

EDITED BY  
ROSI BRAIDOTTI  
AND  
PAUL GILROY

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B L O O M S B U R Y

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Contested Posthumanities

*Rosi Braidotti*

*To reintegrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the 'world' is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeon-holes, by which 'we' are 'human' and 'they' are not.*

EDWARD SAID (2001: 26)

### Introduction

In response to complex social, environmental and academic climate changes, this chapter adopts an affirmative position. I want to defend the productivity of a posthuman future for the humanities, accounting for the tensions of our times in a grounded manner without being reductive and critical while avoiding negativity. To achieve this, I will develop the following argument: starting from the legacy and the limitations of the debate on humanism between Said and Foucault, I will provide a cartography of the critical humanities in the contemporary university. Then I will proceed to map out some of the ways in which the posthumanities are currently being developed in response to and in dialogue with our globally linked and technologically mediated societies that are marked by increasing polarizations in terms of access to economic, technological and environmental resources.



## What is human about the humanities?

Michel Foucault's distinction between universal, organic and specific intellectuals (Foucault and Deleuze 1977), modelled respectively on the Hegelian–Marxist scheme, on Gramsci's thought and on his own insights, reformulated the task of intellectuals as critical thinkers after Sartre's and Fanon's generation. As Edward Said (in Viswanathan 2001: 335) pointed out, the distinction between these categories is not fixed but porous, and the cyclical nature of these different positions allows them to cross over each other, adapting to changing historical circumstances. The common denominator for both the organic and the specific intellectual is the ethical-political commitment to provide adequate and reasoned cartographies of power in its immanent and situated historical formations, as well as in the production of discourse. As Said put it: 'part of intellectual work is understanding how authority is formed' (Said in Viswanathan 2001: 384), and especially for critical theorists working in the university, to represent the powerless and the dispossessed.

Loyal to this legacy, my generation of academics based our work on the politics of location (Rich 1987, 2001), the production of theoretical cartographies as diagrams of power and the creation of new concepts, combining philosophical critiques with feminist, post-colonial and anti-racist reconstructions of both knowledge and social relations (Braidotti 2014). The specific or situated intellectuals' practice rests on the rejection of universalism as both idea and representation, in favour of embedded and embodied relational forms of knowledge production. For my generation, this re-definition of the responsibilities of intellectuals went hand-in-hand with the rejection of European exceptionalism and its vehement and often belligerent universal pretensions (Said 1978, 2004). The critique of humanism formulated by poststructuralism – notably in Foucault's diagnosis of the death of 'Man' (1970) – targeted specifically the assumption about the 'Human' that is implied in the theory and practice of the academic humanities. That is to say the humanist idea of the 'Man of reason' (Lloyd 1984) as coinciding with masculinity, transcendental reason, rational consciousness and European civilization. Irigaray's critique of the Enlightenment-based project of emancipation, pointedly called 'Equal to whom?' (1994), expanded the same critique to social and discursive constructions of 'Woman', radicalizing feminist theory and practice. Anti-humanism emerges as the nodal point.

It is poignant to note, however, how fast the term 'intellectual' was phased out throughout the 1990s, becoming disconnected from its social vocation, till it came to be replaced by a new class of 'content-providers' (Anderson 1997). Also known as the regime of experts and consultants, in a context of increased privatization of research following the official end of the Cold War in 1989, this shift coincided with the 'theory wars' (Arthur

and Shapiro 1995) and rising criticism of French philosophy. The impact of a new techno-scientific culture based on information technologies and bio-genetics was also a crucial factor in demystifying the role of intellectuals. Globalized information networks, the flows of data and capital and the speed and heterogeneity of digital access, induced multiple dislocations of the image and practice of academic 'knowing subjects'.

By the end of the 1990s it was obvious to all that the only 'content-provider' that really mattered was the Internet itself, which relocated the former intellectuals to the market-oriented position of 'ideas brokers' and, in the best case scenario, 'ideas leaders'. As Williams lucidly put it (2014: 166), 'now we are entrepreneurs of the mind and it wears us down'. By the end of the millennium the mutation of capitalism into a cognitive differential machine (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 1987; Moulier-Boutang 2012) was in full swing, just as criticism of the humanities became dominant in a neoliberal university ruled by quantified economics and the profit motive. Critical theory was dismissed as an ideologically-biased activity and declared outdated (Fukuyama 1989), its intellectuals dismissed as 'tenured radicals' (Kimball 1990), while the humanities became down-graded as a glorified finishing school. Academic publishing went into a downward spiral, but seemed to be compensated by the rise of a new class of academic stars, who were both commercially successful and media-savvy, their visibility concealing the real impoverishment of the field (Collini 2013; Williams 2014). A mood of 'post-theoretical malaise' (Cohen, Colebrook and Miller 2012) resulted in critical theorists being contested in both the academy and society.

Deleuze and Guattari's anatomy of advanced capitalism as schizophrenia (1977, 1987) taught us that the global economy is a spinning machine that perverts global nature as well as global culture (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000) and subsumes all living materials – human and non-human – to a logic of commodification and consumption (Rose 2007; Cooper 2008). It functions as a deterritorializing flow of images without imagination (Braidotti 1994), organs without bodies (Braidotti 1989; Žižek 2004) and growth without progress. The manic-depressive proliferation of commodified differences and quantified selves makes for an unsustainable system – a 'future eater' (Flannery 1994) – that erodes its own foundations as it axiomatically shifts ground and sabotages the future (Patton 2000; Braidotti 2002; Protevi 2009, 2013; Toscano 2005). At the same time, as feminist and post-colonial theories (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) pointed out, global consumerism, while promoting an ideology of 'no borders', implements a highly controlled system of hyper-mobility of consumer goods, information bytes, data and capital (Braidotti 2002, 2006), whereas people do not circulate nearly as freely.

This political economy of controlled mobility produces dramatically different nomadic subject positions (Braidotti 1994, 2011a): registered and unregistered migrant workers, refugees, VIP frequent flyers, daily commuters,

tourists, pilgrims and others. The violence of capitalist de-territorializations also induces evictions, homelessness and destitution, as well as the exodus of populations on an unprecedented planetary scale (Sassen 2012). As a result of such devastations, a global diaspora (Brah 1996) has replaced the exemplary condition of 'exile' (Said 2003) while structural injustices including increasing poverty and indebtedness (Deleuze and Guattari 1977; Lazzarato 2012) have condemned large portions of the world population to substandard life-conditions. A 'necro-political' governmentality (Mbembe 2003) is at work through technologically mediated wars and counterterrorism strategies. Security concerns have accordingly become paramount by now, also in the academic humanities and social sciences. I will return to this point.

In this context, the mood of the humanities is undefinable. It is as if, after the great explosion of theoretical creativity of the 1970s and 1980s, theoretical practice stalled in philosophy, but exploded with renewed energy in other quarters. On the right of the political spectrum the ruling philosophical idea became the 'end' of ideological time (Fukuyama 1989) after the official end of the Cold War, and the inevitability of civilizational crusades (Huntington 1996) after 9/11. The political left on the other hand expressed its sense of theoretical fatigue, both by manifest resentment against the previous intellectual generations (Badiou and Žižek 2009) and by self-declared impotence (Badiou 2013), while the centre faltered into self-doubt (Latour 2004). Peter Galison (2004), echoing Lyotard's idea of the decline of master narratives (1979), struck a more balanced note, welcoming the end of grand systems in favour of 'specific theory'. This pragmatic approach stands between universalistic pretensions on the one hand and narrow empiricism on the other, embracing 'just enough theory' to sustain socially relevant practice. In a critical analysis, Jeffrey Williams argues that today we are experiencing a double movement: on the one hand what was blasphemy in the 1980s has by now become banality. Foucault and Derrida, 'once discursive bomb-throwers and banes of traditionalists, are now standard authorities to be cited in due course' (Williams 2014: 25). On the other hand, we are also witnessing the shrinking of public support for the humanities. As a result of this conjuncture, our theoretical mood has become 'retrospective' (Williams 2014: 25), reflecting on its own history and conditions of possibility in an often autobiographical tone, much as I am doing in this essay.

But this crisis is far from universal. For instance, Matthew Fuller' argues that, 'in discussions of cyber-cultures, or new media, which then moved on to become software studies (Fuller 2008), the 1990s was a period of theoretical and practical exuberance that spread into the early years of the new millennium – marked in particular by a coming together of generations emerging from the Cold War'. It is significant that this upbeat account of both the side-effects of the end of Communism and the general health of the humanities is expressed from the discursive location of new media studies,

whose object of enquiry is networks, codes and systems, that is to say non-anthropomorphic objects. This shift of perspective engenders renewed energy and optimism. I shall return to this point in the next section.

The idea of 'crisis' may not quite cover the institutional status of the contemporary humanities, given that this field operates through self-reflection and adaptation to changing historical circumstances. So much so that the 'crisis' may be taken as the humanities' *modus operandi*, as Gayatri Spivak astutely suggested in response to Foucault's analysis of the 'death of Man' (1988). Whether in a strong and self-assertive posture, or as 'weak thought' (Vattimo and Rovatti 2012), the theoretical humanities is the field that posits itself as a perennially open question, constitutionally Socratic, so to speak. Considering the concerted attacks moved against the humanities by Western governments of late, however, it is undeniable that its practitioners are investing disproportionate amounts of time defending themselves in the public sphere.

For instance, literature and the literary critic nowadays are perceived – by management, policy-makers and a large section of the media – as a luxury, not as a necessity, a trend that Marina Warner describes (2014: 42) as 'new brutalism in academia'. The pride Edward Said could take in the great tradition of literature, music and culture is no longer a point of consensus in a globalized and technologically mediated world. Moreover, a shared sensibility based on the knowledge of the canonical literary texts cannot be assumed or taken for granted, either in the West or in the rest of the world. Warner's trenchant comment (2015: 10) says it all: 'Faith in the value of a humanist education is beginning to look like an antique romance'. This general shift of sensibility is enough to make me almost nostalgic for the days of the modern–postmodern dispute, when Edward Said clashed with Harold Bloom on this very issue and defended an anti-elitist conception of culture, cultural access and production. Said replaced the heroic individualism of the 'lone genius' syndrome in cultural criticism and history – upheld by Bloom – with a more grounded analysis of the material conditions that favour cultural creativity as a collective activity and a form of democratic participation. Nowadays, the least we can say is that the humanities as a whole no longer occupies a hegemonic position within the hierarchy of knowledge production systems in the contemporary world and the critical intellectual, far from representing the idealized self-image of the developed world's subjects, is under severe scrutiny.

## What is universal about the university?

The zig-zagging trajectory that traces the descending curve of the status and fortunes of the intellectuals is problematic not only in terms of this particular class of practitioners, but also for what it reveals about the

institutional settings and the changing position of the university in general and the academic humanities in particular. The often acrimonious nature of the debate about the role of critical intellectuals is partly related to the modern–postmodern controversy of the 1980s and the theory wars of the 1990s, reaching a strident peak by the turn of the millennium (Lambert 2001). The institutional vulnerability of the humanities at this time is directly proportional to the extent to which the university itself comes under fire (Berubé and Nelson 1995). The ‘post-theory’ mood coincides with and of public financial support for higher education (Williams 2014) and ‘a broader scaling down within the humanities and social sciences, of the kind of radicalism that anti-imperial and post-colonial work often enabled’ (Nixon 2011: 259). Surveying this situation Coetzee (2013) suggests that the assault on the humanities which started in the 1980s has successfully rid this institution of all academics that were ‘diagnosed as leftists or anarchist or anti-rational or anti-civilisational’, so much so that ‘to conceive of universities any more as seedbeds of agitation and dissent would be laughable’.

Government support and funding have been withdrawn from academic institutions across the Western world, despite their attempt at reinventing themselves as ‘research’ universities (Cole, Barber and Graubaud 1993), and this hit the humanities with particular violence. The ‘last professors’ who still believed in their intellectual mission (Donoghue 2008) and in academic freedom (Menand 1996) denounced ‘the university in ruins’ (Readings 1996) and took a stand against the corporate university and increasing tuition fees, refusing to be cast as merely managerial figures. Williams (2014: 6) argues that, in the last forty years, the public university in the USA was transformed ‘from a flagship of the postwar welfare system to a privatized enterprise, oriented toward business and its own self-accumulation’. In continental Europe, the populist right-wing politicians who came to power in the aftermath of 9/11 and the wars that followed it are explicitly hostile to the fields of culture and the arts, both in society and as academic curricula. The field of the literary and cultural humanities, for instance, was dismissed as ‘left-wing hobbies’ by Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and became the target of large government cut-backs, having been down-classed to the level of a ‘high-risk-no-gain’ investment.

The question of the public value of the humanities (Small 2013) has come to the fore, as policy-makers apply narrowly economic criteria to assess the academic ‘market’. The new labour structure within the university – especially in the USA – reflects the hierarchical values of neoliberal economics. A small (in the USA less than one third, according to Williams) percentage of tenured staff at the top is supported by a large section of intellectual ‘precariat’<sup>2</sup>: part-time, temporary, untenured and underpaid teaching staff with hardly any entitlements or career prospects. With heavy teaching loads, increased pressure to generate income through grant submissions and few research opportunities, this mass of non-staff or

temporary staff members experience working conditions of duress, stress and systemic exploitation (Gill 2010), which Marina Warner (2015: 9) describes as ‘like working for a cross between IBM, with vertiginous hierarchies of command, and McDonald’s’.

Progressive academics responded to this situation by pleading for a non-profit approach to the humanities and to higher education, following the classical liberal arts model (Nussbaum 2010), while more sceptical voices wondered if there was a future at all for the field (Collini 2012). One of the areas of growth within the humanities at institutional level today occurs at the intersection between national security matters, issues of surveillance and anti-terrorism. Ever since Lynne Cheney, speaking for the Bush administration in 2001, declared the academics the ‘weak link’ in the war on terror, much pressure was put on the university to fall in line with official government policy on defence and related matters. The relevance of the humanities for security studies has been growing ever since (Burgess 2014). In 1998 Said (in Viswanathan 2001: 331–2) commented on the affinity that the terms ‘terrorist’ and ‘intellectual’ seemed to have acquired in American consciousness since 9/11 and the subsequent reinforcement of nationalistic ‘Western Judeo-Christian values’ in the academic curriculum. Said saw it both as a sign of the reactionary times and as a failure on the part of left-wing intellectuals to make their voices heard. I tend to see this alliance between the humanities and security studies today as the contemporary variation on the methodological nationalism (Beck 2007) that has haunted the field since the nineteenth century and also made the humanities so crucial for the imperial project of European colonialism (Davies 1997). Today, nationalism protects ‘Fortress Europe’ from the new ‘barbaric’ invasions by diasporic peoples pushing at its gates. As Said lucidly put it, at such a conjuncture it is more crucial than ever for intellectuals to ‘speak the truth to power’ and side with ‘the wretched of the earth’ (Fanon 1963).

To sum up: the university as a material and discursive institution has come down from the universalist pedestal where it stood throughout the nineteenth century, following the models of Von Humboldt and Cardinal Newman (Collini 2010). But this mutation is not entirely negative, as I will argue in the next section.

## From critical studies to posthuman discourses

Over the last thirty years the core of theoretical innovation in the humanities has emerged around a cluster of new, often radical and always interdisciplinary fields of enquiry that called themselves ‘studies’. Gender, feminist, queer, race, post-colonial and subaltern studies, alongside cultural studies, film, television and media studies, are the prototypes of the radical epistemologies which have provided a range of new methods and innovative

concepts. Institutionally, they have remained relatively under-funded in relation to the classical disciplines, yet alternative perspectives and sources of inspiration can be drawn from these highly creative, albeit marginalized 'studies' areas. This proliferation of infra-disciplinary discourses is both a threat and an opportunity in that it calls out for methodological innovations and theoretical creativity. Their relationship to the classical disciplines, in the same period of time, is a complex issue, which James Chandler (2004) called 'critical disciplinarity'. They have contributed to a rigorous revision of often implicit assumptions about humanism and Eurocentrism, and also to the implosion of anthropocentrism, causing both internal fractures and the dislocation of outer disciplinary boundaries in the humanities. The 'studies' areas, however, do not merely oppose humanism, but also create alternative visions of the self, the human, knowledge and society. Their insights have lasting consequences for the academic practice of the humanities.

These 'studies' are radical epistemologies that have exposed the persistence of the fatal flaw at the core of the humanities, namely their inbuilt Eurocentrism that unfolds into methodological nationalism, as I suggested above. The humanist vision of 'Man' includes both an ideal of bodily perfection and a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values. Since the Enlightenment, this ideal combines belief in human uniqueness with an intrinsically Eurocentric understanding of what counts as the basic unit of reference for the human (Foucault 1970). A firm belief in a teleologically ordained view of rational progress through scientific development is a consistent current in defining European cultures as well as individuals. Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model that shaped the idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason (Said 1978). Europe as a fundamental attribute of the human mind posits transcendence as its specific trait and humanistic universalism as its particularity. This makes Eurocentrism into more than just a contingent matter of attitude: it is a structural element of our cultural practice, which is embedded in received ideas about scientific truth, and the task of theory, as well as institutional and pedagogical practices (Bart, Didur and Heffernan 2003). Humanistic 'Man' defined himself as much by what he excluded from as by what he included in his rational self-representation. Furthermore, by organizing differences on a hierarchical scale of decreasing worth, this humanist subject justified violent and belligerent exclusions of the sexualized, racialized and naturalized 'others' that occupied the slot of devalued difference and were socially marginalized at the best of times and reduced to the subhuman status of disposable bodies in the worst case scenarios (Braidotti 2002; 2006). Humanism's restricted notion of what counts as the human emerges therefore as one of the key points of criticism, with Foucault and Said as leading theoretical figures in this debate. This means that many aspects of their position on humanism are relevant for the current situation. Let us briefly go into them.

A high humanist in background, disposition and taste, Said developed however a trenchant critique of Eurocentric humanism. He showed the limitations of this ideal in the orientalist and discriminatory mode implemented by European powers over the last two centuries, and yet never relinquished his belief in humanistic values. Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* is, in my reading, an exercise in affirmative critique of humanism. Said was both generationally and theoretically close to the work of Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze, his contemporaries. He had special affinity with Foucault's critique of the complicity between power and discourse (1977), that is to say the thick materiality of knowledge-production and theoretical representation. But Said (2003) grew progressively disenchanted with the post-structuralist project and his attachment to Foucault lessened over time, because of the deep Eurocentrism – in fact France-centrism – of Foucault's work. This parochial quality, which for some makes the post-structuralists into new orientalists (Almond 2007), was aggravated by the issue of politics. The problem with Foucault, according to Said, is that he lost the insurrectionary spirit and his scholarship evolved in the direction of quietism, or acquiescence with the status quo, believing that power could never be undone (Said 1998). Being a profound humanist, Said did not share in the deconstructive mode, rejected postmodern relativism and believed absolutely in values such as justice and non-coercive social systems. He abandoned Foucault as 'the scribe of domination' (in Viswanathan, 2001: 137) and turned to more robust theories of historical change, drawn from Fanon (1963, 1967) and Gramsci (1971). Said dismissed what he perceived as the opportunistic transnationalism of academic stars and emphasized instead two interrelated notions. The first is a political economy of ideas – based on Lukács and Fanon – that connects their circulation as 'traveling theory' (Said 1983: 226) to the analysis of what Rob Nixon (2011: 262) calls 'the socioenvironmental relations between internal colonialisms and offshore imperialisms in all their historical and geographical variability'. The second is the importance for critics to exit the text and be part of the world, the mundane, and the everyday politics of resistance. In spite of a brief encounter with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy in *A Thousand Plateaus*, which he found 'mysteriously suggestive' (Said 1994: 402), Said's nomadism, as Iskander and Rustom lucidly put it (2010: 5), was 'theoretically unhoused, methodologically untidy and spatially fluid'.

I tend to concur with Radhakrishnan (2010: 437) that Said actually misread Foucault and Deleuze and that his project is much closer to the Foucauldian idea of a philosophy of the outside, materially embedded in micro-political practices, than he is willing to acknowledge. Said's declared hostility to poststructuralism marked an entire generation of post-colonial thinkers, but the debate has since acquired less polemical tones. Spivak's defence of Derrida (1988), Ann Stoler's path-breaking work on gender and race (1995), Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1995) and Robert Young's insightful reappraisal of both Foucault and Deleuze (1990, 1995), as well



as Homi Bhabha (1994), played a constructive role in this respect. The fast-growing field of Deleuzian post-colonial theory and studies of Edouard Glissant (1997; Patton and Bignell 2010; Burns and Kaiser 2012) is another significant factor in rebuilding missing links between these discursive communities, as are intersectional post-colonial studies (Ponzanesi 2014) and neo-materialist and queer race theory (Livingstone and Puar 2011).

The point of consensus is that humanist ideals of reason, secular tolerance, equality under the law and democratic rule, have not been, historically or logically, mutually exclusive with European imperialist practices of violent domination and systematic terror. Acknowledging the close proximity of Enlightenment-driven rationality and barbaric horror has been the core of the radical critique of humanism since the 1970s. The paradox, however, is that, as Said put it:

It is possible to be critical of Humanism in the name of Humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of Humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past [...] and still remain attuned to the emergent voices and currents of the present, many of them exilic extraterritorial and unhoused. (2004: 11)

Complicit in genocides and crimes on the one hand, supportive of enormous hopes and aspirations to freedom on the other, humanism engenders productive contradictions that defeat linear criticism and can only remain open-ended.

But another layer of complexity emerges from the unresolved paradoxes of both humanist and antihumanist critique of humanism, namely the question of disciplinarity. Foucault was very much a philosopher, not particularly involved in the new interdisciplinary 'studies' areas that emerged also in response to his own work, as evidenced by his distant relationship to women's and gay studies in his own days. Foucault's objection – shared and made more explicit by Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) – was that the change of scale introduced by these 'studies' areas may not be enough to introduce a qualitative shift in terms of conceptual and methodological tools. Similarly, Edward Said himself was not very keen on the field of 'post-colonial studies' that none the less celebrated him as a foundational figure. His objection was two-layered: on the one hand Said had a distinct preference for a classical humanistic education in traditional university departments and on the other he was sceptical of the term 'post'-colonial, preferring instead the critique of imperialism: he was 'more Gramsci than Derrida' (Nixon 2011: 283).

In Said's work as in Foucault's, one can detect a deep suspicion of identity politics, the appeal to authenticity and to ethnic or cultural purity. In different ways they both stress the migratory, non-unitary structure

of subjectivity and warn us against proposing uncritically essentialized counteridentities. But the differences are striking. Whereas Foucault called for an antihumanist stance, Said strongly believed that humanism is still valid, but must shed its smug Eurocentrism and become an adventure in difference and in learning about and from alternative cultural traditions. This shift of perspectives requires prior consciousness-raising on the part of humanities scholars: 'Humanists must recognize with some alarm that the politics of identity and the nationalistically grounded system of education remain at the core of what most of us actually do, despite changed boundaries and objects of research' (Said 2004: 55). For Foucault, on the other hand, the project of European humanism is over. Contemporary European subjects of knowledge must meet the ethical obligation to be accountable for their nationalist and imperialist history of exclusions and the long shadow it casts on their present-day politics both in the academy and in society (Morin 1987; Passerini 1998; Balibar 2004; Bauman 2004; Braidotti 2011b, 2013). These different positions also engendered different thinking and writing styles. Both Foucault and Said were aware of the subtle powers of language, but handled it differently. Said, as Nixon put it (2004: x), 'thrived on intellectual complexity while aspiring to clarity', while Foucault – and Deleuze – more influenced by structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, pursued the polysemic complexity of language with a view to expose it, producing an equally dense counter-language.

Since the 1970s however, as I argued in the first two sections of this essay, the institutional landscape has changed dramatically and the question of disciplinarity has acquired a more critical edge. Humanistic culture and its canonical texts no longer constitute a non-negotiable point of reference for a university education, let alone for society as whole. Far from marking the beginning of the end, however, the simultaneous rise of the 'studies' areas and of popular media cultures – both analogue and digital – has proved most invigorating. From this perspective, the real problem with the generation of both Said and Foucault lies elsewhere, namely in their lack of concern for both media culture and the environment, that is to say in the unacknowledged and implicit anthropocentrism of their mindset.

Thus, although the modern-postmodern and humanism-antihumanism debates loom ominously on the contemporary horizon, the real focus for me lies elsewhere, namely in a change of paradigm brought about by the emergence of posthuman discourses. The Said-Foucault quarrel is therefore relevant nowadays as a means to a broader aim, namely how the multilayered critique of humanism comes to bear on contemporary concerns about the dislocation of the human. I have argued (Braidotti 2013) that, far from being deconstructivist and relativistic, the posthuman turn is materialist and neo-foundationalist. It marks the convergence of antihumanism with post-anthropocentrism but moves beyond them both in a more complex direction, overcoming the limitations of both humanism and antihumanism (Braidotti 2013). Because the two-pronged process of

negotiating new terms with the humanist tradition on the one hand, and de-centring *Anthropos* on the other, is fraught with tensions and contradictions, many aspects of the old debates on humanism are relevant for the current situation, but mostly as a cautionary tale.

## The humanities in the Anthropocene

The academic humanities are built on structural anthropomorphism, which translates into a complicated relationship to the culture and institutional practice of science and technology – the never-ending debates about the ‘two’ cultures (Snow 1959) being almost emblematic of this difficulty. The lack of concepts and terminology to deal with the ecological environment and non-human others is a serious deficit in view of the mutation we are experiencing towards the posthuman predicament. Neither ‘Man’ as the universal measure of all things nor *Anthropos* as the emblem of an exceptional species can be said to occupy the centre of world-historical systems of knowledge production in the Anthropocene,<sup>3</sup> which coincides with an era of high technological mediation. The Anthropocene introduces the deconstruction of anthropocentrism in the sense of species supremacy – the rule of *Anthropos* – and shifts the parameters that are used to define it (Rabinow 2003). The compounded impacts of globalization and of technology-driven forms of mediation challenge also the separation of *bios*, as the prerogative of humans, from *zoe*, the life of animals and non-human entities. What comes to the fore instead is a nature–culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self. This shift can be seen as a sort of ‘anthropological exodus’ from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation – a colossal hybridization of the species (Hardt and Negri 2000: 215).

This post-anthropocentric critique has far-reaching implications. Once the centrality of *Anthropos* is challenged, a number of new boundaries between ‘Man’ and the ‘others’ are exposed and challenged. Thus, if the multifaceted critiques and revisions of humanism empowered the sexualized and racialized human ‘others’ to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of oppositional hierarchical master–slave relations, the crisis of *Anthropos* relinquishes the planetary forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants, cells, bacteria, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play in a planetary political arena. This places a different burden of responsibility on our species, which is the primary cause for the climate change and other environmental disasters.

The Anthropocene as a central symptom of the posthuman predicament, however, raises both methodological and conceptual problems. The issue of scale – both temporal and spatial – is a major one: how to develop planetary and very long-term perspectives in a geo-centred and not

anthropocentric frame is quite a challenge for the disciplines in the humanities. Moreover, the necessity to contemplate the idea of extinction, that is to say, a future without ‘us’ – members of this particular species – opens up both theological and futuristic concerns which do not sit well with secular academic methods. Furthermore, these shifts in the basic parameters also affect the content of historical research, by ‘destroying the artificial but time honoured distinction between natural and human histories’ (Chakrabarty 2009: 206).

The post-anthropocentric, or geo-centred turn, however, also has serious implications for the more radical ‘studies’ areas that have perfected the critique of humanism but have not necessarily relinquished anthropocentrism. This tension arises first in the field of science and technology studies, signalling that the social constructivist, oppositional approach does not always help to deal with the challenges of a post-anthropocentric or geo-centred shift.

In 1985 Donna Haraway, the most prominent contemporary post-anthropocentric thinker, published her path-breaking ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’, the first posthuman social-theory text of that generation. It guides us into the high-technology world of informatics and telecommunications and a post-anthropocentric universe marked by what Haraway (2003) would later define as non-human companion species. Haraway (2006) shows that contemporary technologies are enacting a qualitative shift in our understanding of how the human is constituted in its interaction with non-human others, which requires new politics, ethics and creative new cosmologies. She challenges specifically the long-standing association of females/non-Europeans with nature (Haraway 1990), stressing instead the need for feminist and anti-racist critiques that rest on a technologically mediated vision of a nature–culture continuum. She initiates a crossover dialogue between science and technology studies, race theory, socialist feminist politics and feminist neo-materialism by the figuration of the cyborg. A hybrid, or body-machine, the cyborg is a connection-making entity, a figure of inter-relationality, mobility, receptivity and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/non-human; nature/culture; male/female; Oedipal/non-Oedipal; European/non-European). The cyborg as posthuman political subject exemplifies how Haraway combines competence in contemporary bio-sciences and information technologies with a firm programme of feminist social justice and critique of capitalist abuses.

Since this pioneering work, it has become clear that both the mainstream disciplines and the interdisciplinary ‘studies’ areas are affected by the fallout of post-anthropocentrism. The climate change issue and the spectre of human extinction, as Naomi Klein claims (2014), changes everything, including ‘the analytic strategies that post-colonial and post-imperial historians have deployed in the last two decades in response to the postwar scenario of decolonization and globalization’ (Chakrabarty 2009: 198).

Exposing the limitations of the Enlightenment-based humanist model of emancipation, as the 'studies' areas did, is a good starting point but, in the age of the Anthropocene, it just does not go far enough. We need to set a different agenda for the humanities, by challenging anthropocentric definitions of the Human and stressing the structural interdependence among species.

The anthropocentric core of the humanities, moreover, is challenged by another factor: the ubiquity and pervasiveness of technological mediation: the new 'human-non-human linkages, among them complex interfaces involving machinic assemblages of biological "wetware" and non-biological "hardware"' (Bono, Dean and Ziarek 2008: 3). The question of the future of the humanities and the issue of their renewal, therefore, is currently played out on the question of the complex re-configuration of knowledge led by new media and digital technological information: we have entered into global mediation.

The question is consequently what the humanities can become, in the posthuman era and after the decline of the primacy of 'Man' and of *Anthropos*. My argument is that, far from being a terminal crisis, these challenges open up new global, eco-sophical, posthumanist and post-anthropocentric dimensions for the humanities. They are expressed by a second generation of 'studies' areas. Thus animal studies and eco-criticism have grown into such rich and well-articulated fields that it is impossible to even attempt to summarize them.<sup>4</sup> Cultural studies of science and society; religion studies; disability studies; fat studies; success studies; celebrity studies; globalization studies are further significant examples of the exuberant state of the new humanities in the twenty-first century. New media has proliferated into a whole series of sub-sections and meta-fields: software studies, Internet studies, game studies and more. This vitality justifies the optimism expressed by Fuller about the future of the humanities, with media theory and media philosophy providing the new ontological grounds for knowledge production, while the curriculum of the traditional humanities disciplines – notably philosophy – resists any interdisciplinary contamination.

These new 'studies' areas are the direct descendants of the first generation of the 1970s critical 'studies' areas and pursue the work of critique into new spaces. For instance, a growing field of posthuman research concerns the inhuman(e) aspects of our historical condition, namely the recurrence of devastations, mass migration, wars on terror, violent evictions and technologically mediated conflicts. These questions have been taken up by conflict studies and peace research; human rights studies; humanitarian management; human rights-oriented medicine; trauma, memory and reconciliation studies; security studies death studies; suicide studies – and the list is still growing. These are institutional structures that combine pastoral care with both a healing and a critical function in relation to the legacy of pain and hurt which they entail. They perpetuate and update

the transformative impact of the humanities: humane posthumanities for inhumane times.

It follows therefore that, both institutionally and theoretically, the 'studies' areas, which historically have been the motor of both critique and creativity, innovative and challenging in equal measure, have an inspirational role to play also in relation to the posthuman context we inhabit. But in order to be productive, feminist, gender, queer, post-colonial and anti-racist, studies need to allow themselves to be affected by the posthuman turn. To return to the leading question of this essay, if the proper study of mankind used to be 'Man' and the proper study of humanity was the human, it seems to follow that the proper study for the posthuman condition is the complex human interaction with non-human agents. This new knowing subject is a complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking. The posthuman condition marks the end of what Shiva (1993) called 'monocultures of the mind'. The humanities need to embrace the multiple opportunities offered by the posthuman condition, while keeping up the analyses of power formations and the social forms of exclusion and dominations perpetuated by the current world-order of bio-piracy (Shiva 1997), necro-politics (Mbembe 2003) and worldwide dispossession (Sassen 2014).

## Towards the posthumanities

So far I have ascertained a number of preliminary conclusions: the humanities in the posthuman era of the Anthropocene should not be restrained by the Human – let alone 'Man' – as its proper object of study. On the contrary, the field would benefit by being free from the empire of humanist anthropocentric 'Man', so as to be able to access in a post-anthropocentric manner issues of external and even planetary importance. These include relation to organic and inorganic non-human others, scientific and technological advances, ecological and social sustainability and the multiple challenges of globalization, including poverty and structural injustice.

Today the posthumanities are emerging as trans-disciplinary discursive fronts around the edges of the classical disciplines but also across the established 'studies' areas, as evidenced by environmental, evolutionary, cognitive, bio-genetic, medical and digital humanities. They rest on post-anthropocentric premises and technologically mediated emphasis on Life as a *zoe*-centred system of species egalitarianism (Braidotti 2006), which are very promising for new research in the field. They embrace creatively the challenge of our historicity without giving in to cognitive panic and without losing sight of the pursuit of social justice.

Let us take some examples: the first and probably the most successful one the digital humanities – pioneered by Katherine Hayles (1999), which deals

with a rich agenda of thematic and methodological issues. In Europe and the UK the more traditional 'humanities Informatics' tends to be the preferred term of reference.<sup>5</sup> The agenda is focused on the continuing relevance of the science of texts and the role of the press – from Gutenberg to 3D printing – in shaping human knowledge and the imagination. The defining feature of the digital humanities is that they shift the focus from the mere effects of the development of technical applications for traditional humanities methods onto the study of the computational systems and protocols that go into the making of the information architecture, the codes and data types (Fuller 2005; Drucker, Burdick, Lunenfeld and Presner 2012). Also noteworthy is advanced reflection on new forms of technologically mediated sensibility, post-anthropocentric modes of perception (Hansen 2006) and the effects of new media not only on issues of community and ethics, but also in the fun and pleasure it induces (Goriunova 2014). The field is so advanced that it can boast its own advanced companion (Schreibman, Siemens and Unsworth 2004). As I suggested earlier, the field of new media theory and philosophy – which Fuller designates as 'digital media studies' – has emerged as the conceptual core of the digital humanities and it is the fastest-growing area of the posthumanities.

Another illuminating example of conceptual creativity is the environmental humanities, also known as 'green humanities' and, in the case of water-research, 'blue humanities',<sup>6</sup> inspired by the awareness of the Anthropocene and the issue of sustainability (Braidotti 2006). This interdisciplinary field of study spells the end of the idea of a denaturalized social order disconnected from its environmental and organic foundations, and calls for more complex schemes of understanding the multilayered form of interdependence between contemporary nature and culture. They combine theories of historical subjectivity with 'species thinking', proposing a post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge which grants the earth the same role and agency as the human subjects that inhabit it. Environmental humanities also explore the social and cultural factors that underscore the public perception and representation of climate change issues. The humanities and more specifically cultural research are best suited to affect and restructure the social imaginary about the posthuman condition. These innovative agenda, which build on but are not confined to either humanism or anthropocentrism, set a new programme for the humanities today. They demonstrate the extent to which the field will prosper if it shows the ability and willingness to undergo a process of transformation in the direction of the posthuman.

What is posthuman about the digital and environmental humanities? It is a question of thematic, methodological and conceptual changes. Thematically, both discursive fields deal with non-human objects/subjects of study: the Digital with new media and computational culture in general (including its repercussions for social, economic and political life) and the Environmental with Gaia or the planet as a whole. Methodologically, the situation is slightly more complex but still quite discernible. On the

analytical level, both areas work through a mixture of empirical data, including active cultural and technical practices, ethnographic observation and theoretical framing. They are openly relational in their approach but they differ on the degree of disengagement from *Anthropos* which they endorse. Both of them emphasize the intertwined destinies of humans and non-humans and call for an end to the epistemic violence that consists in metaphorizing the naturalized 'others' – animals, plants, the flora and fauna of the planet – with the anthropological aim of either exemplifying the humans' moral aspirations or of flattering our self-projections. These zoo-mythologies need critical revisions (Wolfe 2003, 2010), to be replaced by a more materialist, i.e. less metaphorical, mode of relation.

This does not mean, however, that all analytically post-anthropocentric discourses are automatically posthumanist. On the contrary, one of the paradoxes of the current situation in the humanities is a normative return to Humanism, coupled with a growing post-anthropocentric analytical framework. This is one of the reasons for the revival of the previous generation's debate on antihumanism. An explicit example of what I define as 'compensatory neo-humanism' (Braidotti 2013) is Peter Singer's animal rights theory (1975), where, much as Martha Nussbaum's liberal philosophy (2006), post-anthropocentric analytic premises are combined with a reassessment of a number of humanist values, notably moral rationality, empathy and solidarity. Post-anthropocentric neo-humanists converge on the need to uphold and expand on these values across all species and to practice an ethics of affirmation based on species-equality (Braidotti 2006). Eco-feminists also embrace this ontological form of solidarity and the critique of the destructive side of human individualism that entails selfishness and a misplaced sense of superiority. They (Donovan and Adams 1996, 2007) connect it to male privileges and the oppression of women and other 'others'.

For Shiva (1997), the political analysis of environmental issues is linked to Eurocentrism and Western supremacy, and speciesism is therefore held accountable as an undue privilege to the same degree as sexism and racism. Meat-eating is targeted as a legalized form of cannibalism by feminist vegetarian critical theory (Adams 1990).

One of the most vocal post-anthropocentric neo-humanists in the field of primatology and animal-studies is Frans de Waal (1996), who extends classical humanist values, like empathy and moral responsibility as a form of emotional communication, to the upper primates, notably the bonobos, striking also a note in support of the evolutionary role of the females of the species. De Waal (1996, 2009) argues that evolution has also provided the requisites for morality and empathy as both an innate and genetically transmitted moral tendency.

I think the analytically post-anthropocentric but normatively neo-humanist approach is problematic (Braidotti 2013). The reason why I am somewhat sceptical of this position is that it is uncritical about

humanism itself and it leaves aside the critical evaluation of its limitations. At such a time of deep epistemological, ethical and political crises of values in human societies, extending the privileges of humanist values to other categories can hardly be considered as a selfless and generous, or a particularly productive move. Asserting a vital bond between the humans and other species is necessary, but to narrow down this bond to the effect of shared vulnerability is self-serving a historical time when the very category of the 'human' has become vulnerable. All the more so as this vulnerability is unevenly distributed among humans, with poorer classes across the globe and the South of the planet in general paying a disproportionate price for economic globalization and for climate change. The compensatory efforts on behalf of animals generate what I consider as a belated kind of solidarity between the human dwellers of this planet, currently traumatized by globalization, technology and the 'new' wars, and their animal others. It is at best an ambivalent phenomenon, in that it combines a negative sense of cross-species bonding with classical and rather high-minded humanist moral claims. In this cross-species embrace, anthropocentrism is actually being reinstated uncritically under the aegis of species egalitarianism and humanistic empathy. Is it not the case then that the humans have spread to non-humans their fundamental anxiety about their own future? I think that what we need instead is a change of paradigm, and some recent developments are pointing in that general direction.

### The missing links

The present scholarly landscape in the humanities shows some glaring omissions and a new distribution of knowledge, mostly as a result of the high degrees of specialization required by the second generation of trans-disciplinary 'studies' areas. Firstly, the conceptual and methodological efforts made by the disciplines to address the post-anthropocentric challenge are such that they cave inwards under the strain of having to redefine their key concepts and methodology. This brings about a paradoxical return of disciplinarity in a highly defensive mode.

Secondly, and in order to remedy such tendencies, we need to make a cartographic account of the missing links in the emerging posthumanities: where do they leave feminist, queer, post-colonial, anti-racist, class-conscious analyses? Are we not witnessing a re-segregation of these discourses in the new posthuman landscape? Or, to translate this question into my main concern: what is the 'human' in the posthumanities? It is urgent to create border crossings between the new post-anthropocentric discourses and the multiple critiques of humanism emerging from the 'studies' areas, notably the feminist and post-colonial perspectives. Let us look at how feminist and post-colonial studies reacted to the posthuman turn.

By the late 1990s, posthuman feminism takes off,<sup>7</sup> building on the legacy of cultural studies (McNeil 2007), science and technology studies (Stengers 1997), media and film theory (Smelik and Lykke 2008) and the pioneering work of Donna Haraway. A convergence occurs between these discrete fields, producing a discursive boom in feminist theories of non- and posthuman subjectivity that relate specifically to non-anthropomorphic animal or technological others (Bryld and Lykke 2000; Parisi 2004; Braidotti 2006, 2013; Colebrook 2014; Alaimo 2010; Hird and Roberts 2011). Explicit references to the posthuman condition begin to circulate in feminist texts from the 1990s on (Braidotti 1994; Balsamo 1996; Hayles 1999; Halberstam and Livingston 1995). Exemplary of this development is the work of Barad (2003, 2007), who coins the terms 'posthumanist performativity' and 'agential realism' to signify this enlarged and, in my terms, post-anthropocentric vision of subjectivity.

New media and cultural studies, under the impact of the posthuman ethical turn (Braidotti 2006; MacCormack 2012), provided related genealogical sources. Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000) contribute to a *de facto* displacement of the centrality of the human, through studies of molecular biology (Franklin 2007) and computational systems (Lury, Parisi and Terranova 2012). Eco-feminists (Plumwood 1993, 2003), who had already pioneered geo-centred perspectives, now embrace animal studies and radical veganism (MacCormack 2014). Parallel to these developments, feminist scholars' interest in Darwin, which had been scarce (Beer 1983), starts to grow proportionally by the end of the millennium (Rose and Rose 2000; Carroll 2004; Grosz 2011). 'Matter-realist' feminists (Fraser, Kember and Lury 2006) developed alongside neo-materialist feminism (Braidotti 1991; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Kirby 2011). Deleuzian feminists also developed transversal nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 1991, 1994) as well explicit discourses about the non-human in terms of the animal and the earth (Grosz 2004) and thus furthered the non-anthropocentric strand of feminist thought. There is no question that contemporary feminist theory is productively posthuman.

On the post-colonial front, things move very fast as well. Robert Nixon (2011) – a student of Said's – addresses head-on the missing links between post-colonial theories, the environmental humanities and indigenous epistemologies. As a contemporary USA-based critical thinker, Nixon can take as his starting point the institutional presence of the new trans-disciplinary posthuman areas such as the environmental and digital humanities. He can therefore proceed to develop a post-colonial critique of their omissions. He acknowledges a schism between these fields, which he traces back to the generation of Said, who tended to dismiss environmentalism as either irrelevant or complicit in imperialist practices. According to Nixon, 1970s USA environmentalism tended to be inward-looking and upheld a separation between human and natural ecology, which produced a retreat from analyses of global power relations and geopolitical differences. The



ideology of preservation de-linked environmental degradation from the effects of poverty, warfare, social inequalities and economic exploitation in the global South.

Nixon argues moreover that the status of environmental activism among the poor in the global South has shifted in recent years towards the transnational environmental justice movement and the assessment of damage caused by warfare. Nixon's remedy to the parochialism of greening the humanities consists in bringing them into dialogue with post-colonial perspectives, notably the environmental justice movement, producing a transnational ethics of place. Academically, this results in the production of new areas of studies that crossover the complex post-anthropocentric axes of enquiry: post-colonial environmental humanities come therefore onto the agenda and transnational environmental literature emerges as a crossover between Native American studies and other indigenous studies areas and the environmental humanities.<sup>8</sup>

Starting from the assumption that in contemporary post-colonial studies 'green' politics is now replacing 'red' politics, Huggan and Tiffin (2015: 10) call for new alliances between these fields, so as to address the 'series of constitutive tensions and dilemmas' that characterize them. Identifying as the key issue today 'the clash between conservationist aims and the rights of local indigenous peoples' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 3), they also call for a revision of the Humanistic world view that, while celebrating Enlightenment-driven reason, with its implicit anthropocentrism and explicit Eurocentrism, 'provided both the ideological grounds and the practical basis for imperial expansion and colonial governance in many different regions of the world' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 3). Quoting Derrida they note that the very definition of humanity depends on both the construction and the exclusion of the non-human, the uncivilized, the savage, the animal. They conclude that 'a postcolonial environmental ethic necessitates an investigation of the category of the 'human' itself and the multiple ways in which this anthropocentric construction has been and is, complicit in racism, imperialism and colonialism, from the moment of conquest to the present day' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 7). This requires interdisciplinary networks to replace the discrete disciplines. The key issue is: 'no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice – for *all* ecological beings – no justice at all' (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 10).

Starting from the digital humanities, new developments are on the way to fill in other missing links. Ponzanesi and Leurs (2014) claim that post-colonial digital humanities is now a fully constituted field, digital media providing the most comprehensive platform to re-think transnational spaces and contexts. Relying on the work of pioneers like Lisa Nakamura (2002), contemporary activist-researchers Roopika Risam and Adeline Koh, editors of the website 'Post-colonial Digital Humanities'<sup>9</sup> describe their mission as being 'grounded in the literary, philosophical, and historical heritage

of post-colonial studies and invested in the possibilities offered by digital humanities, we position post-colonial digital humanities as an emergent field of study invested in decolonizing the digital, foregrounding anti-colonial thought, and disrupting salutatory narratives of globalization and technological progress'.

The projects of setting up post-colonial digital humanities and de-colonizing new media are timely, considering that the fields are highly popular with corporate and institutional sponsors who see them as an indispensable economic tool and an essential element of the war on terror. These transversal projects pursue the critical analysis of power formation of the 'high' post-colonial studies era into the complex cultural analytics of the third millennium. Aware of the potential implications of their research for issues of security and anti-terrorism, Ponzanesi and Leurs (2014) are careful to ground their work empirically in the lived experiences of migrant communities across Europe and focus on digital diasporas that allow us to rethink connectivity and mobility as well as the lasting legacy of social inequalities and dissymmetries in access and power. Arguing that digital connectedness, in the dense materiality of its infrastructure as well as in multiple virtual applications, creates new opportunities for community-building and identity formations, they identify the 'digitally connected migrant' as the prototype of what I would call the contemporary posthuman subject.

Walter D. Mignolo and the decolonial movement propose a similar focus, but with a different approach. Taking distance from post-colonial studies in general and Said's work on the Orient in particular, as being over-academic and too literary, decoloniality focuses on the colonization of the Americas and notably Latin America from the sixteenth century. Mignolo defines coloniality as the matrix of European power and its quintessential logic: '*colonial* history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of *modern* Europe' (Mignolo 2011: 16). Mignolo (2011) calls for a very radical break from this tradition, suffering from none of the ambivalence and soul-searching complexity that distinguishes Said's work on the issue of multiple cultural belongings. The decolonial approach none the less shares with post-colonial studies the rejection of imperialism not only as a material system of structural inequality, but also as a system of thought: Eurocentrism. The mistaken idea that the history of human civilization culminates in Europe produces not only structural inequalities, but also the habit of racializing and naturalizing them: 'The first world has knowledge, the third world has culture' (Mignolo 2011: 2). The decolonial movement targets epistemic as well as material manifestations of Eurocentric power, namely coloniality and modernity. Modernity is postulated from the epistemic privilege of Europe's self-appointed role as the motor of world history and human development through its investment in scientific rationality on the one hand and colonial conquest on the other. Mignolo calls for 'epistemic disobedience' (2011: 122–3) as a way of 'de-linking' from this

disastrous legacy, that is to say de-Westernizing the ideals of humanity: 'The *Anthropos* inhabiting non-European places discovered that s/he had been invented, as *Anthropos*, by a locus of enunciation self-defined as *humanitas*' (Mignolo 2011: 3). The decolonial move consists in freeing the human from the domination of European 'Man'.

Furthermore, this movement defines globalization as the contemporary form of Western imperialism, as such responsible for perpetuating the colonial legacy of exploitation and inequality, as evidenced by continuing racism, sexism, genocide and ecocide.<sup>10</sup> Concrete examples of resistance to globalization are movements for indigenous autonomy, like Zapatista self-government.<sup>11</sup> The key idea is that 'the regeneration of life shall prevail over primacy of production and reproduction of goods at the cost of life' (Mignolo 2011: 3).

Indigenous ways of knowing and non-Western epistemologies can provide inspirational material in this quest. As Clarke suggests, we need to be 'wary of the risks of aligning indigeneity with the primordiality of the earth, but [...] also mindful that integrating social history with geological, climatic or evolutionary history has its own potential to destabilize colonial narratives' (Clarke 2008: 739). New alliances between environmentalists, First Nation peoples, new media activists and anti-globalization forces constitute a significant example of these new political assemblages.<sup>12</sup> Mignolo concurs with Nixon about the importance of the transnational environmental justice movement and of taking indigenous epistemologies seriously not as a relic of the past but as a blueprint for the future.

The decolonial approach also proposes a crossover with the digital humanities, as evidenced by the Hasta Scholars Forum<sup>13</sup> that, explicitly inspired by Mignolo's work, focuses on 'Colonial Legacies, Post-colonial Realities and Decolonial Futures of Digital Media'. It starts from the assumption that Eurocentrism and the devastation of indigenous ways of knowing can be exacerbated by the adoption of digital technologies and argues for the need to 'challenge colonial legacies in new media and work towards decolonial futures using contemporary digital technologies, including creating artworks, indigenous archives, games and digital scholarship'. Issues raised include: neocolonialism; indigeneity and settler statuses; post-colonial approaches; white settler colonialism; tensions between decolonization, migration and diaspora; decolonial aesthetics; blackness and decolonization; queer and trans decolonization. The intersection of digital technologies with the humanities is especially targeted, as is research on alternative technologies that may work against colonization and 'post-colonial legacies that maintain social injustice'. These theoretically sophisticated transversal discursive developments constitute the emerging field of the posthumanities.

## Contested reconstructions of knowledge

How are the posthumanities contested? They are so in a multilayered manner: firstly in relation to the original disciplines, which are also trying to reconfigure their profile in relation to the posthuman predicament, the Anthropocene included. A case in point is the fraught dialogue between 'eco-criticism' – which is mostly a literary phenomenon – and the broader interdisciplinary field of the environmental humanities, which has incorporated significant amounts of methodology from the social sciences.

Secondly, the posthumanities are contested in relation to the first generation of 'studies' areas, some of which are very anthropocentric and even militantly so – hence the traditional hostility of left-wing 'red' politics towards environmental 'green' politics. The political implications of the posthumanities' unwillingness to disengage from both humanism and anthropocentrism, and thus let go of the exclusively human political agent, are a highly contested matter. This takes me to the third dimension of the problem: the posthumanities are also contested in relation to mainstream humanist values like empathy and care. Different kinds of neo-humanism are emerging in this respect as well – including a revival of socialist humanism, which posit the human as the main point of resistance against the exploitation and dispossession of aggressive neoliberal politics. The human in question here, however, arises after the decline of the 'Man' of humanism and thus constitutes a new political subject. I shall return to this point.

Last but not least, not only is a variety of neo-humanist stances strengthening the attachment to a traditional sense of 'humanity', but it is also the case that new definitions of the 'human' are emerging, which tend to re-totalize the term. A neo-cosmopolitan redefinition of a new Humanity bonded in fear follows from this position. As I stated earlier, this generalized appeal to a new undifferentiated 'humanity' serves mainly the function of flattening out and disregarding all power differences.

These contestations and contradictions are constitutive of the contemporary posthumanities debate and we should not even attempt to resolve them. We need to think rhizomically, in terms of 'and ... and' and not of 'either/or'. In order to support this shift of perspective, nomadic pedagogics of dis-identification from humanism and anthropocentrism values are needed, but I cannot pursue this further here.<sup>14</sup>

I want to go on now and suggest that Deleuze can provide the stimulus for a trans-disciplinary approach based on monistic philosophies of becoming. This vital materialism supports the convergence between the posthumanities and the radical epistemologies of the multiple 'studies' areas. We need to start from Spinoza and his materialist monistic ontology (Lloyd 1994, 1996), re-reading it with Deleuze and Guattari and others (Matheron 1969; Macherey 2011; Balibar 1998), that is to say with special emphasis on immanence. The focus

of their approach is on theories and practices of subjectivity and subject formations, constituting a significant break from the dismissal of subjectivity, as proposed for instance by the object-oriented ontologists, following superficially on Latour's footsteps (Harman on Latour 2011; Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014). I would argue in favour of a non-unitary (nomadic), embodied and embedded (neo-materialist), affective and relational (vital) subject. The materiality of such a subject is of the dynamic, self-organizing kind (Maturana and Varela 1980; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) which dissolves mind-body dualism in favour of a monistic integration of the two: embodiment of the brain and embrainment of the body (Marks 1998).

This extended self is moreover marked by the structural presence of practices and apparatus of mediation that inscribe technology as 'second nature'. This eco-sophical 'milieu' is our living habitat, which Guattari (1995, 2000) reformulated in terms of the multiple ecologies of 'machinic autopoiesis'. Because the human and social sciences have historically been the main beneficiaries of the transcendental anthropology that posits anthropocentrism, rationality and transcendence as the basic units of reference for the human, they stand to gain the most by being recast today in the Spinozist mode of radical immanence and monistic materialism, enhanced by the high technological mediation and technology. A techno-ecological (Hörl 2013), posthuman turn is at work which means that the vital self-organizing powers that were once reserved for organic entities have now become an integral part of our technologically mediated universe. A nature-cultural continuum that also affects 'humanimals' (Hayward 2008, 2011) and their multiple activities, including the production of knowledge. There is no 'originary humanicity' (Kirby 2011: 233) but only 'originary technicity' (MacKenzie 2002).

We see traces of this approach in contemporary media studies (Fuller 2005; Hansen 2006; Parikka 2010), in neo-materialist philosophy of 'vibrant matter' (Bennett 2010) or 'inventive life' (Fraser, Kember and Lury 2006), that stress the self-organizing vitality and affective structure (Clough 2008) of all living systems, thereby dethroning anthropocentric exceptionalism. By choosing to bypass the binary between the material and the cultural, these process-ontologies focus on their interaction, the better to interrogate the boundaries between them. Posthumanists of many dispositions, building on the poststructuralist legacy but moving beyond it, are also calling for a transformation of the field in the direction of a new deal with the culture of science and technology (Haraway 1997; Hayles 1999; Parisi 2004; Clarke 2008); with comparative literature and cultural studies (Herbrechter 2013; Nayar 2013); new media studies (Fuller 2005; Parikka 2010); and in the framework of social theory (Lury, Parisi and Terranova 2012) and neo-Spinozist social theory (DeLanda 2006; Braidotti 2013).

In other words, however contested and contradictory, the changes and mutations in the direction of the posthumanities are already happening and the question is whether critical thinkers can rise to the occasion and

be worthy of these transformations. The ethical and political stakes of these changes are high. They leave the task of posthuman critical thinkers exactly where Said would have wanted it: with the dispossessed and the disempowered, except that many of those are neither human nor anthropomorphic. This makes it imperative for critical thinkers to develop new genealogies, alternative theoretical and legal representations of the new relational systems we are trying to think our way through. We need adequate narratives to live up to this challenge and thus work towards an affirmative brand of posthuman thought. We need to work on counter-memories and new imaginaries and remain attuned to Foucault's focus on multiple archives of forgotten and erased memories. Echoing Haraway's call for new cosmological visions, DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) argue that, in this quest, the imagination plays a crucial role in reconstructing a memory, which Glissant (1997) described as a poetic and relational re-making of the world.

### A reactive recomposition of humanity?

The selected overview of the fast-growing posthumanities I provided in the previous sections aimed at demonstrating a number of points. Firstly, that the humanities in the twenty-first century are alive and well, in spite of institutional cutbacks and a negative image in the media and policy-making circles. Secondly, that most of the growth in both thematic and methodological substantive issues emerges from trans-disciplinary 'studies' areas, which are very innovative and prolific but institutionally marginal in relation to the traditional disciplines. Thirdly, the posthumanities can be partly seen as the second generation of 'studies' areas, genealogically indebted to the first generation of the 1970s. But they go further and shed both ideological and tactical habits in order to develop more consistently transversal forms of enquiry. They differ from their predecessors in that they address directly and creatively the question of anthropocentrism, which had been left relatively under-examined.

In reaching the concluding section of this essay I want to return more explicitly to the question of the political implications of the posthuman turn. This is a multilayered dimension, which comes down to three basic issues. Firstly: how sustainable is the path of technological advances – which Paul Gilroy calls 'over-development'<sup>15</sup> – in a globally interlinked world? Secondly: what to do about the growing disparities in access to the riches of the global economy and its advanced technologies? And last but not least: what can be the contribution of the humanities to a better understanding of the issues involved?

These questions resonate across the field of the posthumanities. For instance, posthuman discourses of the digital and environmental humanities,

crossed with post-colonial and feminist studies, raise more urgently than ever the question of scale: how can we re-think our interconnection in the era of the Anthropocene, while re-thinking our new ecologies of belonging? The connection to the natural environment and to the technosphere of new media recasts the issue of alterity in non-human terms that cannot be adequately dealt with in the discourses and language of poststructuralist difference, let alone universalist humanism.

There is a distinct tendency today to hastily recompose a new generic 'we' – a new endangered humanity after anthropocentrism. 'Humanity' is posited as a unitary category and as an object of intense debate, just as it emerges as a threatened or endangered category (Chakrabarty 2009). A panhuman bond of vulnerability engenders a negative or reactive sort of cosmopolitan interconnection (Beck 2006) that expresses intense anxiety about the future of our species and cannot fail to affect the construction of the human in the new (post-)humanities.

The literature on shared anxiety about the future of both our species and of our humanist legacy is by now an established genre, as shown by the statements of significant political and social thinkers like Habermas (2003), Fukuyama (2002), Sloterdijk (2009) and Borradori (2003). In different ways, they seem struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the human/non-human/posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for the situation. The size of recent scholarship on the environmental crisis, extinction and the climate change also testifies to this state of emergency and to the emergence of the earth in the Anthropocene as a political agent. Both United Nations humanitarianism and corporate posthumanism assuage this anxiety by proposing a hasty reformulation of a panhuman 'we', who are supposed to be in *this* together.

There is no question that the generic figure of the human – 'we' – is in trouble and *this* is a serious matter. Donna Haraway puts it as follows: 'our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally branded intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly available for the progress of science and the advancement of industry. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand' (1997: 74). Massumi refers to this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': 'a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human' (1998: 60) and as such undergoing significant mutations: 'species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter' (1998: 60). Karen Barad (2003) coins the term 'posthumanist performativity' to define new human–non-human interaction.

Such a sense of urgency, however, does not warrant generic reconstructions of 'Humanity' and a tacit new consensus about something we may call 'the human'. I would argue for the need to keep tracking the changing perceptions and multiple new formations of the 'human' in the globalized, technologically mediated and ethnically diverse world we inhabit. The differential politics

of location affect the production of knowledge and self-representation. 'We' – the dwellers of *this* planet at this point in time – are confronted by a number of painful contradictions: an electronically linked pan-humanity which, however, is more fragmented than ever and split by convulsive internal fractures, economic disparities, xenophobic fears and violence. Humanity is re-created as a negative category, held together by shared vulnerability and the spectre of extinction, but also struck down by environmental devastation, by new and old epidemics, in endless 'new' wars that innovate on ways of killing, in the proliferation of migrations and exodus, detention camps and refugees' centres. The staggering inequalities engendered by the global economy make for violence and insurrection; the appeals for new forms of cosmopolitan relations or a global *ethos* (Kung 1998) are often answered by necro-political acts of violence, destruction and assassination, not only by the official enemies of the West – Muslim extremists – but also by home-grown killers, which in Europe are the likes of Anders Behring Breivik.<sup>16</sup>

In such a volatile context, it is important to keep the critical perspective wide open and not give in to foregone conclusions about the transition the 'human' and 'Humanity' is going through. Such 'closed' systems of thought would short-circuit the process of transformation. Nor can we assume that the shifting notions and social practices of human–non-human–posthuman relations are intrinsically progressive, or that they will automatically undo power relations based on class, gender, race, sexuality, age or disability (Braidotti 2002, 2013). There is in fact large and growing evidence that points to the exact contrary. What is needed instead is careful negotiations in order to constitute new subject positions as transversal alliances between human and non-human agents, which account for the ubiquity of technological mediation and the complexity of inter-species alliances (Livingston and Puar 2011). In a similar vein, arguing that ecologically oriented thinking has yet to come to terms with the deterritorializations induced by globalization, Ursula Heise (2008) concentrates on the missing links between post-colonial studies and media studies, and argues forcefully for the idea of a 'green' or eco-cosmopolitan citizenship. The posthumanities require productive and affirmative forms of de-familiarization or dis-identification from century-old habits of anthropocentric thought and humanist arrogance, which test the boundaries of what exactly is 'human' about them. De-familiarization involves shedding cherished habits of thought and representation, even at the risk of producing fear and nostalgia. It is a sobering process by which the knowing subject evolves from the vision of the self he or she had become accustomed to. Spivak calls it 'unlearning one's privileges', even and especially in the practice of critical theory. Instead of seeking for identity-bound recognition, the ethical emphasis falls on the expression of an affirmative mode of relations to multiple others. The frame of reference therefore becomes the world, in all its open-ended, interrelational, multi-sexed, and trans-species flows of becoming: a native form of cosmopolitanism (Braidotti 2006, 2013).

Acknowledging that engaging non-human agency creates these additional challenges, DeLoughrey and Handley (2011: 9) demand: 'a more nuanced discourse about the representation of alterity, a theorization of difference that post-colonialists, feminists, and environmental activists have long considered in terms of our normative representations of nature, human and otherwise'. In other words, we need a more 'cautious' hermeneutics, based on contingent and interdependent narratives to replace the previous, grandiose mythologies of universal human experience. More than ever, Said's concerns resonate in current geopolitical and academic concerns about the ways in which the 'human' is divided, administered, plundered and pigeonholed in violent oppositional ways.

Instead of taking a flight into an abstract idea of a 'new' pan-humanity, bonded in shared vulnerability or anxiety about survival and extinction, in a world risk society (Beck 1999), therefore, I want to plead for affirmative politics grounded on immanent interconnections, a transnational ethics of place. What we need are embedded and embodied, relational and affective cartographies of the new power relations that are emerging from the current geopolitical and post-anthropocentric world order. Class, race, gender and sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness are more than ever significant markers of human 'normality'. They are key factors in framing the notion of and policing access to something we may call 'human' or 'humanity'. Yet, considering the global reach of the problems we are facing today, in the era of the 'Anthropocene', it is none the less the case that 'we' are indeed in *this* anthropocentric crisis together. Such awareness must not, however, obscure or flatten out the power differentials that sustain the collective subject ('we') and its endeavour (*this*). Labouring towards a neo-aboriginal, rather than a neo-Kantian brand of cosmopolitanism, 'we' need to acknowledge that there may well be multiple and potentially contradictory projects at stake in the complex recompositions of 'the human' in the posthumanities right now: many contested ways of becoming-world together.

## Notes

- 1 Private communication with the author.
- 2 A portmanteau term obtained by merging precarious with proletariat. It designates the bottom social class in advanced capitalism with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital. Source: Wikipedia, consulted 1 June 2015.
- 3 Nobel Prize winning chemist, Paul Crutzen, in 2002 coined the term 'Anthropocene' to describe our current geological era. This term stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by our species and its potentially lethal consequences for the geological sustainability of our planet as a whole.
- 4 A companion to animal studies has just been published (Gross and Vallely,

2012), whereas a complete eco-criticism reader has been available for a while (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996). *The Journal of Ecocriticism* is quite established, while a recent issue of the prestigious *PMLA* papers (2012) was dedicated to the question of the animal. For an excellent historical analysis, see Bourke (2011). For a younger generation of scholars (Rossini and Tyler 2009) the animal is the posthuman question *par excellence*. Braidotti and Roets (2012); Davis (1997) and Goodley, Lawthorn and Runswick (2014).

- 5 With thanks to Matthew Fuller.
- 6 With thanks to Iris van der Tuin.
- 7 For a full analysis, see 'Posthuman feminist theory', Braidotti (2015).
- 8 With thanks to Sandra Ponzanesi.
- 9 Roopika Risam and Adleine Koh: <http://dhpoco.org/about-us/>. With thanks to Koen Leurs. Consulted 7 July 2015.
- 10 The term refers to any extensive damage or destruction of the natural landscape and disruption or loss of ecosystems of a given territory to such an extent that the survival of the inhabitants of that territory is endangered. Source: Wikipedia, consulted 7 July 2015.
- 11 Source: Wikipedia 'Decoloniality', consulted 6 July 2015.
- 12 See for instance the land/media/indigenous project based in British Columbia: Bleck, Dodds and Williams (2013).
- 13 Co-ordinated by Micha Cardenas, Noha F. Beydon and Alainya Kavaloski; see the website: <http://www.hastac.org/forums/colonial-legacies-postcolonial-realities-and-decolonial-futures-digital-media>. Consulted 7 July 2015. With thanks to Matthew Fuller.
- 14 For an illuminating example, see the project 'Posthumanism, the Affective Turn and Socially Just Critical Higher Education Pedagogies', directed by Vivienne Bozalek at the University of the Western Cape and funded by the National Research Foundation in South Africa.
- 15 Private communication with the author.
- 16 Anders Behring Breivik is the Norwegian mass murderer and the confessed perpetrator of the 2011 attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utoya, killing respectively eight and sixty-nine people, mostly Socialist youth.

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