

Special Issue:

Changing Concepts of Nature in Contemporary Scandinavian Literature and Photography

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MARIE-THERES FEDERHOFER AND DÖRTE LINKE (BERLIN) ON:

Introduction to the Special Issue: Changing Concepts of Nature in Contemporary Scandinavian Literature and Photography, pp. 97–104.

REINHARD HENNIG (KRISTIANSAND) ON:

Anthropocene Aesthetics: Norwegian Literature in a New Geological Epoch, pp. 105–130.

DÖRTE LINKE (BERLIN):

String Games and Entanglements – On the Idea of »Interconnectedness« in the Works of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Josefine Klougart, pp. 131–157.

SISSEL FURUSETH (OSLO) ON:

Nordic Contemporary Fiction Grieving the Loss of Snow, pp. 158–173.

MAIKE TEUBNER (ERLANGEN-NÜRNBERG) ON:

Photographic Encounters in the Arctic Ice. Mette Tronvoll's Series *Svalbard* (2014), pp. 174–198.

ANNA CHRISTINA HARMS (BERLIN) ON:

Nature and Identity: Sámi-ness in the Novel *Zeichen der Zerstörung* by the Sámi Author Kirsti Paltto, pp. 199–218.

Dörte Linke (Berlin):

String Games and Entanglements

On the Idea of »Interconnectedness« in the Works of Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Josefine Klougart

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel setzt sich mit der Idee der »Vernetzung« auseinander, die gerade auch dort eine wichtige Rolle spielt, wo es um neue Verhältnisse zwischen Menschen und Naturphänomenen und eine Einbettung von Menschen in komplexe Lebenszusammenhänge geht. Erörtert werden die Ansätze zweier Denkerinnen der posthumanistischen, feministischen Theorie, Rosi Braidotti und Donna Haraway, in Bezug darauf, wie sie Vernetzung und Subjektivität denken. Hierbei geht es auch darum, die Problematiken dieser Überlegungen und posthumanistischer Ansätze aufzuzeigen. Dies gelingt durch die Betrachtung des Romans *Om mørke* (2013) der dänischen Autorin Josefine Klougart. Dessen Gedanken lassen sich einerseits mit den posthumanistischen Ansätzen verknüpfen, zeigen aber auch Aspekte auf, die als Korrektiv dazu gelesen werden können. Es wird deutlich, dass gerade theoretische und literarische Texte in einen fruchtbaren Dialog treten können, wenn es um eine Revision des Humanen geht.

Abstract

The following essay examines the idea of »interconnectedness«, which plays an important role particularly where new relationships between people and natural phenomena and an embedding of humans in complex life-nexuses are at stake. The approaches of two thinkers from posthumanist feminist theory, Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, are discussed in relation to their thinking about interconnectedness and subjectivity. Some problematic issues arising from these thoughts and posthumanistic approaches are also pointed out. This is accomplished by considering the novel *Om mørke* (2013) by the Danish author Josefine Klougart. On the one hand, its ideas can be linked with posthumanistic approaches, but they also highlight aspects that can be read as a corrective to them. It is shown that theoretical and literary texts can enter into a fruitful dialogue when the matter at issue is a revision of the human.

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Introduction

»Interconnections« are almost ubiquitous today, and their various manifestations exert effects throughout human societies. It has now reached the point that life, culture and knowledge production are unthinkable without digital interconnections via the Internet, the World Wide Web. Increasing mobility and migration interconnect the fortunes of countries and people, as does global trade. Likewise, professional success depends on »networking«. »Interconnectedness« can therefore also be understood as an »absolute metaphor« in the sense intended by Hans Blumenberg – as a figuration that represents the attempt to express and apprehend fundamental and complex conditions of life by means of language. Absolute metaphors originate mainly in times of upheaval, when the challenge is to describe new events and developments:

[T]hey give structure to a world, representing the nonexperienceable, nonapprehensible totality of the real. To the historically trained eye, they therefore indicate the fundamental certainties, conjectures, and judgments in relation to which the attitudes and expectations, actions and inactions, longings and disappointments, interests and indifferences, of an epoch are regulated.¹

In the same vein, the philosopher Michael Reitz sees the digital Web as the guiding metaphor of our era: »Public and, for some time now, private life, too, are conducted over the Web; as a guiding metaphor, it penetrates into the most multifarious spheres, connecting them and creating new nodes.«² He elaborates:

The Web conveys, connects, is intricately woven and has innumerable nodes. It will never be fully comprehensible or fully fathomable. And yet human identity and relations with the world have become unimaginable without it. The Internet liberates; more people can be reached through Facebook or Twitter at the click of a mouse than with a best-selling novel. The Web as a metaphor for anonymous omnipresence, as a gigantic, digital community centre in the long-heralded global village. To paraphrase Zeno: only as a Web user did I prosper in the world.³

»Interconnectedness« is also a key factor wherever ecological questions and interrelationships are at stake. This can be traced back to the 19th century, when Ernst Haeckel coined the term ecology and used it to describe the interdependencies and interrelationships of living organisms within specific environments or habitats.⁴ The climate

¹ Quoted after Robert Savage's translation, Blumenberg 2010, p. 14. »Sie geben einer Welt Struktur, repräsentieren das nie erfahrbare, nie übersehbare Ganze der Realität. Dem historisch verstehenden Blick indizieren sie also die fundamentalen, tragenden Gewißheiten, Vermutungen, Wertungen, aus denen sich die Haltungen, Erwartungen, Tätigkeiten und Untätigkeiten, Sehnsüchte und Enttäuschungen, Interessen und Gleichgültigkeiten einer Epoche regulierten.« (Blumenberg 1998, p. 25).

² »Am Netz entlang verläuft das öffentliche und längst auch das private Leben, als Leitmetapher dringt es in die unterschiedlichsten Sphären ein, verbindet sie und lässt neue Knoten entstehen.« (Reitz 2012).

³ »Das Netz trägt, verbindet, ist fein gewoben und seine Knoten sind zahlreich. Es ist niemals vollständig zu durchschauen und vollständig zu ergründen. Und trotzdem ist es nicht mehr wegzudenken aus menschlichem Selbstverständnis und Weltverhältnis. Das Internet macht frei, durch Facebook oder Twitter sind per Mausclick mehr Menschen zu erreichen als mit einem Romanbestseller. Das Web als Metapher einer anonymen Allgegenwart, als gigantisches, digitales Gemeindehaus im lange verheißenen, globalen Dorf. In Abwandlung von Zenons Zitat: Erst als Webnutzer bin ich in der Welt angekommen.« Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Bühler 2016, p. 8.

crisis is not the only thing that is currently heightening awareness of the complex interconnections within fragile ecosystems, in which humans are just as embedded as all other living organisms, but on which they can also wield forces of destruction. Environmental philosopher Serenella Iovino even reads the current outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as a disruption of established ecological »communication nexuses«:

Here, health is a conversation between cells, molecules, proteins, and other tiny »speakers« in an enormous, integrated system inhabited by plants, animals, and human beings. After all, we are ecosystems too, and our health relies on the richness and the balance of biodiversity dialoguing within our bodies. Sticking our noses, or our mouths, our appetites, our bulldozers, or our weapons into ecosystems and habitats with their own balance (places of which we are not an evolutionary part) is not only unjust in ethical and ecological terms. It is also damaging to our vital communications. When we stick our noses where they don't belong, we expose ourselves to a lethal Babel of messages to which our cells are not prepared to respond. At least, that is, until we have a vaccine to act as an interpreter.⁵

At the same time, however, this disruption of ecological communication has simultaneously intensified virtual interconnections to an extreme degree, which points to a tension between these two spheres. It draws attention to the importance of partnerships and relations that form the basis of human and non-human life on planet Earth. It also raises the question of how exactly such interconnections between people and natural phenomena are to be thought about, and how people can redefine and reposition themselves in an accelerated world of complex and entangled interrelationships. In the following, I would like to present and discuss some reflections on this from posthumanist feminist theory, namely from Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway. I will contrast and enlarge upon my reflections by considering a literary text, the novel *Om mørke* (2013) by the Danish author Josefine Klougart. It will be demonstrated that precisely this dialogue between the three women thinkers, and the interplay between the philosophical-theoretical essay (Braidotti), the theoretical-speculative essay (Haraway) and the literary text (Klougart) can impressively illuminate the complexity of the theme.

The revision of the human – on the reflections of Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway

Only the rudiments of Rosi Braidotti's and Donna Haraway's extensive reflections can be sketched out in the present article, in the aim of identifying the salient points, similarities and differences with regard to the theme of interconnectedness.⁶ The two thinkers are categorically united by their criticisms of a humanistically rooted, universal conception of »human beings«, which are understood to be transcendently grounded, self-contained subjects, governed by their reflective reason. These »human beings« obtain their identity by differentiating themselves from »others«, essentially defining themselves by means of what they are not. On the one hand, such a mentality creates norms that exalt a certain (tendentally male and white) humanness as a universal standard, and

⁵ Iovino 2020.

⁶ I refer principally to Haraway 2016, Braidotti 2013 and Braidotti 2019.

String Games and Entanglements

on the other, creates hierarchies that degrade all fellow beings to faceless and objectified others. Thus, Braidotti sees humanness as a normative convention, and, as such, not »inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination.«⁷ As a (self-)description, this conception no longer does justice to a rapidly changing present that not only continues to extend interconnections, but also, as described above, exposes the fundamental interdependencies of living organisms and of life-nexuses.⁸ In contrast, both theorists emphasize relationality as a fundamental property of living things and the ability to form relationships as a central competence of living organisms. Human beings, too, are part of dynamic, diverse and complex interconnected networks with human and non-human actors, which are unmanageable and uncontrollable and within which one's own identity is only ever created through interaction. The challenge of the present, according to Haraway, is to learn »to be truly present [...] as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.«⁹ It follows that timeless universalisms can no longer be assumed; rather, it is necessary to think in terms of a diversity, complexity and heterogeneity of life-nexuses, in which situative differences bring forth a multitude of differentiated perspectives.

Against this backdrop, both formulate a critique of the term »Anthropocene«, which, although it comprises different readings, ultimately reassembles humankind as an exceptional species – impelled by a crisis in which the options are to await one's own demise on a devastated Earth in apocalyptic-heroic style or, with an inflated sense of responsibility, to set oneself up as its manager and saviour, assisted by even smarter technology.¹⁰ This is rightly seen as a covert continuation of the Enlightenment project, in which »human beings« once again elevate themselves over other living organisms on the presumption of their own exceptional status.¹¹ In contrast, both Braidotti and Haraway make the case for a revision of the human in the posthuman age, for rethinking and renarrating, nurtured by an attitude that is as critical as it is creative and imaginative. Central to this is a new connection with and embeddedness in a creative life-nexus inhabited by people in community with other living beings. »We are in this together«,¹² writes Braidotti, and Haraway emphasizes that there is not simply one history that is told, destroyed and ended by human beings: »That History must give way to geostories, to Gaia stories, to symchthonic stories; terrans do webbed, braided, and tentacular living and dying in sympoietic multispecies string figures; they do not do History.«¹³ For both thinkers, this foundational condition of endless, dynamic and unpredictable

⁷ Braidotti 2013, p. 26.

⁸ On this section in detail, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 13–16 and Braidotti 2019, pp. 6–13; also Haraway 2016, pp. 2, 11, 30, 32.

⁹ Haraway 2016, p. 1.

¹⁰ I am aware that this is a selective and abbreviated account, as the discourse on the Anthropocene is extremely diverse, and that there are other narratives besides the catastrophe narrative mentioned here and the biotechnology narrative. Cf. in detail Dürbeck 2018. In this regard, Dürbeck also includes the interdependence narrative and in this connection explicitly mentions Braidotti and Haraway, although they are critical of the term themselves. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13. More extensive discussion of the Anthropocene is also found in Horn & Berghaller 2020.

¹¹ On this aspect in detail, cf. Haraway 2016, pp. 44–51, especially p. 49 and Braidotti 2019, pp. 71–74.

¹² Braidotti 2019, p. 9.

¹³ Haraway 2016, p. 49.

interconnections, of an affirmative life force that permeates the realm of the living, conditions the possibility of carrying on in a difficult present. They urge courageous acceptance of its complexities and challenges, and within it, the rethinking and reshaping of one's own life and identities.¹⁴

Within this common intellectual framework, however, Braidotti and Haraway accentuate slightly different aspects, which I would like to outline briefly because they are significant for my concluding question about the political practicability of the theoretical concepts. Braidotti, coming from the more philosophical direction, takes the rethinking of a posthuman subjectivity as her starting point. She formulates the posthuman subject as an extended self that stands in a field of references, forces and energies, of which it is born in the first place and on which it, in turn, exerts influence. Here, Braidotti emphasizes »the priority of the relation and the awareness that one is the effect of irrepressible flows of encounters, interactions, affectivity and desire, which one is not in charge of.«¹⁵ Subjects are thus conceived of as a kind of »event«, as instances that are heterogeneous and fluid in themselves, that reassemble forces in specific ways and are involved in a permanent process of becoming.¹⁶ Thus, the humanistic subject defined by its transcendental consciousness, previously thought of as an individual entity with a fixed identity, now becomes a relational one, »framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities.«¹⁷ This subject can reconnect with *zoe*, described by Braidotti as a vital, non-human life force which breaks down structures that are normative and hostile to life and is thus a moment of creative force and resistance:

Zoe as the dynamic, selforganizing structure of life itself [...] stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism.¹⁸

Inscribed in *zoe* is a force, an impulse for development, self-expression and freedom, which cannot be tamed by settled and standardizing human concepts, but rather, continually realizes new potential for life.¹⁹

From this standpoint, Braidotti gains the means to redefine phenomena such as subjectivity, agency, and indeed thinking, as relational. In a new »we« that is composed of numerous different perspectives and situations, and hence inherently heterogeneous, alliances arise between different living beings which are able to realize new visions collectively. Another very essential concern here is to include hitherto marginalized voices and, by establishing »missing links«, to create more all-encompassing interconnections. Subjectivity is thus no longer a status, no longer

¹⁴ In this regard cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1–4 and Braidotti 2019, pp. 175–182; also Braidotti 2013, pp. 193–195.

¹⁵ Braidotti 2013, p. 100.

¹⁶ Cf. Braidotti 2019, p. 41.

¹⁷ Braidotti 2013, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56 and Braidotti 2019, p. 155.

String Games and Entanglements

an instrument of power ascribed to individuals, but emerges as efficacy and potency in the collective action of human and non-human beings, in the assemblage in which the individual participates.²⁰ It is »a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability«²¹ and thus it can never be thought of as settled, but is continuously renegotiated. Relationality and relational capacity are the key terms here:

Instead, I emphasize the embodied, embedded and transversal selves that we are, bonded by ontological relationality. Embodied and embedded because we are deeply steeped in the material world. Transversal because we connect but also differ from each other. And yet we are structurally related to one another, to the human and non-human world that we live in. We are after all variations on a common matter. In other words, we differ from each other all the more as we co-define ourselves within the same living matter – environmentally, socially and relationally. [...] This relational process supports a thick and dynamic web of interconnections by removing the obstacles of individualism. Life is not exclusively human: it encompasses both *bios* and *zoe* forces, as well as geo- and techno-relations that defy our collective and singular powers of perception and understanding.²²

With her concept, Braidotti pursues a new and conscious shaping and expansion of this relational capacity, a creative interweaving of the various *zoe*, geo and techno perspectives based on an experimental play with (life) forces.²³ Her »affirmative ethics« is based on both an adequate knowledge of the power relations and possibilities within these interconnections, and on the desire to break these down in a collective practice of self-formation and to recreate them in a way that is life-promoting and equitable for all living beings.²⁴ It is not a matter of simple forms of protest or the fashioning of counter-identities, but rather, of complex, diverse and scattered forms of resistance in the form of a micro-politics of lived relationships,²⁵ »as a posthumanist ethics that traces transversal connections among material and symbolic, concrete and discursive, lines or forces.«²⁶ This also engenders another form of collective:

It actualizes a community that is not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of ancestral communal violence, or the melancholia of unpayable ontological debts, but rather the compassionate acknowledgement of their interdependence with multiple others most of which, in the age of the anthropocene, are quite simply not anthropomorphic.²⁷

²⁰ Cf. Braidotti 2019, p. 158.

²¹ Braidotti 2013, p. 35.

²² Braidotti 2019, pp. 44–45.

²³ Cf. Ibid., p. 98.

²⁴ Cf. Braidotti 2019, pp. 190–197 and Braidotti 2013, pp. 153–173.

²⁵ Cf. Braidotti 2013, p. 95.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Braidotti 2013, p. 101.

Braidotti even conceives of consciousness and thinking as collective phenomena. Their purpose is no longer self-reflection and self-affirmation of a human consciousness that is, of its very nature, wrapped up in itself and its own problems, but rather, a shared becoming-new-together that creates a future: »Thinking is about increasing our relational capacity, so as to enhance our power (*potentia*) for freedom and resistance. Posthuman thinking is post-identitarian and relational: it turns the self away from a focus on its own identity into a threshold of active becoming.«²⁸ From my point of view, Braidotti's concept is accurately summarized by a play on words that is only possible in German: *Bewusst-Sein* (consciousness; being conscious), in the sense of transcendental concepts and human conceptions that are normatively imposed on life-contexts, becomes *Sein-Bewusst* (being-conscious), a kind of thinking that is immanent to being, which serves to connect with life, to rediscover and orient oneself in it, and to create positive, fruitful life relationships. This is also evident in the distinction Braidotti makes between morality and ethics. Whereas the former is brought to bear on life-relationships as a normative concept, ethics comes into being, as it were, in, through and from relationality; that is to say, through positive, lived relationships.²⁹ For Braidotti, human consciousness as such is not capable of resolving or adequately dealing with phenomena such as suffering, grief and pain or the uncontrollability of life itself: the task for humans is rather to transform these positively by venturing into the dynamic relationality of life and, being connected to an overriding life force, trying in collaboration with others to bring about new realizations of its constant, ubiquitous creative potential.³⁰ It is a consciousness that is inherent within the life-nexus itself, which evolves from it and for the preservation of it. As a posthuman phenomenon, it extends beyond »human beings« into their numerous interconnections.

In contrast to Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway is originally at home in biology, among other subjects, and also nurtures a deep fascination for stories.³¹ This forms the background for her proposals of material-semiotic realities geared towards a collective becoming that makes it possible »to live and die well with each other in a thick present [...] learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth.«³² Haraway thinks of life in the current era of the Chthulucene³³ as dense entanglement, as the interconnectedness of tactile, tentacular beings, of the Chthonic ones:

²⁸ Braidotti 2019, p. 79. This also has consequences for Braidotti's view of the humanities, although I cannot address these in further detail here. Cf. on this aspect in detail *ibid.*, pp. 100–121 and Braidotti 2013, pp. 143–185.

²⁹ Cf. on this aspect Braidotti 2019 p. 92, p. 136 and p. 158: »There are no moral injunctions at work, but rather ethical forces that operate like analytic frames for on-going experiments with intensities that need to be enacted collectively.« At this point I am considerably more sceptical than Braidotti, as I will discuss further below.

³⁰ Cf. Braidotti 2013, pp. 193–194.

³¹ Haraway is trained in zoology, biology, philosophy and literature and brings together the approaches from the different disciplines in her interdisciplinary thinking. Cf. Merrick 2017, p. 101.

³² Haraway 2016, pp. 1–2.

³³ The word is a compound from the Greek roots *khthôn* and *kainos*, which »together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth.« *Ibid.*, p. 2. Haraway consciously also introduces this term as a counter-concept to that of the Anthropocene in order to circumvent the anthropocentric dimension of the Anthropocene concept and place the emphasis on interconnections.

String Games and Entanglements

Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute. I imagine chthonic ones as replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair. Chthonic ones romp in multicritter humus but have no truck with sky-gazing Homo. Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. Chthonic ones are not safe; they have no truck with ideologues; they belong to no one; they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth. The make and unmake, they are made and unmade. They are who are.³⁴

The basis for this proposal is, among other things, the observation of sympoietic becoming in biology, where organisms are no longer thought about exclusively as individual entities in interaction with a surrounding environment, but rather as holobionts, which are held together by polytemporal and polyspatial associations, interact in complex patterns, and only arise as such from this interaction.³⁵ Haraway conjures up the figuration of the interconnections and interdependencies for her readers in considerably more visual and concrete terms than Braidotti by making use of the textile-related metaphor of string figures. The string figures (SF)³⁶ in question are a kind of cat's-cradle game in which the strings are passed from player to player, each responding to the other's pattern and both taking care to let new patterns emerge. It is impossible to obtain secure knots in this game, which is more concerned with the new and surprising configurations that emerge in a constantly unfolding process:

The tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others. SF is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come.³⁷

Here, the description of the string figures becomes a material-semiotic practice itself, in that it simultaneously represents both a form of action and a metaphorical description of the world. Haraway also associates it with the process of weaving, which – it may be inferred from her description – serves to establish meaning, beauty, and the positive relationships in the world: »Weaving is neither secular nor religious; it is *sensible*. It performs and manifests the meaningful lived connections for sustaining kinship, behavior, relational action – for *hózhó* – for humans and nonhumans.«³⁸ Thus, for Haraway, it is out of a »multispecies trouble«³⁹, the »rich terran muddle«⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 30, pp. 58–69.

³⁶ SF signifies many things for Haraway: »speculative fabulation, science fiction, science fact, speculative feminism, *soin de ficelle*, so far.« *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91. *Hózhó* is a central concept in the cosmology and daily practice of the Navajo. It translates approximately as beauty, harmony and order, although Haraway herself makes the point that the translation would have to emphasize the »right relations of the world« (p. 91), which encompass both human and non-human beings. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of life itself that meaningful and significant interconnections arise, which owe their existence to encountering existing lines and composing new ones in equal measure.

Haraway places less reliance than Braidotti on a continuous flow of forces in which alliances and nodes are formed, and instead favours an invention of new »attentive practices of thought, love, rage, and care«⁴¹, which enable new associations and entanglements between the given partners, and new forms of kinship: »I work with string figures as a theoretical trope, a way to think-with a host of companions in sympoietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting. I work with and in SF as material-semiotic composting, as theory in the mud, as muddle.«⁴² Nor does Haraway explicitly refer to her thinking as posthuman, but calls herself »a compostist, not a posthumanist: we are all compost, not posthuman.«⁴³ Although the compost image here points to the »chipping and shredding«⁴⁴ of traditional concepts of the human as *Homo*, which stress the exceptional position of Man and his techno-cultural superiority, these are not quite so firmly dispelled as in Braidotti's work. What Haraway envisages, instead, is a long-term process of transformation. For instance, Haraway still refers to a central, intrinsically human cultural practice: telling stories.⁴⁵ While the underlying intention remains the same, this slightly alters the focus.

The practice of telling stories is central to the configuration of new worlds as well as to human orientation within them. Albrecht Koschorke, for example, draws attention in his narrative theory to the definition of the human being as »*Homo narrans*«⁴⁶ while Haraway, for her part, employs this ability herself for her reconfiguration of life:

Each time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise. Such exercise enhances collective thinking and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴² Ibid., p. 31. What is important here is that this compost does not signify disorder in the sense of chaos, and thus differs from »the mesh« outlined by Timothy Morton, for example. Morton makes the case for admitting that human beings live in an environment they themselves have destroyed, and are inextricably involved *in* it and *with* other beings, responsible for it but unable to master it. Thus, instead of ascribing meaning, he argues in favour of staying with the doubt, wonder and monstrousness, and cultivating a kind of intelligent immersion that does not assimilate things harmoniously. On this approach, cf. Morton 2007, especially pp. 217–225. It does, however, entail an apocalyptic gesture, which draws criticism from Braidotti: »Morton is a champion of such sentimental and apocalyptic gestures that unify humanity in fear and anxiety.« Braidotti 2019, p. 83. Braidotti and Haraway firmly reject this gesture. Another interesting approach is Tim Ingold's concept of »meshwork«. He understands interconnections not as links between different entities that collaborate with each other, but rather as complex linear meshes much like energy fields, in which living beings operate and are integrated. It would be worth tracing the links with Braidotti's and Haraway's concepts in more detail. Cf. Ingold 2011, pp. 64–65 and pp. 89–94.

⁴³ Haraway 2016, p. 101. However, Haraway does not go into further detail on what exactly she means by posthumanism and how her concepts differ from it. Cf. also *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁵ This is also evident in the different slogans that Braidotti and Haraway adopt. Again and again, Haraway postulates »**Think** we must; we must think.« (Ibid., p. 36), while Braidotti repeats at different points »We **are** in this together« [emphasis my own, D. L.]. Although Haraway, too, thinks of thinking as relational and caring, what she is objecting to here is a thoughtless indifference, a refusal to realise the consequences and implications of one's actions; nevertheless, in my view this points up a subtle difference in the work of the two thinkers, who are otherwise very closely aligned. Haraway agrees that other living beings possess their own communication and language, yet makes intensive reference to the human capacity for writing, narrating and reflecting in her book. In contrast, as outlined above, Braidotti attaches even greater weight to a consciousness embodied in all living beings, from which a common wellbeing emerges.

⁴⁶ Cf. Koschorke 2012, pp. 9–12.

String Games and Entanglements

movement in complexity. Each time I trace a tangle and add a few threads that at first seemed whimsical but turned out to be essential to the fabric, I get a bit straighter that staying with the trouble of complex worlding is the name of the game of living and dying well together on terra, in Terrapolis.⁴⁷

It is a matter of finding other, new stories, and thus, as Haraway's idea can be construed, of establishing new habits of thought. Haraway sees stories in this sense both as new practices supporting mutual empowerment and a heightened attention to the flourishing of life-promoting nexuses, and as the act of narrating itself: there is thus a close interplay between making good (life) stories and telling them or writing them down. An important aspect of this is a new practice of reflection and consciousness of (one's own) interconnections. In this way, Haraway vividly conveys how places and contexts are, as it were, woven through with new threads, and how these interweavings acquire new meanings, provided that one explores them sensitively. This applies as much to the mutualistic relationship between ants and acacias in Africa⁴⁸ as to the complex interconnections around the ingestion of an oestrogen⁴⁹ and the stories of the penguins in Sydney Harbour, told by van Dooren in the volume *Urban Penguins: Stories for Lost Places*:

In their resolutely »philopatric« (home loving) nesting and other life practices, these urban penguins – real, particular birds – story place, *this* place, not just any place. Establishing the reality and vivid specificity of penguin-storied place is a major material-semiotic accomplishment. Storying cannot any longer be put into the box of human exceptionalism. Without deserting the terrain of behavioral ecology and natural history, this writing achieves powerful attunement to storying in penguin multimodal semiotics.⁵⁰

The prerequisite for finding and creating such stories is a polite curiosity⁵¹ which departs from well-trodden paths and asks new questions of oneself and others: »The risk of listening to a story is that it can obligate us in ramifying webs that cannot be known in advance of venturing among their myriad threads.«⁵² This overturns a mode of narrating and thinking, the creation of sense-connections that relate only to humans themselves. Instead, a network of thinking-with is established, which takes one's involvement in the lives of others and one's own responsibilities and entanglements seriously, without diminishing their complexity: »Why tell stories like this, when there are only more and more openings and no bottom lines? Because there are quite definite response-abilities that are strengthened in such stories.«⁵³ The new interconnections Haraway describes are not therefore human safety nets; they are complex, dynamic, surprising and unpredictable, always open, and thus part of the trouble. Yet they also take the human need for meaning and orientation seriously: they are stories which work as nets in which the world

⁴⁷ Haraway 2016, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid., pp. 121–125.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 104–116.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 127.

⁵² Ibid., p. 132.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 115.

can be collected and which can be inhabited – dynamic string figures of meaning and practices we create and live in, which *are* our world. Here, too, human conceptions are no longer applied to life normatively, but rather, emerge from it – in the interplay with numerous other living beings, which is where new interconnections are sought: »What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?«⁵⁴ At the same time, in my view, compared with Braidotti's work, the thinking behind this concept comes more from the viewpoint of humans and their abilities, since it is partly and very substantially based on the ability to tell stories or to verbalize the stories of others.

The rethinking of humans as relational beings, which both thinkers call for, is inspiring. Nevertheless, I would now briefly like to address four points of criticism that occur to me as a result of reading the theoretical texts, because they are important for the question as to the possibilities of new interconnections, and particularly with natural phenomena. These are (1) elitism, (2) the scope of the concepts' political practicability, (3) the interplay with non-human actors, and (4) dealing with one's own mortality.

(1) Particularly in Braidotti's work, which explicitly calls for an improvement in relational abilities and the capacity to absorb the complexity of the world, there are indications of the danger of being overwhelmed and the difficulty of withstanding the world at this intensity. While Braidotti addresses these in a few instances, she ultimately makes no concrete proposals for possible boundary setting.⁵⁵ Overall, she takes too little notice of the human need for structures, which enable orientation in an increasingly confusing world of ever more abundant interconnections and collaborations.⁵⁶ The populist movements mentioned by Braidotti, and their »negativity« in the form of isolation

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁵ Cf. on this aspect in detail *inter alia* Braidotti 2019, p. 170–171 and p. 179. As Braidotti writes here, for example: »A higher form of self-knowledge by reaching adequate understanding of the nature of one's affectivity is the key to an affirmative ethics of empowerment. It includes a more adequate understanding of the interconnections between the self and a multitude other force. This requires labour so as to increase relational powers and to deal with complexity without being over-burdened. Thus, only a quest for increasing degrees of relational powers can guarantee the freedom of mind in the awareness of its true, affective and dynamic nature.« (Ibid., p. 171). To my mind, this higher self-knowledge presupposes not only experience but also a very highly developed capacity for reflection, which cannot simply be taken for granted, by any means. In an essay on Virginia Woolf, Braidotti does address the »problem of sustainability« somewhat more specifically: »One needs to be able to sustain the impact with the onrushing affectivity to ›hold‹ it, without being completely overwhelmed by it. But ›holding‹ it or capturing it does not occur on the paranoid or rapacious model of a dominant, dialectically driven consciousness. It rather takes the form of a sustainable model of an affective, de-personalized, highly receptive subject which quite simply is not one, not there, not that. As Virginia Woolf put it: ›I am rooted, but I flow.« (Braidotti 2008 p. 46). She continues: »›Too much-ness‹ and hence the question of limits is as crucial in pleasure as it is in pain. Learning to dose and time it is the alchemy of a successful relationship [...].« (Braidotti 2008, p. 52). At the same time, however, it becomes clear that her protagonist Virginia Woolf obviously could not bear it: »Just enough, until [she] could not take it any more and decided to walk back into her liquid element: death by water.« (Ibid., p. 53). In my view this reveals the problem of overload or instability of the ego, resulting from the intensity of input from the world and embedding within it; more serious problem-solving approaches will be required than Braidotti offers if the human ego is to remain capable of performing its functions.

⁵⁶ Overall, Braidotti gives little consideration to the problems and specificities of human consciousness. As she explains at one point, somewhat contradictorily: »Vital materialism [...] is a way of empowering the specificity and value of being human at a time when the centrality of ›Man‹ is being historically displaced. At the same time it abstracts the anthropomorphic subjects from any claim of exceptionalism.« (Braidotti 2019, p. 50). As to the nature of this particularity and value, however, she does not elaborate further. Likewise, at one point she mentions the importance of semiotic systems for human beings: »The nomadic subject is a branch of complexity theory and it promotes a continuing emphasis on radical ethics of transformation. This is not to deny the role that historical contingency and cultural codes play in subject formation, but rather to subject these very factors to a serious update in the light of their own changing structures and compositions.« (Braidotti 2013, p. 192). She does not go on to explain how these semiotic systems might arise and be authoritative and a means of orientation within a nomadic concept.

String Games and Entanglements

and the desire for harmonizations and rigid hierarchies, are the natural downside of her »nomadic concepts«. Here, a real overload cannot be countered with the absolute openness that Braidotti demands, because such openness ultimately entails the difficult and, in this form, perhaps completely undesirable loss of familiar identities.⁵⁷ Likewise, the realities of concrete situatedness, which are increasingly difficult to withstand and to define in a globally interconnected world, are also of little help at this point. Overall, Braidotti's concept is based on a very positive view of the life-nexus, and of human beings themselves. While she does not disregard negativity or affects such as grief, she nevertheless assumes – too naively in my view – that these can always be transformed positively:

Posthuman knowledge brings about a communal and distributed subjectivity, supported by the shared desire for reaching adequate understanding of the conditions that limit our freedom. Thinking is always active: by understanding your life conditions you strive to change them affirmatively.⁵⁸

Possibly this view is more likely to be situated in academic, privileged contexts than in mainstream society.

(2) My second point is therefore the question of who the »we« sketched out by Braidotti actually includes, and how it is to come about, in concrete terms? How, in reality, can such different perspectives as that of a posthumanist-feminist collective, with which Braidotti aligns herself,⁵⁹ and of those who cling to structure and hierarchies, be brought together in common action? And will it give rise to collectives which can be made ethically responsible and which engage in life-promoting action? For instance, as I see it, the »*Querdenker*« (lateral thinkers) movement that is currently being constituted in Germany to protest against state restrictions in relation to COVID-19 also fulfils Braidotti's requirements for an affirmative collective.⁶⁰ I take a critical view of the possibility of overcoming

⁵⁷ Cf. on this aspect Braidotti 2019, pp. 166–167 and p. 158. As Braidotti writes: »Microfascism brings about the paradox of a desire that desires its own repression and its un-freedom.« (Ibid., p. 178). In this she sees a turn towards the destructive, a systematic obstruction of the affirmative forces of desire by suppressing relationality: »One can undo the fascist inside by acknowledging one's attachment to dominant identity formations and power structures. This acknowledgment is the precondition for the practical task of changing the negative habit into affirmative relations. This praxis requires opening up to others and co-constructing alternative social structures and alternative desires that sustain the task of transforming the negative. Returning desire to its affirmative structure is a way of learning to live the non-fascist life, that is to say a life guided by the ethics of relational affirmation as outlined throughout the book.« (Ibid., p. 179). From my perspective, this is an arrogant attitude that re-establishes »the other« in the form of all those who cannot or do not want to apply the affirmative life forces, without looking more closely at how and why such »blockages« come about. I will have more to say about this further below.

⁵⁸ Braidotti 2019, p. 132. Here once again, it is worth asking to what extent this can be considered universal, or whether one's own values are not simply being made absolute. A further question arises as to how far Braidotti's concept can be distinguished from approaches of self-enhancement in the sense of maximizing happiness and optimizing performance – a difficulty she herself also addresses. She does so by invoking the different set of values that underlies her concept, which is aimed not at exploitation and the aggrandisement of the capitalist logic, but rather at a conscious and affirmative understanding and play with one's own life forces, which makes it possible to live one's own life well and become the best version of oneself. Here once again, I think this differentiation is not quite as simple as Braidotti would have it. It appears that she implicitly introduces new moral values and makes them absolute, which ultimately contradicts her own concept. On this point, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 176–177.

⁵⁹ At one point she states this very clearly, along with a certain, group-specific set of values which only a small group of people are likely to share in that form. Cf. Braidotti 2019, p. 86: »For the sake of the current discussion, »we« are situated, feminist-minded, anti-racist, post- and de-colonial thinkers and practitioners, who are trying to come to terms with the challenges of the posthuman convergence, while avoiding a universal posture or undue generalizations.«

⁶⁰ On this aspect, cf. *ibid.*, p. 128: »Such collective vision implements the creative and collective praxis of jurisprudence, which, contrary to the abstract conceptualizations of legal codes and rules, is work-in-progress. As Deleuze teaches, jurisprudence is an active mode of resisting established protocols and concepts. It is a dynamic element that allows for an immanent conception of rights, open to collective interventions aimed at changing and troubling the law.« The so-called »lateral thinkers« would certainly

individual interests in the direction of collective action as Braidotti envisages, particularly if the dangers of new hierarchizations between different »sets of values« and the marginalization of individuals are to be avoided in the process. It seems to me that Braidotti's concept is eminently fruitful as a philosophical-visionary programme; as a political one, however – which is how I understand her aspiration – it seems less appropriate.

(3) A third question in this context is how the inclusion of non-linguistic beings can really succeed. For instance, while Haraway's description of a joint project involving humans and pigeons is fascinating, a certain scepticism remains when she says that the pigeons »were invited«⁶¹ to this project, because the question involuntarily arises as to whether and how a »no« could have been communicated. This touches on the question as to the possibilities for relativizing anthropocentrism in reality, which in my judgement is extremely difficult.⁶²

(4) Of greatest importance to me, however, is the fourth point: dealing with one's own mortality. While Haraway speaks in rather general terms of a new way of living and dying well,⁶³ Braidotti more explicitly addresses the necessity of reconceiving death as an event that represents an individual boundary within a larger life-nexus, but causes it no impairment as such:

Making friends with the impersonal necessity of death is an ethical way of installing oneself in life as a transient, slightly wounded visitor. We build our house on the crack, so to speak. We live to recover from the shocking awareness that this game is over even before it started. The proximity to death suspends life not into transcendence, but rather into the radical immanence of »just a life«, here and now, for as long as we can and as much as we take.⁶⁴

While at the conscious level all of us struggle for survival, at some deeper level of our unconscious structures all we long for is to lie silently and let time wash over us in the stillness of non-life. Self-styling one's death is an act of affirmation [...] Life as virtual suicide is life as constant creation. Life lived so as to break the cycles of inert repetitions that usher in banality. Lest we delude ourselves with narcissistic pretences, we need to cultivate endurance, immortality within time, that is to say death in life.⁶⁵

identify with this description. Naturally, it is indeed important that legislation is critically questioned, and changed and amended if need be. My main point is that I am not confident that the public at large has the informed and reflective competence that is ultimately necessary to accomplish this, and I think individual interests are very much in play which are not intent on the well-being of all. In this area, binding regulations based on a largely consensual ethical code provide substantially more orientation, which in my view can be extremely beneficial for positive social coexistence.

⁶¹ Haraway 2016, p. 21.

⁶² This is a matter that I cannot explore in detail here. In my opinion, human perception and human action are always anthropocentric insofar as it is impossible really to perceive the world from the perspective of another species. These can only ever be imaginaries, which in turn are ultimately anthropomorphic. Cf. on this aspect Nagel 1996 as well as my dissertation *Reflexionen und Verwebungen. Wechselwirkungen von ›Natur‹ und ›Mensch‹ in der deutschen und dänischen Gegenwartsliteratur*, publication of which is forthcoming in 2021. While such imaginaries can be of great value in shaping a better form of coexistence with other species, in the end they must remain conscious of their own limitations.

⁶³ Cf. *inter alia* Haraway 2016, p. 1f.

⁶⁴ Braidotti 2013, p. 132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

String Games and Entanglements

Contrary to this assertion that the human ego longs for dissolution, which is a relatively unreflected borrowing from vitalist ideology, I think that if human beings actually strengthen the connection with their animalistic and earth-bound parts, it could massively amplify the individual's striving for self-preservation. For example, there is evidence from research in biosemiotics that all living beings possess a kind of self-reference, an intentionality with which they respond to and process environmental stimuli in ways conducive to their survival.⁶⁶ Without precluding cooperation or phenomena like sympoiesis, this shows that an urge to survive as an individual is anchored at a very basal level. It is demonstrable that this striving is not anchored solely on the conscious level, since people who put this self-preservation aside in order to protect and defend life are often perceived as exceptional. The question is therefore whether this remarkable humanity is truly rooted in surrender to the affirmative play of life forces, or whether it is rather the result of a conscious *mental* attitude which is somewhat beyond their reach and is anchored, in no small part, in humanistic values; whether the life-nexus as a self-organized entity does in fact engender the affirmative and empathetic concepts that Braidotti so trustfully imputes to it. In no way are these observations intended to deny the necessity of »opening up« and reconceiving the humanistic subject, but rather to draw attention to the difficulties in this context. So in conclusion, I would like to postulate that an essential motive for the project of the Enlightenment and the concept of the humanistic subject was precisely to dissociate from a natural context and to minimize the risk of having to die. By no means have these been overcome today. Indeed, the longing for security, self-preservation and endurance is more deeply inscribed than ever in the present day, on the evidence of paradoxical phenomena such as the desire for a natural birth but with the security of complete medical backup, the prodigious use of the possibilities of medical technology in reproductive medicine, and the abundance of research within biotechnology and biomedicine.⁶⁷ Affirmation of the creative life force and of new interconnections with the life-context, a stance that is pivotal in the work of both Braidotti and Haraway, therefore calls for a new and rigorous look at human boundaries, especially in dealing with one's own mortality. Since they constitute a »psychic setting« and an existential reality, these boundaries are not quite as easy to circumvent or positively transform as the two theorists, and particularly Braidotti, have in mind.⁶⁸ This is clear from the literary text by Josefine Klougart, which corresponds with the theoretical texts in many places, but in some respects also sets different focuses which challenge them.

⁶⁶ Cf. on this aspect in more detail Hoffmeyer 1993, pp. 73–76.

⁶⁷ Cf. on this aspect Möller 2013, pp. 125–147.

⁶⁸ Braidotti explicitly assumes that the human psychological setting is similarly mutable and not static: »Our psyche – with its affective, fantasy-ridden, desire-driven complications – would then be forever static in an unhistorical limbo, framed by the self-replicating power of a despotic master signifier. For all vitalist ›matter-realists‹, this mournful vision of a subject desperately attached to the conditions of its own impotence is quite simply an inadequate representation of what we are in the process of becoming.« (Braidotti 2013, p. 189). I, too, believe that humans are capable of evolving, but at this point I am not as optimistic as Braidotti, precisely because instinctive behaviours, which are still part of the human make-up, do develop in an evolutionary manner but cannot simply be recorded.

Interweavings and worlds of meaning: Josefine Klougart's novel *Om mørke*

Om mørke is an experimental literary text, in which a plot cannot be clearly discerned. All that can be inferred is that it revolves around a couple, former lovers who meet once again after a period of separation and after the man's father has died. The female partner then begins to reflect: about life, in which nothing can be held on to, not even love, and which consists of constant partings and incessant breakdown, to echo Klougart's own drastic turn of phrase.⁶⁹ The text begins with the protagonists' feelings and with reflection on the events, in which it becomes particularly immersed. It extends and explodes the story of individuals into a highly idiosyncratic textual space, which could be a mosaic, a collage or a construct. This is pervaded with infinitely many different fault lines, with violent and harmonious associations, with looks and »threads« which alternately join and take apart the images and the material that the world represents in the human being's counterpart, and which constantly change. Thus, the textual space no longer appears as a linear, individual and tangible narrative of life, but rather, as a fundamental exploration of (human) relational existence. In this respect, a close thematic affinity with the conceptions of Braidotti and Haraway is already evident, in that the text no longer centres around the autonomous subject, but rather, conceives of it in relational terms. Klougart's text can also be read as posthumanist inasmuch as it describes an embeddedness of the human being in natural contexts, which supersedes a conception of the purely mentally constituted, self-contained subject. By way of example, the following passage may elucidate this:

Kvinden i billedet. Hun ligger på siden, vi ser hendes knæ oppefra, senerne der er tydelige./ [...] Vi ser hele hendes krop;/ landskabet, uskarpt bagved,/ mørke. [...] Vi kommer ikke tættere på, det omvendte, vi er på vej væk./ Bevæger os baglæns,/ mister porerne i kvindens hud, vi mister porerne, de små lyse dun på overlæben, som du havde opdaget, linjerne i huden, der mindede dig om en anden tid, en ungdom, paradoksalt nok, der ikke rigtig kunne placeres./ Et skridt ad gangen, baglæns over markerne, op gennem bjergene snublende,/ højere oppe./ Mere og mere tør rød jord ses, mere og mere af jordens hud, mindre af kvindens./ [...] Man mærker forholdet mellem kroppen og landskabet, som var det en sygdom,/ mærker man den,/ hvad den gør ved kroppen,/ det sted man kan forstå noget fra./ Og hvordan kroppen så er et område, en flade, hvordan stoffet er et andet område./ Der er ingen hierarkier,/ der er planer, som skydes ind over og ind under hinanden som dagen og natten. At flette sit hår stramt./ [...] Vi har bevæget os væk, ser hele hendes krop i ét billede;/ [...] Afstanden bliver større,/ vi ser mere og mere af bjerget./ Bjerget der stiger fra havet, og i et hjørne af billedet, forsvindende: denne blå bunke stof, huden som et område lidt inde i landet.⁷⁰

The woman in the picture. She is lying on her side; we see her knees from above, the clarity of tendons./ [...] We see her body in its entirety;/ the landscape a blur in the background,/ darkness./ [...] We come no closer, only the opposite – we are moving away./ Moving backwards,/ losing the pores of the woman's skin, we lose the pores, the fair down of her upper lip that you discovered, the lines of her skin reminding you of some other

⁶⁹ Cf. Klougart 2013b.

⁷⁰ Klougart 2013, p. 14–18.

String Games and Entanglements

age – youth, funnily enough, that couldn't quite be placed./ One step at a time, backwards across the fields, upwards through the hills, stumbling,/ higher still./ More and more dry red earth is seen, more and more of the earth's skin, less of the woman's./ [...] You feel the relationship between body and land, as if it were sickness,/ you feel it,/ what it does to the body,/ the place from which understanding something begins./ And the way the body is then an area, a surface, the way the fabric is another./ There are no hierarchies,/ there are planes latticing like day and night. Plaiting one's hair tight./ [...] We have pulled away and see now her body in one image;/ [...] The distance becomes greater,/ we see more and more of the hill./ The hill, sweeping up from the sea, and in a corner of the picture, vanishing: this blue heap of fabric, the skin as an area of land within the interior.⁷¹

The human body of the woman – which is identifiable from this passage, in conjunction with others, as that of the narrative voice and the female protagonist⁷² – seems to be an autonomous entity, yet it is also interwoven with the landscape. A backward movement blurs the close-up view of this body, which progressively disappears in the reddish earth. At the same time, this movement leads into a primal scene of landscape contemplation, in which the sovereign subject looks down from a mountain on the scenery, gazing it into subjugation.⁷³ In Klougart's work, however, this gaze does not establish any such hierarchy between human and landscape; rather, in a self-reflective act, the person sees herself as a vanishing body. Viewed both from close up and from a distance, then, what shines out from Klougart's work is the transience of human beings and their insignificance in the overall context of life.⁷⁴ Throughout the course of the text, the body continues to be an entity interwoven with organic contexts and, as such, exposed to vulnerability and perpetual decay. As in Braidotti's work, here »the human organism is an in-between that is plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces.«⁷⁵ In the novel this is not greeted with enthusiastic affirmation, however, but with fundamental sorrow. Klougart portrays the process of individual decay as a threatening and violent one, with which the human ego can barely come to terms:

Hvad blev der af paradisæbletræet,/ det vi plantede i baghaven./ Sygdommen tog det, siger hun køligt, upåvirket, som om hun har overtaget naturens/ ligegyldige brutalitet, ligegyldige/ omsorg for alting./ Det døde, det levende. En kærlighed til alting/ i enhver form, som kan minde om/ ligegyldighed, men er det modsatte: en opmærksomhed mod det der er./ I alle de nye former, i alle de former det værende kan antage. Forud og bagud, det modsatte af nostalgi, dét netop ikke at gemme noget for det, det var,/ men måske nok bevare noget eller

⁷¹ Klougart 2017, pp. 12–13. All passages from Klougart's novel are quoted after the published English version, *Of Darkness* (2017), translated by Martin Aitken.

⁷² Klougart's novel is complex in the extreme and calls for specific interpretative approaches, which I will return to further below. It is not therefore possible within the scope of this article to elucidate all the interpretative approaches thoroughly with reference to the text. Readers are referred to the detailed observations in my dissertation.

⁷³ Here one might think of Petrarch's mountain ascent, the »founding scene« of landscape contemplation, but also of the portrayal of the subject on rising ground, placing the landscape at his or her feet. For a detailed account of this, cf. Ritter 1989, pp. 141–163.

⁷⁴ The portrayal also calls to mind Foucault, who describes »man« as a figuration who, being an effect of changes »in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge«, and the present change regarding the human-nature relationship may certainly be seen as such, may also be erased again »like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.« Foucault [1970] 2002, p. 422.

⁷⁵ Braidotti 2013, p. 139.

blive ved med at se på noget, der opløser sig,/ for at lade noget andet komme til syne./ Det er ret brutalt, synes hun, men samtidig ret flot.⁷⁶

What became of the crab apple tree,/ the one we planted in the back garden./ Disease killed it, she says aloofly, unmoved, as if having assumed nature's indifferent brutality, its indifferent nurture of all things./ The dead, the living. A love of everything/ in any form that might remind one of/ indifference, but is the opposite: an attention to what there is./ In all new forms, in all the forms being may assume./ Forwards and backwards in time, the opposite of nostalgia, not keeping anything for what it was,/ but perhaps retaining something, or continuing to watch while something dissolves,/ so that something else might emerge in its place./ She considers it brutal, but at the same time rather elegant.⁷⁷

Nature appears in the novel as a place of constant new creation, as tangled darkness from which new living forms perpetually come forth.⁷⁸ Lacking intentionality or valency of the individual, however, nature is fundamentally at odds with the human desire to exist and endure as an individual. Bearing in mind that the relationship between the human body and the landscape was also described as a »disease« in the quotation above⁷⁹ (cf. p. 146), what emerges here is a new relationship between humans and nature: Like all other living beings, human beings are embedded in organic contexts and can no longer appear as sovereign subjects who define themselves independently of their environment. In Klougart's work, consciousness is also tightly bound into the material context, being hosted, so to speak, in the body which makes perception possible and, by engaging in movement, continually creates new perspectives.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the novel retains a dualism between human beings and the life-nexus or natural context,⁸¹ a dualism that the posthumanistic theories attempt to eliminate. This is not the result of any human arrogance, however; rather, it springs from the sense of profound irreconciliation with one's own mortality and a fundamental disparity between consciously created human worlds of meaning and an aimless natural context. More strongly than Braidotti (and Haraway, too, in a certain sense), Josefine Klougart focuses on the importance of human concepts of meaning, which allow orientation, memory, structure and individuality in the »unmade bed of the world«.⁸² Precisely this inability to reconcile oneself to a dynamically flowing process of life that lets the

⁷⁶ Klougart 2013, p. 168. Cf. in this regard also *ibid.*, 248.

⁷⁷ Klougart 2017, p.158.

⁷⁸ Cf. *inter alia* *ibid.*, p. 74 and extensively in my dissertation.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 59, p. 286 and p. 294. Parallels can be found here with conceptions of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who describes the subject as a »rupture« in the »flesh of the world« – that is to say, in a multidimensional field of pre-conscious interrelationships, which must exist before the distinct phenomena can emerge from it. Flesh appears as a universal sensual framework, conceived of as a kind of mesh of myriad relational connections, intersections and transgressions, as an opaque context, as a dark, subliminal tissue to which human beings remain attached through their bodies. Cf. also Orlikowski 2012, pp. 36–40, 56–61, 70–78.

⁸¹ Of course, more nuanced clarification of this connection between the concept of life and the concept of nature would be required. In my view, »nature« itself is an ordering and reflective concept, a construct that assembles phenomena in a certain way. Understood as a fundamental and all-encompassing life-nexus, in the novel it correlates closely with the concept of *zoe* proposed by Braidotti. Klougart, however, makes greater reference to the »nature concept« as such, which is partly due to the fact that she upholds dualistic conceptions to some extent. For more extensive discussion of the nature concept, cf. my dissertation.

⁸² The title of an essay by Josefine Klougart 2012.

String Games and Entanglements

individual perish becomes a specific condition of human life. In that respect, the concept that emerges here is contrary to Braidotti's reflections.

Klougart's text, therefore, unlike the theoretical texts, does not focalize new relations with other living beings or the Earth itself, but rather, acknowledges a basic connection with the organic. And while humans cannot extricate themselves from this connection, they pit their own mental worlds against it:

Et menneske er det eneste, der kan bevæge et menneske./ Et fravær af interesse for naturen, som den findes derude, eller måske som en interesse for det menneskelige i naturen. Naturens menneskelighed, hvis man kan tale om det./⁸³

A person is the only thing that can move a person./ An absence of interest in nature as it is found out there,/ or perhaps an interest in what is human in nature./ Nature's humanity, if that's something we can talk about./⁸⁴

A fresh link with Braidotti and Haraway is evident here, in that Klougart's »world of meaning« is also based on relationality and relational capacity. Two aspects are central in this regard: love and language, although these are thought of as exclusively human phenomena. Hence, her work retains an anthropocentric and humanistic perspective which is no longer found in the conceptions of the other two thinkers. In the novel, it is love that draws people into relationships which give them support in the vortex of matter, relationships in which they appear as individuals – seen and enlivened by the gaze of the other.⁸⁵ While the human being as an individual »speck of dust«, as a fragment, is absolutely vulnerable, love binds humans into a structure, a constellation that is (at least intuitively) removed from the mere cycling of materials and rapid changeability:

Planeterne flyder som i vand udenfor [...]/ Langsomheden ligger mellem objekterne./ Den enkelte krop, den enkelte planet har en vanvittig hastighed og bevæger sig sindssygt hurtigt mod undergangen.⁸⁶

The planets drift as if suspended in water [...] The slowness lies between the objects./ The individual body, the individual planet, possesses unimaginable speed and is proceeding insanely towards destruction.⁸⁷

Even these constellations are just as temporary and transient – relationships fall apart and individual existence ends at the point of death, after which the human being only lives on in the other's memory. Since this, too, is embodied, memory is inscribed with the aspect of temporality.

⁸³ Klougart 2013, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Klougart 2017, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Much could be said at this point about the significance of seeing in Josefine Klougart's work. Generally speaking, seeing elevates things into being. Klougart therefore articulates different modes of seeing; they also correspond to lighting conditions, and range from a more empathetic, bluish-dark seeing to a dazzling analytical seeing. This in turn is linked to memory, which sees things inwardly, so that they are kept as they are, and the process of narration itself, which preserves and stores things in language. In the novel, this conscious seeing is counterposed with transient materiality. Cf. my dissertation for a more extensive discussion.

⁸⁶ Klougart 2013, p. 140.

⁸⁷ Klougart 2017, p. 129.

So, it is also the case that Klougart's novel no longer assumes human consciousness to be of such transcendence and timelessness that it can withdraw from the dynamic life-nexus. At the same time, the novel dwells on its attempt to resist nomadic fluidity by means of the specific meanings and valencies, relations of love, that it creates. A second form of interconnectedness is shown in Josephine Klougart's particular literary language, whose basic figure is, tellingly, the metaphorical. Here, however, the metaphors are not thought of in the classical manner as an interdependence of two domains of imagery, casting light on one another. The linguistic-metaphorical movement is accomplished, instead, as a process of interweaving and threading, a complex tying-in, which creates conscious touch and connection. Metaphor, for the author, is a form of love which dissolves the fragmentary and joins the individual phenomena into living, albeit fleeting, structures of meaning. The association is with drawing breath: a relief that ensues from both the suspension of loneliness and the temporary disengagement from the physically transient context:⁸⁸

Og det at metaforen som kærligheden: forener det uforenelige, forbinder øjne, æbler, dine kinder, overfladen i et glas vand på terrassen, en rund hånd. At være henvist til et fortsat forsøg på at få adgang. [...] Blikkene, kærligheden og altid, som en forudsætning, tænker jeg: sproget. Vi forbinder steder og ting og tider, tegner linjer i den verden, vi er kastet af. Ligger her i gruset og taler med alt vores sprog. [...] Nogle sætninger, der gør os i stand til at fastholde bevægelserne, og som endda engang imellem tillader os at dele de her bevægelser med den anden. Et du. Og midt i arbejdet med at væve verden tyk af forbindelser, i sætninger og i berøringer, arbejdet med at se og skabe strukturer og mønstre i den uredte seng verden er, her kan man måske faktisk lykkes med at finde et hjem. I det mindste få adgang. Det er så godt som umuligt at træde ind i verden uden at have trukket disse linjer op, åbnet verden, det tænker jeg. Den er spejlblank og glat, vi falder af den. Står udenfor.⁸⁹

And that metaphor, like love: reconciles the irreconcilable, connects eyes, apples, your cheeks, the surface of a glass of water on the terrace, a round hand. Being reliant on a continued attempt to gain access. [...] Glances, love, and always, as a prerequisite, I think: language. We connect places and things and times, draw lines into the world we have been cast out of. Lie here in the gravel and talk with all our language. [...] A few sentences that are us to register the movements, and now and again even allow us to share these movements with the other. With a *you*. And amid the work of weaving the world dense with connections, in sentences and in caresses, amid the work of seeing and creating structures and patterns in the unmade bed that is the world, one might even have the luck to find a home. At least to gain access. It's almost impossible to enter the world without having drawn these lines, without having opened the world, that's what I think. It's mirror-like and slippery, we fall off it. Stand on the outside.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Klougart 2013, pp. 52–53. Cf. the extensive discussion in my dissertation, and also Munk Rösing 2014.

⁸⁹ Klougart 2012.

⁹⁰ My own translation.

String Games and Entanglements

The above passage certainly displays a great affinity with Braidott's and Haraway's concepts. Klougart's (fictional) world is also threaded with strings, so to speak; it is built on relations and connections which presuppose caring, touching and being touched, and a great sensitivity. It also brings to light the specific situatedness of individuals, in that individual consciousness remains bound to one's own bodily experiences. Metaphorical thinking is portrayed as creative, tentative thinking, which explores the space of an in-between, between materiality and meaning, being and interpretation, and creates the possibility of the individual, fluid, flexible language-world combinations that Klougart strives for.⁹¹ Here once again, the result is not certain knowledge, not an everlasting order, but rather, an individual exploration and linguistic probing of the world; I will return to this once more in the next section. Yet Klougart's text quite explicitly rejects the affirmative basic premises on which Braidotti relies, namely a conscious association with the forces of *zoe*, which are befriended and affirmed. Such an affirmation is something that humans with their reflective consciousness, aware of their own mortality, cannot ultimately give. This reflectiveness, the search for meaning and endurance, and the faculty of language represent a specifically human basic constellation and cannot simply be circumvented. To be sure, people must accommodate to these in a material, transient world so as to become familiar with it. However, the novel tends to portray this as a sizeable challenge: »Er det muligt at være reflekteret og lykkelig på én gang. [...] Der er stier under jorden, og alting er i gang med at blive noget andet hele tiden.« [Is it possible to reflect and be happy at the same time. [...] There are paths below the ground and everything is continually in the process of becoming something else./]⁹² Thus, Klougart's concept differs markedly from the spontaneously emerging, positive constellations of meaning arising from self-organising matter, of which humans are a part. Far more strongly than Braidotti and Haraway, she draws on traditional humanistic concepts that define human beings based on specific faculties of language, self-reflectivity and reason, thereby ascribing them a place of their own in the vast assemblage of living beings.

To some extent, this rather dualistic perspective is undermined, as already suggested, on the poetological level, where the emergence of a new kind of writing in and with natural phenomena is evident and a pronounced integration of physical-material and reflective-mental worlds takes place. This is very substantially due to the special metaphorical technique. In the course of the text, various nature motifs occur which make it clear how precisely Klougart chooses her images and that she accesses new layers of meaning by linking materiality and symbolism. At this point, the image of the pearl is cited as an example. »En sorg, der samler sig til en perle i hånden;« [Grief, condensing, a pearl in the hand;]⁹³ On account of its shape, the pearl was seen as a symbol of suffering and sorrow. Whilst it is reminiscent of tears, it is also regarded as a hidden treasure.⁹⁴ It is also interesting in this connection, however, that it comes into being when an extraneous element penetrates the internal cavity of a shell. The pearl is formed as a protective response, to surround the foreign element and render it harmless. In

⁹¹ Cf. my dissertation for a more extensive discussion of this, Linke 2021.

⁹² Klougart 2013, p. 221 [Klougart 2017, pp. 209–210].

⁹³ Klougart 2013, p. 12 [Klougart 2017, p. 7].

⁹⁴ Cf. in this regard Peil 2012, pp. 318–319.

Klougart's work, this can be associated with the grieving process in several ways. For instance, death is seen as a fundamental disturbance of human existence: »Perler starter som sandkorn i muslingeskaller, senere skal de trækkes på en snor eller fæstnes i en metalfod eller lægges i en lille blød pose./ Løse perler ser forladte ud./ Nødder der er knækket fri og ligger i et rod af nøddeskaller. Øjne uden øjenhuler.« [Pearls begin as grains of sand in oyster shells, later they must be strunged, or mounted on metal, or placed in a small, soft pouch./ Loose pearls look so abandoned./ Nuts released, exposed in a shatter of broken shells./ Eyes without sockets./]⁹⁵ What is made visible here is the painful process that follows the death of a beloved person: a sense of being torn from a context, an existential isolation that cannot connect either with life or with the other, and has lost all sense of sanctuary. The implicit metaphor here seems to be that of crying one's eyes out; it reveals a deep inconsolability, not being able to see or wanting to see, because confronting reality without the *you* has become impossible. Grieving, in contrast, becomes a valuable process in order to overcome this presence of death and the brutal caesura of the darkness. Death is apprehended little by little, access to it becomes more indirect as the pain is encased, as it were, by a new protective layer. Moreover, the crystalline structure of the pearl can be associated with the multi-perspectivity of memory and narrative as a conserving gesture that Klougart practises in her novel. Here, the mental world of the human being is opened up to material-physical existence, entering into a process of exchange with it, which allows both to appear in a new light and in their referentiality.⁹⁶ Yet here, once again, Klougart also assumes that the motifs from nature can be related to universal *human* experiences, because otherwise any communication via these images would be impossible. These are experiences of a bodily and emotional nature in the sense of (shared) life experiences, such as observing a pearl in one's own hand, perceiving a clinking crystal chandelier, the emotional significance of an apple tree and of losing a beloved person, perceiving the texture and coloration of a birch tree. This communication structure has consequences for the scholarly literary study of this text. It must combine an analytical approach with a subjective process of interweaving that takes the text seriously as a co-actor.⁹⁷ In order to attach meaning to the complex images, it is necessary to step into the text oneself, as it were, with one's own physical experiences, thoughts and subjective life positioning, to follow its tracks and encounter it directly. A hermeneutic process, as Klougart makes clear, is always based on individual connection and contact, on empathy and subjective experience, with regard to the world and being per se, as well as the text as a being-space in microcosm. Thus, a shared, specifically human framework of language and reservoir of images gives rise to each individual's subjective situatedness, which makes communication uncertain but also open. Whether and how the images are understood,

⁹⁵ Klougart 2013, p. 20 [Klougart 2017, p. 14]. Cf. also similar passages, including *ibid.*, p. 37, p. 63, p. 81.

⁹⁶ In my dissertation, I also extensively examine other motifs such as the tree, the sea and ashes.

⁹⁷ In making this point, I am following the reflections of Rita Felski. In a complex process, and in reciprocal dialogue with the readers, one that encompasses their cognitive-critical faculties as well as their powers of imagination, prior experience and emotional affect, the text is explored and thereby becomes a co-actor that makes things happen and plays a part in constructing a certain configuration of knowledge. The task of literary studies is to reflect on how one is aesthetically and personally moved and touched and how this comes about, which culminates in knowledge that is situated and embodied, and not in a putatively objective-analytical account. Cf. on this aspect in detail Felski 2015, pp. 162ff.

String Games and Entanglements

whether the text discloses any meaning, is ultimately based on the work of the readers and their willingness to create intensive relationships and to rethink existing relations. In Klougart's text, language thus reveals itself as a dynamically interconnecting momentum and simultaneously as a construct, in that it captures things but at the same time makes fluid connections between them, drawing threads between natural phenomena and human inner worlds, between author and readers, between text and world. In my view, this indeed shows the possibility of a new relationship with nature: on the one hand, people open up anew through their sensuousness and admit their vulnerabilities; on the other hand, this process does not go so far as to undermine a specifically human mental world as such. It is a cautious reconfiguration, a creative turn in thinking and feeling, which does not simply disregard specific characteristics such as the power of reflection and the fear of dying and transience, but rather makes them the starting point.

Conclusion

I will conclude by drawing attention once again to the aspects of Braidotti's, Haraway's and Klougart's concepts that I consider important. It is particularly inspiring that all three concepts emphasize a relationality and sensitivity, which, being loving, affirmative and dynamic, is the ontological foundation of a creative life-nexus and brings forth good forms of life. Practising this loving, caring and open interconnectedness, which transcends the sovereign ego and its entrenched identity, seems to me a meaningful tool with which to reconsider our violent subjugation of the world and other living beings, and – as Haraway and Klougart compellingly demonstrate – to write new stories. The necessity of dispelling a perspective of violence is shown very clearly, to my mind, in two parallel passages from the texts by Klougart and Haraway:

Grundlæggende er der to slags mennesker. *Jeg og de andre.*/ Inden i *jeget* ligger *os, vi, han, hun*, nogle gange *man.*/ Og så er der *du*. Som hun måske ikke helt ved, hvad hun skal stille op med./ [...] Jeg har mareridt, de fleste nætter har jeg mareridt./ Usammenlignelige størrelser findes ikke. Alt rummer elementer af hinanden, trådene trækkes igennem verden af blikkenes nåle./ Alting bløder./ Og står stille som soldater under paradet. Soldaters sprog er kort, ordene stopper brat som heste foran en afgrund.⁹⁸

Basically there are two kinds of people. *Me and everyone else.*/ Inside the *me* is *us, we, he she*, sometimes a more general *one.*/ And then there is *you*. She doesn't know quite what to do with *you.*/ [...] I have nightmares, nearly every night./ Incomparable entities do not exist. Everything contains elements of something else. Threads, drawn through the world by the needles of our eyes./ Everything is bleeding./ And everything is still, like soldiers ordered to attention. The language of soldiers is blunt, their words halt like horses at a precipice.⁹⁹

So much of earth history has been told in the thrall of the fantasy of the first beautiful words and weapons, of the first beautiful weapons *as* words and vice versa. Tool, weapon, word: that is the word made flesh in the

⁹⁸ Klougart 2013, p. 321.

⁹⁹ Klougart 2017, p. 300–301.

image of the sky god. In a tragic story with only one real actor, one real world maker, the hero, this is the Man-making tale of the hunter on a quest to kill and bring back the terrible bounty. This is the cutting, sharp, combative tale of action that defers the suffering of glutinous, earth-rotted passivity beyond bearing. All others in the prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey. They don't matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit, but not the traveler, not the begetter. The last thing the hero wants to know is that his beautiful words and weapons will be worthless without bag, a container, a net.¹⁰⁰

Especially literary language with its possibilities for sensitive and curious exploration, the tentative search for words and meaning, the unbridled hope of understanding and communication, can play its part in not forcibly fitting things into conceptualizations, but in creating new interconnections and stories, both in reality and in thinking. Interconnections that are capable of gathering and seeing »world« without exploiting it, that are as dynamic and fluid as being itself. Yet at the same time, for me, as for Josefina Klougart and in a certain sense also for Haraway, this process remains very tightly bound to a specifically human consciousness, to a far-reaching capacity for reflection, which is not inherent in other living beings in this way, or at least cannot be articulated in language.¹⁰¹ This sets limits to the possibilities of interconnectedness with other living beings and natural phenomena. It is entirely possible and worthwhile, for example, to imagine the perspectives of the »others«, to give due regard to their needs in order to arrive at a better relationship of coexistence. But ultimately, this will always be done from an anthropocentric perspective that, of its very nature, cannot be circumvented. Rather, the point is to shape it responsibly, by tracing one's own interconnections sensitively and with great interest. Certainly these are thoughts that can be recognized and followed in Braidotti's work, but overall her concept remains too philosophical and abstract for me. The fundamental impulse to create a new bond with life and other living beings that minimizes hierarchies and limitations and creates an egalitarian ensemble, to embed the human being into an all-encompassing life-nexus, is not new in itself; indeed, it has often been expressed in similar terms.¹⁰² It stems from a deep and

¹⁰⁰ Haraway 2016, p. 118.

¹⁰¹ This question about the capacity of other living beings for language and reflection is important and as yet unsettled. I refer here first of all to the fact that, as far as we know so far, phenomena such as the distinctive human powers of reflection and memory are tied to language development. Welzer argues that »the crucial conditions of human life – those which distinguish us from animals – are consciousness and autobiographical memory, and they are formed in communication.« [Own translation from German: »daß die entscheidenden Bedingungen menschlichen Lebens – jene, die uns von den Tieren unterscheiden – Bewusstsein und autobiographisches Gedächtnis sind, und die bilden sich in Kommunikation.« (Welzer 2005, p. 9)]. Although primates are also capable of drawing on a complex of acquired knowledge, they cannot consciously envision this knowledge, i.e. reflect **that** they are remembering. Both episodic and autobiographical memory are based on the human faculty for language. They both presuppose »mastery of the representational dimension of language, which is necessary in order to be able to interpret and understand motives, intentions and correlations in the world [...] beyond the concrete situation that happens to be at hand.« [Own translation from German: »Beherrschen der repräsentationalen Dimension von Sprache voraus, die notwendig ist, um Motive, Absichten und Zusammenhänge in der Welt [...] jenseits der jeweils vorliegenden konkreten Situation deuten und verstehen zu können.« (Welzer 2005, p. 92)]. Welzer 2005, p. 9. Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 25, 30, 91–100, 186. Furthermore, in my view, real communication with non-human beings is difficult in that it is impossible to ascertain to what extent an originally non-linguistic statement is really understood as the intended statement of the other party, or whether the understanding is not, in fact, a product of human interpretation. Naturally, this also applies to interpersonal communication; yet here the common language provides a foundation for communication that is lacking with other living beings. This points to an open field of research, from which future insights could potentially lead to a massive rethinking of human-animal and human-nature relationships.

¹⁰² Initially I am thinking of vitalism itself, since Braidotti after all refers to it very closely. Here once again, the concept that shines through is that of a dynamic, living life-nexus underlying everything, as well as a human longing to merge with it by overcoming

String Games and Entanglements

utopian human longing, which intensifies as life-contexts become increasingly virtualized, but certainly also evinces regressive tendencies. In my view, a concrete and pragmatic elaboration of concepts that genuinely gives rise to ethically responsible action would be unable to avoid examining and including the specifically human consciousness and its psychological conditionalities, something that ultimately runs counter to the posthumanist approach. What I regard as more viable or more tractable as a *political* concept is therefore a concrete praxeological kind of thinking proposed by Haraway, which allows new visions and narratives to emerge from specific forms of interaction in projects and the continuous development of concrete practices such as storytelling, and thus proceeds from the root to the bud, as it were, and not in the other direction. At this juncture, literary texts – and Haraway draws on such texts extensively – which articulate anthropological, psychological and pragmatic knowledge are an important dialogue partner and also, if need be, a corrective to more theoretical approaches. It is therefore of interest to discuss in more detail the extent to which literature, beyond the utopian genre, takes up posthumanist theory. This can yield valuable insights into the feasibility of implementing such concepts and the distinctions to be borne in mind when giving them shape.¹⁰³ For example, I consider it extremely important that an emphatic affirmation of the power of creation, as stated so impressively by Braidotti and Haraway, should be placed on an equal footing with the second possible affect, that of grief and being wrapped up in one's own vulnerability, which Josefine Klougart works out with such subtlety. The latter cannot simply be passed over as a blockage; rather, new conceptions must take their place in these real fields of tension, accept them and work with them. Consequently, the literary text can be seen here as a corrective or a problematization of Haraway's and Braidotti's proposals.

At the same time, however, the visionary horizon opened up by Braidotti, in particular, is an important inspiration, encouraging the constant pursuit of creative change and the practice of rethinking, which is indeed imperative for survival. All three concepts show, clearly and correctly, that the humanistic subject as such must be rethought in the present and can no longer rely on existing figurations. It is embedded in a constantly changing world and in complex interconnections, some of an entirely new kind, which the subject itself and its thinking (must) generate anew, over and over again. The nomadic concepts in the form that Braidotti calls for are, in my view, (too) difficult to master, but the rejection of fluidity and one's own touchability goes hand in hand with a loss of liveliness and creative force, which are currently urgently needed. Hence, the new, uncertain, creative, dynamic, wild, sensitive, tentative interconnections and weaving processes proposed by these three thinkers show one thing – if humans want to be better interconnected with each other and with natural contexts in the future, they must start by making their minds up to choose insecurity and vulnerability over comforts and cherished certainties, as Braidotti also

one's own individuation. At the same time, it is clear that human beings can scarcely pay such a price. Cf. *inter alia* Halse 2013. In that sense, the conceptions of vitalism also always dwell in the imaginary; they ostensibly strive towards the loss of conceptions of meaning and individuation, but in a historical moment in which human meaning-making becomes precarious, they themselves establish such a conception and thus, in a certain way, save the human cognitive and meaning-imposing ego. In my view, similar utopias of a non-hierarchical community are certainly developed by Christianity, even if there is no inclusion of other living beings in this case. Ultimately, suffering from one's own individuation and identity is a human constant, which Braidotti once again endeavours to eliminate. But it will never be accomplished in that way. The task is to accept this challenge and to shape it.

¹⁰³ Cf. on this *inter alia* an essay by Meurer-Bongardt 2020.

emphasizes. Only this will make it possible to be part of an unpredictable, creative and living world, and to establish new relations with nature.

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