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# Living in Difficult Times: New Materialist Subject/ivity and *Becoming* of Posthuman Life

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Matter itself is not a substrate or a medium for the flow of desire. Materiality itself is always already a desiring dynamism, a reiterative reconfiguring, energized and energizing, enlivened and enlivening. Feeling, desiring and experiencing are not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. *Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers.*

– Karen Barad (qtd. in Dolphijn and Tuin, emphasis added)

Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?”

– Jacques Derrida (*Specters of Marx* xviii, emphasis original)<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

Jane Bennett in her seminal book, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), asks a very timely question: “Why advocate the vitality of matter?” The critical gesture of the question is certainly toward a relooking into the nature of the matter<sup>2</sup> and human beings’ entangled positioning

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1. All the references, quotations used in the paper are taken from 2006 edition of *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, which was originally published in 1994 (English version).
  2. Beyond the common dictionary meaning the term “matter” is used as an inclusive term in this paper in a new materialist sense which brings *all* into its semantic ambit—living

in the broader scheme of things. What it foregrounds as a condition of living is not exclusively human or nonhuman mattering rather an inclusive humannonhuman mattering,<sup>3</sup> as new materialist thinkers often conceive it in their nondualistic thinking pushing boundaries into crisis. Working toward such a mode of living or just to prepare a ground work, it is important to take note of the answer Bennett provides to the question:

Because [...] the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, lasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies. These material powers, which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness, or even “respect.” (ix)

There has been a dangerous partitioning of the world operative in the general model of life. What has mostly governed the modern minds, Bennett argues, is the problematic conceptualization of “matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert [as] a habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)” (vii). Such a mode of binary division of the world has led to the material vulnerability of life. In recent times, its global bearing on the emergent living space of both human and nonhuman is clearly visible and even lamentable.

The unprecedented speed with which the unexpected and grievable changes in the geopolitical conditions of living make us realize the very materiality of the world in which both human and nonhuman matters come to matter each other but certainly in a *new* way, a *new* mode of thinking matter has started taking shape in recent academic scholarship. This has necessitated an alternative mode of thinking as well as living life that is grounded in ethics and

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and nonliving, human and nonhuman, abstract and concrete etc. —and conceives the power and agency of the “matter” in an intersubjective plane. However, care must be given while reading the right meaning in the given context.

3. Such expressions are common in new materialist thinkers like Karen Barad and others; this is because they problematize the human-drawn boundaries and push binarism into crisis. Karen Barad’s “spacetime mattering” (68) and Donna Haraway’s “naturecultures” (118) are important terms in new materialist critical vocabulary. For detail, see Barad’s interview with Dolphijn and Tuin in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*.
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responsibility. It is very much timely and urgent that the everyday life practices come to a new mattering in this light.

The new materialist thinkers (most are radical feminists) like Diana Coole, Samanta Frost, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad and others have very recently stressed on the critical urgency of (re)turning to the material conditions of life and do away with the dualistic engagement of the recent mainstream critical thinking in the wake of its excessive “cultural turn” that is “increasingly being deemed inadequate for understanding contemporary society, particularly in light of some of its most urgent challenges regarding environmental, demographic, geopolitical, and economic change” (Coole and Frost 3). “For there is an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so,” Coole and Frost argue, “we seem to distance ourselves from it” (2). Though the theorists acknowledge that the “cultural turn” has certainly radicalized the common sense understanding of subject/ivity and human’s “embeddedness in dense networks of power that outrun its control and constitute its willfulness” (2), it has hardly paid any attention to the question of matter, the process of materialization, most importantly, to put in another way the dialogic existence of human and nonhuman. What is quite urgent now is a radical reappraisal of the notion of the matter, reading human as only a part (not whole) in this materialist scheme of things—a move from the materiality of human-centered subject/ivity to a new transformative space of posthuman subject/ivity where, as Coole and Frost maintain, “‘matter becomes’ rather than that ‘matter is’” (10). They further insist on how such a mode of materialization is conceptualized as open-ended, contingent and even complex in which all players—human, nonhuman, nature, culture, ideas and values—are subjected to an ongoing process of existence and coexistence. This informs a new materially grounded mode of living that is responsible as well as responsive. In other words, this inaugurates a radical condition of life that would operate in the deep entanglement of human and nonhuman in the way they intersect and interact through time.

The paper attempts to address this new materialist turn in recent critical thinking at the backdrop of the material vulnerability of global geopolitical conditions of living in which both human and nonhuman are entangled via violent ideological and structural orderings/otherings. Drawing on Coole and Frost’s *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010) and Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, the two pioneering texts on “new materialism” and mediating through Derrida’s notion of hauntological nature

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of matter, as introduced and extended in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*,<sup>4</sup> the paper foregrounds the philosophical urgency of such a radical mode of thinking for the possibility of a (new) materially grounded life “to come.” Living in difficult times, it argues, when “time is out of joint” and the history of the living present is haunted by the spectral traces of the past and possible future “to come,” the materiality of matter (its subject/ivity) can never be located in a stable ontological positionality but certainly in the matter’s imbeddedness in hauntological temporality—an emerging posthuman space of transformative possibility where “matter becomes” in its radical mode of living through *becoming*.<sup>5</sup> This *becoming* of matter informs as well as transforms the nature as well as the very condition of life: a radical *becoming* of posthuman life that becomes as well as comes at the same moment foregrounding a process living as complex and open ended but ethically grounded.

## II. Materiality of Life and Difficult Witnessing

How far it may be invisible there is hardly any doubt on the fact that human life is deeply entangled in the material world: the “embeddedness” of the human in the nonhuman (Coole and Frost 2). Our everyday lives are entangled in matters: both living and nonliving, both abstract and concrete. Our everyday lives are also deeply conditioned by matters how far it may be a matter of disbelief. This is because of the agential capacities of the matters—the power of the matters to affect human lives. But hardly human beings have been attentive and responsive enough to the material world, of which it is only a part. Human beings have only been concerned with everything human than with what lies beyond. This centrality of human as matter with agency and action in its materiality has relegated other matters as insignificant or passive matters and thus deviant in the normative order

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4. Henceforth, the main title *Specters of Marx* will be used in this paper.

5. Henceforth, all italics, except the titles of the books, used in this paper show special emphasis, very often in the philosophical context of the usage. “Becoming” is a new concept in new materialist thinking which basically refers to a process living in which each “becoming” is a new type of “coming” and each “coming” is a new mode of “becoming”; what is understood by this is neither “becoming” nor “coming” maintain stability rather they are always already into continuous reworking.

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of human. Even in the name of human and just to maintain the centrality of human, our world is programmatically structured with certain operative violence, at least in the *human* scheme of things/beings/matters. Boundaries have been drawn just to maintain this violent order: human at the center and other matters at the margin. Even, very surprisingly, such a human order is exclusively in the interest of selective few; it does not include *all*, both human and nonhuman into its frame. By this what has come out is: man is central woman is marginal; West is central East is marginal; culture is central nature is marginal; human is central animal is marginal; human-thing(s) is central not-so-human-thing(s) is marginal. This mode of ordering and boundary drawings at the center of problematic conceptualization of human subject as the only matter that matters has contaminated not only the history of the human but also the nonhuman.

The idea about the matter or human as matter in the very materiality of the world is commonly indebted to the seventeenth century philosopher René Descartes and his famous *egological* deduction “I think, therefore I am” that assigns an autonomous status to the human person as a thinking subject as well as the power and agency in the material order of the world. This centrality of human person led to the birth of the human subject or the human-centered conceptualization of the subject until its death in postmodern times.<sup>6</sup> It would be helpful here to start a brief discussion on the idea and operation of such a mode of thinking human subject (as the central matter) that has become the ground of living for human as well as nonhuman.

The question of human person — the status and function of the “self” or its other variants in philosophical language, the “being” or the “subject” and the conceptualization of this in a broader framework of nature of things/objects, reality and universe—has always remained at the center of philosophical

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6. The term “subject,” as David Ross Fryer mentions, a central concept in the works of poststructural/postmodern thinkers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray and others, has come under serious critique for its self/subject/ego/logo/God-centered notion of human ontology and epistemology and the problematic rendering of the privileged status of the “subject” through its totalizing program, which further led to the necessary declaration of the death of the subject with Foucault’s proposition “the death of man.” This death of the subject/man does not mean the complete death of the human subject/ivity as such rather it proposes a decentering of the human person—a radical restructuring of the centered-subject/ivity, a certain doing away with the modernist notion of the self-sufficient, self-constituting human person/subject. See Fryer p.16.

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discourse, particularly continental philosophy.<sup>7</sup> By calling human person a subject, what is foregrounded is drawing attention to the human subject/ivity as our necessary starting point, the center of the universe—a founding precept of humanism,<sup>8</sup> that maintains a firm belief that the human self/subject is essentially autonomous and self-sufficient and the human individual as a “thinking subject” can reach towards knowledge, truth and progress through rational action. The individual consciousness is taken as the source of action and meaning in the world. Such a thinking of the human subject in the “Cartesian model of individualism” through the Enlightenment<sup>9</sup> into the twentieth century has in its constructivist epistemic structuring of the world not only maintained the centrality of the human subject (or human as subject) but also at its very core it has produced certain other objects—other matters, experiences, ideas, histories, cultures, people—in its appropriative self-centered, self-given logic. These “others”<sup>10</sup> as realized through the consciousness of the subject have always been objectified and thus relegated to the margin and against this founding moment that the human (as) subject constitutes its sovereignty and centrality. This “subject-object” or “self-other” or “subjectivity-alterity” dichotomy has been at the heart of the epistemic structuring of the world where the subject not only differentiates and separates the “other” but also, most importantly, gives the very meaning and presence of the “other”

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7. “Continental philosophy,” as it differs from Anglo-American (analytical) philosophy, is the branch of philosophy that holds on to the legacy of the philosophers of the European continent like Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. For a brief survey of “continental philosophy,” see the “Introduction” in Andrew Cutrofello. Cutrofello, Andrew. *Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
  8. For “humanism” as a program/project of the modernist thought about the autonomy of the human subject and its various meanings in various disciplines and the poststructural/postmodern critique against it, see Fryer p.8–14.
  9. Enlightenment is the cultural/intellectual revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe that emphasized on the importance of reason and individual understanding against the blind adherence to tradition and authority. With its scientific temper and questioning spirit it was believed that Enlightenment would lead to progress, happiness and, thus, emancipation of the humanity. See Schmidt. Also see Kant.
  10. The use of “other” or its plural “others” should not be confused with the general use of the term “other.” These are philosophically grounded terms showing the ontological conceptualization of the othered nature of the other(s) as matter or other matters.
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and as a result, the latter in its differential (binary) positioning is always and only viewed in terms of its object-position—an object for/in the consciousness of the subject. The existence of these “others” is very crucial for the subject to know and locate its own position in the world. The subject produces the “other” than is produced otherwise.

This model of subject/ivity as a mode of thinking about the human person has, though, dominated and very deeply structured the Western culture and thought for the last two to three centuries, it has come under serious attack in recent times. Since 1950s, specifically after the delivery of World War I and II and other modes of imperial act of the West, thinkers have attempted to analyze what went wrong with the project humanism and found it to be “problematically universal, totalizing, and insufficiently sensitive to the question of human otherness” (Fryer 13). Ideals such as “self-sufficiency,” “autonomy,” “universality,” “freedom,” “rights” and “progress” that exclusively came under the banner humanism and flourished in a modernist landscape are now seen as the remnants of a dying liberal project that is no longer valid in a fragmented world that has come to be labeled as “postmodern.”<sup>11</sup> Not only is the world, now, fragmented, but also the human subject or any subject as such. The autonomy and self-sufficiency of the human person—the essentialist self-centered, self-given status of the subject in a universalist framework—is, thus, rendered as problematic; it is because the subject can never be self-sufficient and self-complete rather it is always already into subjection to certain “others” beyond/before its own subject-position. The subject can know and locate its very subject/ivity only when it encounters “others,” when it relates to “others,” to be more specific, in a deep relationship with “others.” These “others” have never been considered in human terms possessing agential capacities for affect and change. Rather, they are always subject to certain violence. Braidotti in her paper “Working towards the Posthumanities,” unpacks such a mode of ideological violence:

Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion

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11. The term “postmodern” in its contested status, here, refers to the intellectual landscape in which the works of thinkers like Derrida are located which strongly rejects any (specifically modernist’s) theory of totality and universality in favor of heterogeneity and provisionality and as such, it works for as well as brings back heterogeneous others/matters into its frame which very hardly or marginally found a place in the totalizing program of modernity. See Fryer p.8–14.
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of “difference” as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as “others.” These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies [...]. We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others. (162)

This is a very disturbing arrangement of life between the human subject and the so called “others.” Not only human othering, but also the othering of *all* in *all* possible forms has become a global concern in recent times. Most of the contemporary thinkers like Braidotti have been critically attentive to such a mode of living. Pierre Bourdieu and Derrida draw our attention to such an experiential mode of everyday life: how the narrative of progress and happiness has in fact been a narrative of wretchedness operative with programmatic enactments of violence—a necessary violence to the human subject and beyond, both material and symbolical.<sup>12</sup>

Violence is commonly conceived as a human programme. This is the reason why the major part of the recent scholarly engagement has placed its critical focus mostly on human being’s ideological, socio-politico-cultural, aesthetic, intellectual and psychological structures and programs. Violence has not only contained but also contaminated the world in one form or another. This programmatic construction and operation of violence in its diverse modalities and subsequent normalization (as it seems) in contemporary societies has its operative locus and impetus in the ideological programs of European modernity and its subsequent transplantation in various avatars in other societies. Modernity as the program of the West, with its genesis in the European Enlightenment, along with science and technology as its life-enhancing projects, has provided us more reasons to mourn than its narrative of progress and happiness (Derrida xviii; Shaw ix). The major historical

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12. “Symbolic violence” is an important notion in the works of postmodern thinkers like Derrida, Bourdieu and others. For Bourdieu, as the editors mention, it is the “softer’ and more subtle means of exercising power” (24) over others, unlike physical or material violence, mostly invisible but most powerful in its operation in socio-cultural life, often “‘misrecognized’ as such and thereby ‘recognized’ as legitimate” (23). See Bourdieu.

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experiences of the recent times—the neoliberal human trafficking, the World Wars, the state-sponsored wars, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansings, colonialism and other forms of totalitarianism, in the global context and countless legitimate modes of totalitarianism in the local context—are sufficient to show the extent to which modern man and the project modernity can drive the material condition of living. In recent times, the neoliberal capitalism as the final form of governance and life has delivered the late-modern culture of victimhood where the victims are the raw materials and the new victim world order is the operational landscape for the state and its satellite networks, as Jean Baudrillard in *The Perfect Crime* (1996) very graphically presents it:

The New Intellectual Order everywhere follows the paths opened up by the New World Order. The misfortune, wretchedness and suffering of others have everywhere become the raw material and the primal scene. Victimhood, accompanied by Human Rights as its sole funerary ideology. Those who do not exploit it directly and in their own name do so by proxy. There is no lack of middlemen, who take their financial or symbolic cut in the process. Deficit and misfortune, like the international debt, are traded and sold on in the speculative market—in this case the politico-intellectual market, which is quite the equal of the late, unlamented military—industrial complex. Now, all commiseration is part of the logic of misfortune [*malheur*]. (135)

Life, now, is operative with a consumerist logic as the essential ground of all possible modes of human violence that has contained as well as sustained a more wretched world. There has been the global witnessing of countless numbers of victims of diverse modes of violence: war victims, victims of state violence, victims of colonialist, nationalist, racist/casteist, sexist, capitalist or other modes of oppression and violence (Derrida xviii). Such a mode of human engagement has not only been limited within the human; it has also severely affected the environment leading to a very difficult confrontation between the human and nonhuman. This is the geo-politico-economical world order in which the human as the master or the centered matter has come to matter pushing the principle of coexistence into crisis. This mode of material ordering via programmatic othering at the heart of the centered notion of human mattering has not only structured human life but also continues to do so, which necessarily demands a new mode of reordering both human and nonhuman

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by reconceptualizing the transformative agency of matter not via domination, exploitation, exclusion and violence but through interrelationship, harmony, temporality and transcendence. This is why there is the critical urgency to attend to the thinking, not about human-centered matter or human as matter, but certainly about the new notion of matter beyond human, as Coole and Frost maintain:

At the forefront of current thinking about matter; about how to approach it, and about its significance for and within the political [...] to succeed, a reprisal of materialism must be truly radical. This means returning to the most fundamental questions about the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world [...] attending to transformations in the ways we currently produce, reproduce, and consume our material environment. It entails sensitivity to contemporary shifts in the bio- and eco-spheres, as well as to changes in global economic structures and technologies. It also demands detailed analyses of our daily interactions with material objects and the natural environment. What is at stake here is nothing less than a challenge to some of the most basic assumptions that have underpinned the modern world, including its normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency, but also regarding its material practices such as the ways we labor on, exploit, and interact with nature. (4–5)

To have a relooking on this aspect, it would be helpful to present a brief survey of the making and progress of human history. Human history<sup>13</sup> in its teleological march, since the Enlightenment until our times, has only delivered the past mistakes in one form or another. It is Hegel, the first philosopher to extend

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13. What is understood by “human history,” here, though it is problematic at the same time, is based on Hegel’s notion of history which is also the model for Francis Fukuyama. In his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), Fukuyama, in order to clarify the hostile criticism against his thesis, defines history “as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all peoples in all times.” By this he does not mean end of “occurrence of events, even large and grave events,” but he means how human society has evolved through time from “simple tribal ones based on slavery and subsistence agriculture, through various theocracies, monarchies, and feudal aristocracies, up through modern liberal democracy and technologically driven capitalism” (xii).

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a coherent notion of history in his lecture notes, to view history, Leo Rauch forwards in Translator's Introduction to *Introduction to The Philosophy of History* (1988), "as [...] a process of emancipation and enlightenment, with the aim of enabling us to construct a system of society wherein everyone can be regarded as free and autonomous, simply by virtue of being a person—conscious and rational" (ix). "For Hegel," Rauch further mentions, "the goal of history can be said to be achieved when our individual and societal lives are fully in our control, so that we are able to give a conscious and rational shape to our lives as self-determining members of human society" (x). At the same time Hegel has also been critically attentive to the history's darker side as history has been a "slaughter-bench" (24) and history's participants have failed to realize its emancipatory goal. Further, Hegel criticizes human's "cunning of reason" (35) that has delivered, as Rauch mentions, "the universal suffering that we have seen in our time."<sup>14</sup> In the late-twentieth century, if we have arrived at the end of history as Fukuyama most triumphantly claimed in his 1989 article "The End of History?"<sup>15</sup> that with "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" (1), history has come to an end and the Western liberal democracy and its attendant democratic capitalism has now come to be the final universal model of governance and life, it cannot also neglect its inherent dangers associated with, as the Editors in their Exordium to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* put it, "the global triumph of free market economies," (vii) which, with its resultant international changes, would prove to be as "malign [...] as benign" (Derrida vii; qtd. in Sim 7). Drawing on the notion of history from Hegel via Marx, Fukuyama though believes that capitalist liberal democracy, after the eventual collapse of tyrannies, as the final form of governance would allow for and protect individual rights and freedoms and lead to the collective happiness of humanity, still life, now, is not free from the clutches of totalitarianism in different guises, and thus subject to universal suffering. In fact, we are leading

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14. See Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: with Selections from the Philosophy of Right* (ix). For a detailed discussion on "Cunning of Reason" and its irrational drives that is responsible for making history "slaughter-bench," see Chapter Three "Freedom, the Individual and the State."

15. In the article "The End of History?" (1989), Fukuyama claims that with the "end point of humankind's ideological evolution" (1), we have reached at the end of history if, history is understood in Hegelian sense "as a dialectical process with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (2) and "the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (1) is now a material reality. For detail see Fukuyama.

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our lives through a very difficult time. Derrida in *Specters of Marx* maintains that now “the time is out of joint,”<sup>16</sup> in which past, present and future come to a very difficult negotiation not as separate entities but as int(e)raactive entities in their deep entanglement. In this disjointure of time where the “founding principles of community have been perverted or gone astray” (qtd. in Häggglund 77), when the specters of history continue to *haunt* the living present and life is in utmost precarity, maintaining the human-centered notion of subject/ivity by drawing boundaries and, thus, separating and subjugating the other(ed) matters/things/beings is no more tenable. Derrida is very much firm in his view that in such a scheme of living “we cannot do away with a notion of emancipation and progress” (qtd. in Häggglund 78), we cannot also, at the same time, close our eyes before countless victims that we have produced and witnessed in the past as well as continue to do so in the present. The burden of such historical injustices forces us to rethink, as participants and inheritors of such a history that has gone or a possible history that is yet “to come,” what it means to be human in the materiality of living and most importantly, what has been or should be the guiding principles of our lives for a better and just life to begin with.

### III. New Materialist Subject/ivity and *Becoming* of Posthuman Life

Owing to the material vulnerability of the global geopolitical conditions of living, there has been a serious postmortem of the historical injustices in recent times. While the countries that faced the direct and indirect Western colonialism from Latin America to South Africa have set up the famous Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs),<sup>17</sup> the other countries, mostly the developed ones who have a general aversion to such commissions about their own past are now moving through a serious rethinking on the significance of assuming a memory of the victims of past injustices. To mention a few, there are debates and discussions in the socio-political life in 1980s Germany about

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16. This phrase, from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, in Derrida’s vocabulary “offers the link to a possible thought of an experience of history that is the condition for the notion of justice” (qtd. in Cohen 161) in which past, present and future are no more separate entities rather they come to an ongoing negotiation for a new mode of life. For detail see Derrida.

17. For an overview on TRCs, see Avruchand Vejarano.

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Holocaust Memorial, the political debates about the legacies of Stalinism in Russia, the discussions in the United States, Canada and elsewhere on the justice to be done to the victims of slavery, dispossession, genocide and racist and sexist exclusion (Fritsch 2). Also, there are growing global concerns in recent times with regard to the material vulnerability of the environment which has a tremendous impact on both human and nonhuman. This has foregrounded an urgent environmental rethinking (radical shift from *egological* to *ecological* thinking) on the possible modes of action and interaction between human and nature. But what seems quite urgent in this context is that at the centrality of these larger public narratives/events as most (or the only) *visible* events/matters, there remains many more local events/matters which in a differential (binary) positioning remain to be *invisible* in the everyday acts of living. It seems as if these events bear no significance or very less significance both at the collective and individual level. Very often these are otherwise conceived as legitimate and normal everyday life—all is well. To be more specific, within the framework of global thinking and acting on the larger visible issues, it is equally important to pay particular attention to the crises in the local contexts, even at the individual level first so that the action can be integrated within a common agenda for the possibility of a better future “to come.”

It is quite urgent to acknowledge and act on the line of the concern raised in these debates and discussions in and around TRCs, memorials and histories’ victims, environmental crises in which both human and nonhuman are implicated. In such a state of wretchedness we cannot refuse our (ir) responsibility towards such injustices—not only of the past, but also of present as well as of the future, which cannot be thinkable to be different unless it is thought otherwise “here and now” towards a better and just life, as it could not be otherwise, either in past or present. It is necessary to work toward a new (materialist) history to take shape in the future “to come.” Working for such a possibility cannot happen with the present mode of thinking, owing to their problematic operation in contemporary modes of governance and life. As a necessary departure what is required is a radical mode of thinking about the violence against the “other” (as othered matters) in the materiality of history “to come.” History’s injustices can neither be pushed to the remote past nor a new (materialist) future be anticipated with the operative present. Living in difficult times, when the history of the living present is haunted by the spectral traces of past and possible future “to come,” the materiality of the living present is now haunted in its temporality. It is that, as Barad argues, “the ‘past’ was

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never simply there to begin with, and the ‘future’ is not what will unfold, but ‘past’ and ‘future’ are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the world’s ongoing intra-activity” (qtd. in Dolphijn and Tuin 66). Human subject/ivity is also equally subject to this hauntological reworking as it can no more be self-contained and self-sustained. In such hauntological production of everyday life (which is certainly for the possibility of an ethically rooted life), we must live in remembrance of the victims of injustice, rather with the victims of injustice. In fact, it is necessary to forge a *new* model of community as part of broader socio-political life by renewing our relationship with the other(ed) matters/beings/things, by making our subject/ivity operational through “others”—a radical restructuring of our subject/ivity. This radical sense of subject/ivity as a mode of ethical living is a prerequisite for a just and livable future “to come.” This is the new materially grounded subject/ivity on which our posthuman life has an immanent grounding in its *becoming*.

Coole and Frost in their edited book *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics* emphasize this new material *turn* in recent critical thinking with regard to this new subject/ivity. They basically further the idea that the ontological turn of the matter in its posthumanist orientation foregrounds the radical becoming of the matter: how “matter becomes” than “matter is.” By this what is understood is matter, both living and nonliving, is not “mere” matter; it is “more” than matter possessing productive agency and vitality. Coole and Frost draw our attention:

For materiality is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. (9)

Thus, human beings in their so-called autonomy, agency, cognition and supremacy can no more be conceived as the only living matter that matters most, possessing the right to exploit other matters. Instead, human is relocated only as a matter quite similar to other matters in the material orderings where the positionings of matters in their complex relationality transform the totality

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by transcending self/subject in radical hauntological temporality. “Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert,” Coole and Frost formulate, “disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature” (10). On this vitality of matter, specifically the nonhuman matter, and the human positioning and predicament in the larger scheme of things as new materialist thinkers often argue for, Poe makes a very useful observation:

Subject-centered models of political agency situate the experience of agency within the frame of the agent being capable of rationally reflecting on possible actions and the completion of such actions pursued. Such a model has internal limits [...] But neo-materialists introduce an important external limit to these models. Are there not ‘things’ that also evince agency—and especially political agency—things that affect the structure of political life such that it—and we—are called to its attention? [...] These things—no longer mere objects—require an accounting when we notice them. And yet it is not our noticing them that gives them agentive force in the world (as classical phenomenology might suggest). Rather, these things are assembled within a web that itself allows for the ‘noticing’ to occur. This webbed network is not empowered by our noticing it, but rather empowers those within its frame [...] This is true of human and nonhuman matter alike. (155)

On such a mode of the human mattering and the production of “others,” Derrida in *Specters of Marx* elaborates “but with the other, is not this disjuncture, this dis-adjustment of the “it’s going badly” necessary for the good, or at least the just, to be announced? Is not disjuncture the very possibility of the other? How to distinguish between two disadjustments, between the disjuncture of the unjust and the one that opens up the infinite asymmetry of the relation to the other, that is to say, the place for justice?” (26). Any thinking as well as living in this regard must start with the language of justice, justice that stands on “the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present” (xviii), beyond the human centered notion of subject/ivity within the space inhabited by the other(ed) matters. It is a new mode of thinking about the “other” in

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the materiality of living that “disjoins the living present” (xviii) in its constant ethical *haunting*. Such a mode of thinking would work for living otherwise: living for the “other” and living wise. What is foregrounded by this and which is equally urgent is a new type of learning living life: learning about the “other” from which comes a new ethics of living.

Living otherwise—“I would like to learn to live finally” against “I’m going to teach you to live” as it has always been the case throughout human history through such oppressive figures like fathers/masters/victors or any normative essentialist socio-political structures of such kind in top-down frame—demands a commitment that is impossible but at the same time necessary (Derrida xvii). It has to radically go beyond the existing model of life—from the notion of life that I must live, I need to live, the existence and operation of my being, based on an essentialist, absolutist notion of self as the only matter or any thinking in the line of such totalization to a life that stands on intersubjective notion of subject, that, in its radical openness, presupposes the presence of the “other” before making any sense of the “self.” Such a mode of life welcomes the “other” on a radico-ethical plane that always checks any totalizing thinking or operation of the self and as such, there is always the interventionist call of the “other” and the self has the originary obligation to respond to in its openness. This would necessarily work toward an ethical coexistence with “others.”

To be more specific, as the life of the “other” (as a passive objectified matter) has always been subject to violence and synonymous with suffering, as we have been historically blind to the suffering of the “other,” as the presence of the “other” no more viewed as present rather always a deviant, it is necessary to learn to live otherwise. This commitment of learning to live and/or living otherwise is, what Derrida in *Specters of Marx* believes, “ethics itself” —“to learn to live, to learn it *from oneself and by oneself*, all alone, to teach *oneself* to live” (xvii). This is the very impossibility of the commitment for a living being. It is for, to live, in general, is not something one learns. “Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. *Only from the other and by death*” (xvii, emphasis added). If this learning to live remains finally to be done, Derrida firmly views in *Specters of Marx*, “it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death *alone*” (xvii). Between these two binary extremities, “between all the ‘two’s’ one likes, such as between life and death” (xvii), what constitutes is certain *spectral ethics*—ethics of/as living otherwise and better. What is necessary for a life to be just, for a living being to be ethically alive that

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it has to come “to terms with death. Mine as (well as) that of the other” (xvii). In other words, the self/subject has to critically revisit its own ontological validity and engage in a nondualistic possibility—possibility of *becoming* other and otherwise—and necessarily inaugurate its own death and as such, between life and death, it has to “*maintain itself* with some ghost, talk *with or about* some ghost” (xvii)—the ghost of the self as well as that of “certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us or outside us” (xviii). This, as Derrida calls it, “heterodidactics between life and death” (xvii) is what compels us “to learn to live with ghosts”: “ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, [or if living, living like dead], be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism” (xvii–xviii). In this disjointed time, when the specter of injustices haunting the whole humanity, the question of survival—living a just life or working towards its possibility—“must carry beyond *present* life, life as *my* life or *our* life,” Derrida argues, “as it will be the same thing for ‘my life’ or ‘our life’ tomorrow, that is, for the life of others as it was yesterday for other others” (xix). This “being-with specters,” this companionship with “others” or “others” as specters or “others” as (passive) matters, which now matter most in their ethical haunting, would certainly lead us toward a materially grounded collective life in the future “to come,” where the materiality of life will never be based on violent orderings/otherings (due to the maintenance of stable ontological positionalities) rather be based on temporal hauntological transformation as an act of radical “coming” in the act of *becoming*. Such a mode of life is ethically grounded and justice oriented. It informs a reconfiguring of a life that becomes as well as comes at the same moment: a dynamic life, life as process that is on move beyond normative boundary drawing, beyond othering but certainly through ethical mattering and “intra-active becoming,” to use Barad’s term.

On this *becoming* of the matter and the ethical mattering as condition and conditioning of the posthuman life, Barad in an interview with Dolphijn and Tuin maintains:

Matter is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its *intra-active becoming*. All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity, its performativity. Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through

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the intra-activity of mattering. Differentiating [...] is not about Othering, separating, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments. So the very nature of materiality itself is an entanglement. Hence, what is on the other side of the agential cut is never separate from us. Agential separability is not individuation. Ethics is therefore not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively *relationalities of becoming*, of which we are a part. Ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities. (qtd. in Dolphijn and Tuin 69, emphasis added)

Posthuman life, as Barad and others argue, is a mode of *becoming* through our deep living, which emerges in the complex entanglement of human and nonhuman in the materiality of the world. It is not exclusively about human matter or nonhuman matter but about all-inclusive humannonhuman mattering in their accountability, intersectionality and inseparability. Such a possibility of life lies in the emergence of a new material subject/ivity grounded in ethics and response-ability. It foregrounds a complex, open-ended and ever-*becoming* rearrangement of subject/ivities for the posthuman life. This ever-*becoming* nature of subject/ivity defines the ethical mode of living towards which our posthuman life is on move in its *becoming*. What is at issue is a *process living* in which each becoming is a new type of coming and each coming is a new mode of becoming, always already into continuous reworking.

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to address the new materialist turn in recent critical thinking at the backdrop of the material vulnerability of global geopolitical conditions of living in which both human and nonhuman are implicated in their deep entanglement via violent ideological and structural orderings/otherings. Drawing on Diana Cool and Samanta Frost's *New Materialisms* (2010) and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), the two pioneering texts on "new materialism" and mediating through Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntological nature of matter, as introduced and extended in *Specters of Marx* ([1994] 2006), this paper foregrounds the philosophical urgency of such a radical mode of thinking for the possibility of a (new) materially grounded life "to come." Living in difficult times, it argues, when "time is out of joint" and the history of the living present is haunted by the spectral traces of the past and possible future "to come," the materiality of matter (its subject/ivity) can never be located in a stable ontological positionality but certainly in the matter's imbeddedness in hauntological temporality—an emerging posthuman space of transformative possibility where "matter becomes" in its radical mode of living through becoming. This becoming of matter informs as well as transforms the nature as well as the very condition of life: a radical becoming of posthuman life that becomes as well as comes at the same moment foregrounding a process living as complex and open ended but ethically grounded.

**Keywords:** Derrida, becoming, new materialist subject/ivity, posthuman life, hauntological temporality, *Specters of Marx*

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conditioning of the immanent possibility of trans-boundary subject/ivity for an ethically grounded life in the future-to-come.

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