guise of liminal spaces which are tricky and risky to invest in terms of generation and production of meanings due to their vulnerability to shifts of displacement at borders. However, envisioning the coyote as a “problematic” figure without thereby problematising the boundaries of reason, only in which case it would become characteristic of being a “trickster,” is not promising enough.

2. Xenofeminist Critique of Donna Haraway

In so far as her search is for granting agency to the local world of objects, an active contender is “eco-feminism.” For eco-feminists, however, agency of the world is embodied by the metaphor of a “primal mother” who resists convertibility into an object of resource. Figurations of mothers are designed to claim mastery over the world (including the artificial) via recourse to the mystical powers. It is in defiance of this primal figuration of nature that Haraway opts for the coyote figure as symbolising a “trickster” figure enabling the visualisation of the world as a “witty agent,” thus giving way to a feminist account of objectivity which “makes room for surprises and ironies.”¹⁵ However, Haraway could not envision this figure as a technophilic figure, although it is not a technophobic figure either.

Xenofeminism (henceforth XF) poses itself as one of the contemporary technophilic feminist positions in the work of Laboria Cuboniks (2015)¹⁶ and in their extended vision presented in the work of Helen

14 Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 589.

15 Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 593–594.

16 Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, laboriacuboniks.net/manifesto/xenofeminism-a-politics-for-alienation/, accessed January 14, 2017.

Hester (2018).¹⁷ XF presents itself as a post-revolutionary feminism seeking to develop strategies of adaptation to technologically mediated realities. Their vehement stance on anti-naturalism is built on the labour of freedom from alienation induced by normatively given “natures.” Their orientation towards adaptiveness to the existing technologies organises their thought around the “repurposing of technologies.” This strategic stance towards adaptive or repurposed use of technologies is grounded on two premises: 1) that there is no inherently progressive or political techno-scientific imagination, and 2) feminism is a project of reclaiming reason (“feminism must be a rationalism”), or “rationalism must itself be a feminism”:

Systematic thinking and structural analysis have largely fallen by the wayside in favour of admirable but insufficient struggles bound to fixed localities and fragmented insurrections. Whilst capitalism is understood as a complex and ever-expanding totality, many would-be emancipatory anti-capitalist projects remain profoundly fearful of transitioning to the universal, resisting big-picture speculative politics by condemning them as necessarily oppressive vectors.¹⁸

Though one might agree with their affirmative to go beyond the valorisation of local micro-communities to foster universal solidarity between fractured insurgencies in the interest of emancipatory tactics, there is an equally imminent need to transcend the binaries of local and universal in order to scale up alternative imaginations of “globalism” emanating from heterogeneous forms of milieu formations. Alternative milieus unfurled by digital realities present recursive networks of reasoning whereby our naïve definitions of the rational do not recognise themselves in the binary contrast under the new algorithmic schemas of the rational. It is with respect to their position on anti-naturalism that XF positions themselves as “Haraway’s disobedient daughters”:¹⁹

XF is an anti-naturalist endeavour in the sense that it frames nature and the natural as a space for contestation – that is, as within the purview of politics. Any political project based upon nature as a pseudo-theological limit, a cartography of the untouchable, or a space of incontaminable purity risks lending huge conceptual resources to the conservative punishment of radical difference.²⁰

XF’s anti-naturalist position, as expressed in the above quote, provokes the “givenness” of gender identities. Seeking to break free of the comforts one experiences in the unfreedom of being born this

17 Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

18 Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism*, 3.

19 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 20.

20 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 19.

way leads to their position of gender abolitionism. Heteronormative norms, as we know, are constructed around the immutability of nature. The givenness of gender identity is sequestered into the private realm as a certainty. Severing the natural into the private realm is the biggest challenge one faces today in tearing down the disciplining grid of gender identities. Although in agreement with XF's agenda of anti-naturalism, this paper examines the equitability assumed between the local and the natural. Most agendas of globalism are a call to transcend localism. Dynamics of the transition from the local to the global appear unproblematic in the rational registers of emancipatory universals. However, it would disclose a checkered history in the registers of semi-rational, mystical-spiritual, or inadequately rational.

Donna Haraway's work exposes this intricacy in her articulation of the coyote figuration as an inadequately technophilic figure who could visualise this quandary. However, in this respect, XF's postulation of the "mesopolitical" sphere as a substitution for the local is equally inadequate,²¹ as it operates on the advancement of given technological rationality into developing women's self-help tools, a repurposing of second-wave feminism for the fourth-wave, which though certainly serves the everyday ends of the feminist movement, does not serve the end of the heterogenisation of feminist technics per se:

Without sufficient attention to the mesopolitical, the difficult work of alliance building and of increasing the reach of political ideas is too often left unconsidered. It is within this context that the example of self-help becomes particularly illuminating, given that the protocol might be considered a specifically mesopolitical tactic.²²

Xenofeminism, on the one hand, imagines a post-capitalist mode of production, thought of as a counter-social production; on the other hand, it executes its vision within the given models of practical solidarity using the universal model of the modern technological apparatus. Hence, this model forecloses the possibilities inherent to "cybernetical cosmotechnics" to realise an alternative future of techne. Instead, XF envisions a future that foregrounds human survival, "remembering that survival is the precondition for any revolutionary politics."²³ Although I empathise with XF's concern regarding the acknowledgement of old tools, namely, the "speculum," one of the first gender political tools that mediated the second-wave feminist movement, their lack of empathy towards the heterogenisation of tools is dismal.

21 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 9.

22 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 115.

23 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 68.

In Hester's interjections on Haraway's version of anti-naturalism, we see the conceptual contours of XF's position on anti-naturalism. In her extended version of Xenofeminism teasing out the underpinnings of 2015's *Xenofeminist Manifesto*, Hester, one among the six members of Laboria Cuboniks (the Xenofeminist working group), focuses on their position on reproduction, or rather reproductive justice implied by some versions of transhumanism. In reference to contemporary environmental activism, she points to the "anti-natalist" tendencies implicit within recent accounts of a more sustainable future.²⁴ At this point, her work brings into discussion Donna Haraway's slogan, "make kin not babies," which she pronounces in her work the *Chthulucene* (2015). Hester's point of contention is with its suggested directive to "reduce our birth rate."²⁵ She deploys her dissonance in contextual reference to the biopolitical population control projects initiated by the UN in view of the depletion of resources exacerbated by the environmental crisis.

Haraway's analysis of the impact of population density on the issue of environmental strain, XF argues, "lets capitalism off the hook."²⁶ Integral to Haraway's call for making kin (the Chthulucene) is her deliberation on alternatives to the reproductive futurism of one's genetic line induced by the current ecological conditions. Making kin-assemblages beyond one's genealogy and species prompts us to rethink naturalism. This call, XF argues, inadvertently enters into a complicit entanglement with the "coercive histories of population management, extending to racist practices of sterilisation as a kind of biopolitical border control, culling unwanted future lives from citizenship."²⁷ Indeed, there is a side to Haraway's argument that unravels a lacuna in political sensibilities concerning the biopolitics of subjective formations. Therefore, Hester's critique of Haraway comes in the wake of racialised strategies of population control, which siege the reproductive sovereignty of the subjugated race, which by extension also violates women's individual bodily autonomy. In a further remark, Hester observes that Haraway's empathy towards the ongoing decolonial and post-colonial struggles "concentrates on a vision beyond the capitalist present rather than centring active struggles for a post-capitalist future." In the remaining part of the chapter, Hester brings out the dismal picture of "reproductive labourers," thereby unveiling the fact that the "social capital of parenthood is drastically limited."²⁸ Certainly, one could add to this picture the plight of sex workers, the impoverished, the displaced (migrants, refugees), and the queer. Therefore, Hester succeeds in her argument that rather than making kin-assemblages as a generic call of post-humanist feminism, one has to pay heed to subjectivations formed under the political regime of biopolitics, which appropriate this demand as a tool of governance.

24 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 4.

25 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 55.

26 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 56.

27 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 59.

28 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 60–61.

However, Hester's caution against any form of "punitive disdain regarding the reproductive choices of others"²⁹ does not open up new doors for kin-formations beyond the human species and is a drawback which places Haraway's metaphors harbouring kin-groups of other-than-human species, a reservoir of imageries far exceeding the narrow framework of reproductive justice highlighted by XF, investing exclusively in post-capitalism without a parallel expansion via post-humanist imageries.

3. Cosmotechnical Affinity of Coyotes

Through hindsight derived from algorithmic modes of governance modelled after recursivity, Yuk Hui dispels the naïve imaginings of monolithic reason identifiable in the eighteenth-century models of technologies. Whether the form of reasoning that fuels the big-data machines governed by cybernetics be legibly called "reason" is not only a challenge to its nomenclature but also delineates the crisis in thinking new horizons of cybernetics. A more pertinent question for us to ponder in the age of cybernetics is to map the recursive movements of reason, which otherwise bestows an aura of mystery to its modes of functioning that resemble the soul.³⁰ The advent of cybernetic governance confuses the given critical apparatuses of thinking, as it readily draws in the so-called radical subjectivations—or, as Haraway would call it, subjugated knowledges—into its feedback loop without thereby distinguishing between positivism and hermeneutics. Thus, while systems of governance optimise themselves through cybernetics, their functioning obtains the guise of new metaphysics. In this regard, posthumanist figurations have been criticised by Hui for their naïve attitude towards technology, which completely ignores the ontological intricacies implicit in the new technological ordering of machine and organism relations.³¹ Following this analysis, one can see that Haraway's figure of the cyborg ails from such conceptual naiveté.

In Haraway, the presumed affinity between the post-humanist figure of the cyborg and the Native American figure of the coyote is beset with a theoretical dilemma. Though chronologically, the concept of the cyborg precedes the coyote in Haraway's work, the latter could not succeed in becoming a posthuman figure. While feminist counter-dialogues with science and technological discourse can be appraised as a voice of resistance against the increasing synchronisation normalised between different spheres of society and culture aided by cybernetic governance, Hui's work appeals by adding volume to the diversification of technological resistances, instead of naively opposing organicism against the inorganic. If Haraway's figure of the cyborg is premised on a naïve dichotomy between nature and

29 Hester, *Xenofeminism*, 63–64.

30 Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 246.

31 Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*, 252–53.

machine, the coyote figuration would beg another disdain from an informed post-humanist like Hui: “Are we not here sacrificing science and technology to the Unknown, or, more precisely, to a mythical and religious thinking?”³²

In contrast, Hui maps an alternative route which bypasses a resolution in favour of either science or organic nature. He postulates a new realm of ecology constituted by cybernetics and thus takes the risk of “burning the bridge.”³³ In this newly forged landscape, cybernetics substitutes the place of the “Unknown” in all its spiritual, aesthetic, or absolutistic senses.³⁴ Consequently, cybernetics is recast in a non-deterministic model of diversification of its technical coordinates. This diversification is leveraged on different visions of the cosmos, embedded in multifarious aesthetic, intuitive sensibilities, whereby each of these conceptual equations, radiated by their respective cosmological milieus, would reverberate in resonance with the corresponding cosmotechnics that emerge. A critical moment of reappraisal of the familiar-sounding notions in a new framework of non-modern epistemologies is demanded by “cosmotechnics.” Whether one can reinvigorate the figure of the coyote in cosmotechnical imagery is a compelling question to ponder in the interest of advancing alternative visions of non-modern technics. However, this demands rediscovery of the corresponding cosmological imaginations in which these coyote figures are nestled by various corpora of folklore.

4. Conclusion: Plasticity of Coyotes

This concluding section gesticulates certain theoretical moves that can be viably conceived to have resonance with the contemporary post-human feminist discourse of new materialism wherein the coyote figuration can emerge as a “critical” metaphor with political intent. In this regard, I bring the works of new material feminism into dialogue with each other. The voices of Karen Barad, Katherine Hayles, and Catherine Malabou are brought into dialogue with Donna Haraway for the pursuance of an informed reinvention of the coyote metaphor in technophilic feminism.

In the trajectory of the post-human feminist discourse leading up to its inflexions in new feminist materialism, Haraway’s work belongs to the feminist critiques of the epistemological authority of science. It thus opens new ways of imagining objectivity, but which is still a far cry from new materialism, which is rooting for a shift towards an ontological redefinition of materiality and material agencies. Barad is the key figure who pronounces this shift by engaging with matter’s agentic properties as opposed to a

32 Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*, 270.

33 Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*, 274.

34 Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency*, 278.

vision of agency associated with human intentionality and intelligence. Instead of resisting scientific objectivity, Barad shifts the focus to material-discursive practices of sciences whereby what comes to be determined as “matter” in scientific observation/objectivity is conceived as co-constituted by various processes of becoming of the world’s entangled agencies, a position she names by the phrase “agential realism.”³⁵ Thus, this shift can also be characterised as a move away from a direct critique of science, the mode in which Haraway and Harding have been carrying out their feminist critiques. Nonetheless, the socio-cultural, anti-racial, decolonising, and postcolonial affinities implied by their feminist visions seem to be attenuated in the imaginings of new material feminisms.³⁶

The provocation that Haraway brings into effect with her use of cyborg and coyote imageries is through her imagination of post-gender apparatuses of bodily production. As she reminds us, “gender is a specific production of subjects in sexualised forms where some have rights in others to reproductivity and sexuality.”³⁷ But she uses the phrase “post-gender” only in a critical sense, insinuating the discontinuities in the history of this specific way of understanding gender that “things need not be this way,” not in the sense of beyond masculine and feminine. Similarly, by reimagining the cyborg as a female figure, Haraway is etching an alternative figuration for the space project. In this regard, she decentralises the cyborg from the male-centric imagination of a militarised space project and from the pornographic male-centric gaze of robotised objects fabricated by science fiction. Thus, the figure of the cyborg is reinvented as a tool to understand women’s place in the “integrated circuit” of the communication-control-system.³⁸ Wherever the cyborg assumed a female figuration, she notes, its character is etched in fragilities and ambiguities—as a patient, or as iron-maiden, or as fem-bots. They became expressions of the “problematic of communication.” Hence, her reinvention of the cyborg as a critical figuration of the project for freedom is as an oppositional figure, but which is undertaken as a relentless task, acutely aware of the risks involved in the appropriations of such figures into the mainstream. This propels her into making a counter-appropriative move of inventing a “kinship system of figurations as critical figures.”³⁹ Thus, the coyote is invented as an alternative figural expression of nature, with sorts of entities that are neither nature nor culture, analogous to the genetically engineered laboratory research animal OncoMouse.⁴⁰ In a similar attempt, she articulates “Sojourner Truth” as a trickster

35 Karen Barad, “Agential Realism,” *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. Mario Biagioli (New York: Psychology Press, 1999) 1–11.

36 Sari Irni, “The Politics of Materiality: Affective Encounters in a Transdisciplinary Debate,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 20, no.4 (2013): 347–60; Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008).

37 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 328–329.

38 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 321–322.

39 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 327.

40 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 332.

figure, a shape-changer, a troublesome problematic universal.⁴¹ That is, these critical figurations dwell in an interface establishing inter-sectionality between nature and culture, human and non-human, and human and machine, but nonetheless, in prior determined binaries. It is by challenging this notion of inter-sectionality, which presupposes a world of binaries that pre-exists them, that new narratives of the post-human articulate a vision of intra-sections. It is Karen Barad's work, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), which invents the term "intra-actions" in contrast to "inter-actions" to designate the specific dynamics of agencies, of both humans and non-humans, in an ontologically entangled web. In order to underline their specific differences and distinctness, intra-active processes do not posit the pre-existence of determinate objects—as in inter-action—prior to the actions themselves. They are perceived to be emergent within a certain constellation of phenomena. Though Haraway's transgressive figures symbolically bypass technophobia, they sparingly succeed in turn becoming technophilic. The new material dimensions in posthuman discourse assuage this dilemma, but their alternate conceptions of matter are still ill at ease with the spectral/occultist dimensions. In this regard, Barad's cue lies in the redressal of the dissatisfaction Haraway exudes with respect to the representationalist power of prior ontological categories—of subject and object—predetermining the social constructivist positions.⁴² Nonetheless, what this paper champions is the power of the coyote figuration to precisely defy the representationalist framework in favour of the performative one Barad advances without attenuating the decolonising lens implied by this figuration as well as the occultist one. This figural agency is embedded in the mythic/aesthetic/transcorporeal imagery of the coyote as a "contra-modern" figure, embodying an "originary mutability" symbolising the material-semiotic agency, which is purportedly the vantage point of partial/subjugated/marginal knowledges. However, its first step involves a reinvention of the coyote as a cosmotechnical figure, as the coyote remains a free-floating metaphor in Haraway due to various reasons.

Coyote appears in Haraway's work abstracted from its corresponding cosmoses, assuming the generic character of a "trickster" figure. Unhinged as it is from any conceptual "constraints," it appears in the glory of its flexibility. Appropriation of the coyote from Native American Navaho cultures is imagined, facilitating the "cross-talk" between Native American and Anglo-American cultures.⁴³ In this imagination of cross-border travels, the local-global exchange would remain privileged imagery without a corresponding detailing of the risks and mediations involved. Keeping in view the critical potential of the use of metaphors, Katherine Hayles reminds us that the articulation of metaphors

41 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 46–61.

42 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs* 28, no.3 (2003): 802.

43 Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 328.

should account for its own set of constraints.⁴⁴ Articulating the post-human possibilities in thinking with metaphors, Hayles argues against the decontextualisation of metaphors, as it merely shifts the subjective agency to non-human actors, thereby making them act as ambitiously as humans, thus seeking to materialise the very same modern ideals of autonomy. She illustrates this by taking the examples of Richard Dawkins's and Deleuze and Guattari's work. Dawkins decontextualises his use of metaphors from constraints immanent to evolutionary biology. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari often articulate their goal of the fragmentation of agency against an absent internal structure, which in turn bestows to their use of metaphors an unconstrained dynamism. In contrast to this practice, she forges the concept of "constrained constructivism", foreseeing a post-human future for metaphors wherein processes of self-organisation are constrained by "interlocking feedback loops" restricting the space of possibilities so that "only the most viable self-organising systems or models emerge."⁴⁵ These self-organising systems are conceived as systems that contain distributed cognition and, in consequence, distributed agency whereby we act "with partial agency amid local specificities."⁴⁶ Taking a cue from this insight, we have to reinvent the coyote figuration as a cosmic figuration whereby its possibilities are co-determined by its cosmotechnical milieus in order to make it amenable to technophilic mediums. Hence, a recursive return is called for to the cosmic milieus of coyote figures. However, this return is meant to reinvent the coyote as a cosmotechnical figure of feminism, that is, neither to recover its mythical milieu nor to effect a disaffection from it.

As we have seen, the coyote figuration is rendered as a "trickster" figure by Haraway, assuming its resonance with such figures in the Native American Navaho myths. However, the figure of the trickster assumes a very different set of characters when rendered into Indian folk/tribal/village mythologies, which showcases the heterogeneities in their respective cosmologies. Here, the trickster figure transforms its guise from an epistemological metaphor in Haraway to the mode of expression of "the fantastic designating the phenomenality of ontico-ontological transformations."⁴⁷ Trickster figures within their respective mythical-cosmoses assume their critical potential via their magical acts of violation of specific moral and social codes.⁴⁸ That is, the specificity cannot be taken away from its critical figuration. Its potential as an imagery for post-human articulation lies in the "originary mutability" of this figure.⁴⁹ But what remains to be recovered from their respective mythical cosmoses

44 N. Katherine Hayles, "Desiring Agency: Limiting Metaphors and Enabling Constraints in Dawkins and Deleuze/Guattari," *SubStance* 30, no.1/2 (2001): 144–159.

45 Hayles, "Desiring Agency," 145.

46 Hayles, "Desiring Agency," 158.

47 Malabou, *The Heidegger Change*, 11.

48 Franchot Ballinger, "Coyote, He/She Was Going There: Sex and Gender in Native American Trickster Stories," *Studies in American Literature* 12, no.4 (2000): 15–43.

49 Malabou, *The Heidegger Change*, 11.

is the specific modes of intelligibility to change that this figure brings into vision. Trickster figures are not identified as a fixed-type; rather, they are endorsed as potent figures of subversion. Narratives of subversion are renewed each time a new text or a new oral tradition is recreated. This also attests to the changing face of the cultural and religious dynamics of this discourse at the ground level.

Malabou shoots the poignant question at the onset of her work, titled, *The Heidegger Change*—whether the palpable elusiveness we experience in thinking on “change without presence”—its mode of operation in thought—exuding the “plasticity of being,” be looked upon as a “converter”? Katherine Hayles deploys this concept in the space of digital media technologies of GIS and GPS, which convert physical geographical spaces into digital information programs.⁵⁰ While the above-mentioned digital program for conversion is a flexible model very amenable to the logic of the global economic model of algorithms, both Malabou and Hayles underline the need to distinguish plasticity as a critical model from flexibility. Flexibility is defined in this context as the passive mode of adaptation to the given techno-economic model of global capitalism, and by contrast, plasticity restores a critical space for resistance by creating new digital devices that contravene the logic of the givenness of the capitalist model.⁵¹ Hayles conceives “technics” as cognitive partners, whereby the spectrum of cognition is broadened to include non-conscious cognition as well.⁵² The inclusivity of non-conscious cognitions would decentralise thinking as a prerogative of humans. Thus, in her understanding of posthuman feminist materialism, she distinguishes between the idea of materiality from the physicality of matter, thereby asserting that materiality is an emergent quality not reducible to the latter. Materiality emerges as part of the meaning-making process of intra-action between human intelligence, the physical attributes of artefacts, and our empirical practices in this robust world.

However, one must also delineate the post-colonial/decolonial/post-racial order of things in the articulations of the situatedness of coyote knowledges, specifying the local constraints that the partial agencies of any cosmotechnical milieu implies. In the given socio-material realities, “plasticity” is embedded in a problematic milieu whereby it becomes symbolic of the entangled material realities of a social class in India within the economy of plastic governmentality as a waste product of everyday life. In the Indian context in particular, and in the racialised economies in general, waste workers and garbage collectors constitute a particular social class who are normalised within the caste-economies

50 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 14.

51 Hayles, *How We Think*, 102.

52 Birgit Van Puymbroeck and N. Katherine Hayles, “Enwebbed Complexities: The Posthumanities, Digital Media and New Feminist Materialism,” *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no.1-2 (2015): 21-29.

in India and racialised economies across the global capitalist order.⁵³ Hence, it is in resonance with these intricacies of Asian/African/migrant as well as other forms of impoverished materialities of plastic and e-waste matters that a re-imagination of plasticity has to emerge, wherein a re-invigoration of coyote metaphor ought to insinuate the originary mutability of knowledges on plasticity; thereby delineating the potent convertibility implied by specific political interventions through metamorphoses of subjugated knowledges.⁵⁴ However, in this modest articulation, it can only be deemed as a conjecture placed in the ethical space-time that Luce Irigaray articulates as the “interval between,” where non-human others could also possibly include the mythical/occult, alongside the cyborg elements, earth, and nature, in a new economy of relations of energies.⁵⁵ New material feminism suggested in the works of Barad, Hayles, Malabou, et al. exudes the potential for becoming a coyote materialism if mobilised by metaphors embedded in cosmotechnical milieus and thereby, advancing the performative act of meeting in an ethically mediated ground of “the interval between,” conceived as a space both politically contested as well as effectively transformational, where Haraway would meet new material feminism inflected by decolonial agencies in thinking.

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53 Kaveri Gill, *Of Poverty and Plastic: Scavenging and Scrap Trading Entrepreneurs in India's Urban Informal Economy*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

54 Stuart H. Blackburn, “The Folk Hero and Class Interests in Tamil Heroic Ballads”, *Asian Folklore Studies* 37, no.1 (1978): 131-149.

55 Luce Irigaray, *To be Two* (London: Routledge, 2000); Krzysztof Ziarek, “A new economy of relations,” *Returning to Irigaray*, ed. Maria C. Cimitile and Elaine P. Miller (Albany: State University of New York press, 2007), 51–76; Margaret E. Toyé, “Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Touching (Up/On) Luce Irigaray’s Ethics and the Interval Between: Poethics as Embodied Writing,” *Hypatia* 27, no.1 (2012): 182–200.

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