



# The Posthuman

Rosi Braidotti

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
1 Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self	13
2 Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species	55
3 The Inhuman: Life beyond Death	105
4 Posthuman Humanities: Life beyond Theory	143
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>186</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>198</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>214</i>

# Chapter 1

## Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self

At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of ‘Man’, formulated first by Protagoras as ‘the measure of all things’, later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man (see figure 1.1). An ideal of bodily perfection which, in keeping with the classical dictum *mens sana in corpore sano*, doubles up as a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values. Together they uphold a specific view of what is ‘human’ about humanity. Moreover, they assert with unshakable certainty the almost boundless capacity of humans to pursue their individual and collective perfectibility. That iconic image is the emblem of Humanism as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress. Faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason forms an integral part of this high-humanistic creed, which was essentially predicated on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals.

This model sets standards not only for individuals, but also for their cultures. Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason. The mutation of the Humanistic ideal into

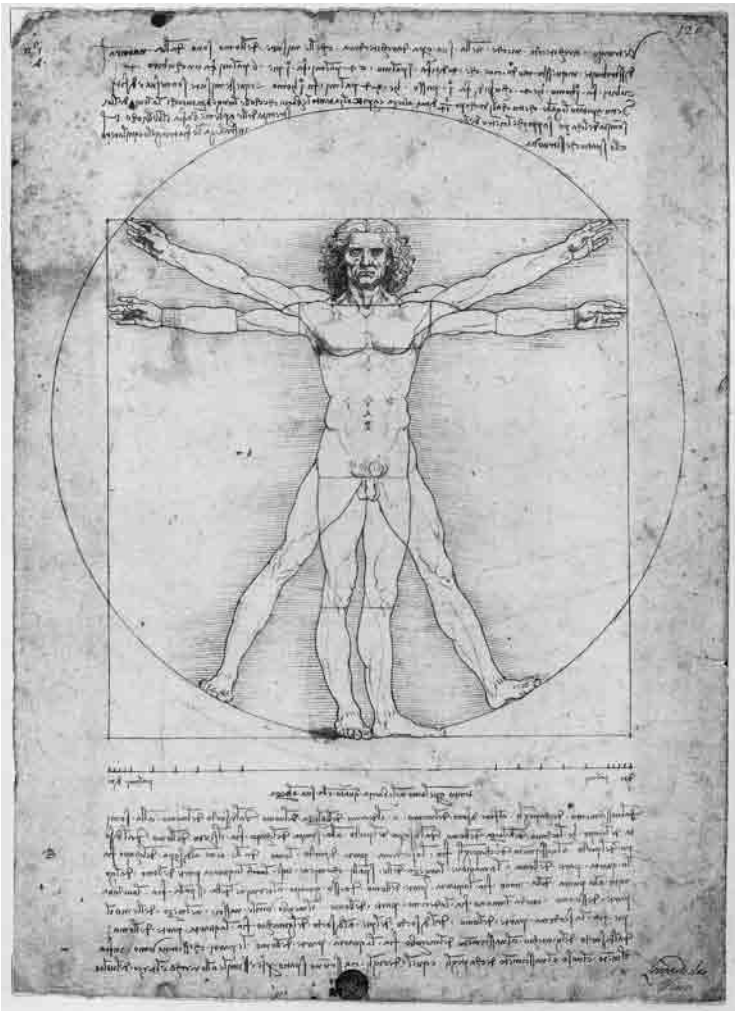


Figure 1.1 Vitruvian Man, 1492, Leonardo da Vinci  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

a hegemonic cultural model was canonized by Hegel's philosophy of history. This self-aggrandizing vision assumes that Europe is not just a geo-political location, but rather a universal attribute of the human mind that can lend its quality to any suitable object. This is the view espoused by Edmund Husserl (1970) in his celebrated essay 'The crisis of European

sciences', which is a passionate defence of the universal powers of reason against the intellectual and moral decline symbolized by the rising threat of European fascism in the 1930s. In Husserl's view, Europe announces itself as the site of origin of critical reason and self-reflexivity, both qualities resting on the Humanistic norm. Equal only to itself, Europe as universal consciousness transcends its specificity, or, rather, posits the power of transcendence as its distinctive characteristic 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 also embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practices. As a civilizational ideal, Humanism fuelled 'the imperial destinies of nineteenth-century Germany, France and, supremely, Great Britain' (Davies, 1997: 23).

This Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference' as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, 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. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these 'others' raise issues of power and exclusion. We need more ethical accountability in dealing with the legacy of Humanism. Tony Davies puts it lucidly: 'All Humanisms, until now, have been imperial. They speak of the human in the accents and the interests of a class, a sex, a race, a genome. Their embrace suffocates those whom it does not ignore. [. . .] It is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity' (Davies, 1997: 141). Indeed, but it is also the case unfortunately that many atrocities have been committed in the name of the hatred for humanity, as shown by the case of Pekka-Eric Auvinen in the first vignette in the introduction.

Humanism's restricted notion of what counts as the human is one of the keys to understand how we got to a post-human turn at all. The itinerary is far from simple or predictable. Edward Said, for instance, complicates the picture by introducing a post-colonial angle: 'Humanism as protective or even defensive nationalism is [. . .] a mixed blessing for its [. . .] ideological ferocity and triumphalism, although it is sometimes inevitable. In a colonial setting for example, a revival of the suppressed languages and cultures, the attempts at national assertion through cultural tradition and glorious ancestors [. . .] are explainable and understandable' (Said, 2004: 37). This qualification is crucial in pointing out the importance of where one is actually speaking from. Differences of location between centres and margins matter greatly, especially in relation to the legacy of something as complex and multi-faceted as Humanism. Complicitous with genocides and crimes on the one hand, supportive of enormous hopes and aspirations to freedom on the other, Humanism somehow defeats linear criticism. This protean quality is partly responsible for its longevity.

## Anti-Humanism

Let me put my cards on the table at this early stage of the argument: I am none too fond of Humanism or of the idea of the human which it implicitly upholds. Anti-humanism is so much part of my intellectual and personal genealogy, as well as family background, that for me the crisis of Humanism is almost a banality. Why?

Politics and philosophy are the main reasons for the glee with which I have always greeted the notion of the historical decline of Humanism, with its Eurocentric core and imperial tendencies. Of course, the historical context has a lot to do with it. I came of age intellectually and politically in the turbulent years after the Second World War, when the Humanist ideal came to be questioned quite radically. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s an activist brand of anti-Humanism was developed by the new social movements and the youth cultures of the day: feminism, de-colonization and anti-racism, anti-nuclear and pacifist movements. Chronologically linked



to the social and cultural politics of the generation known as the baby-boomers, these social movements produced radical political, social theories and new epistemologies. They challenged the platitudes of Cold War rhetoric, with its emphasis on Western democracy, liberal individualism and the freedom they allegedly ensured for all.

Nothing smacks more like a theoretical mid-life crisis than to acknowledge one's affiliation to the baby-boomers. The public image of this generation is not exactly edifying at this point in time. Nonetheless, truth be said, that generation was marked by the traumatic legacy of the many failed political experiments of the twentieth century. Fascism and the Holocaust on the one hand, Communism and the Gulag on the other, strike a blood-drenched balance on the comparative scale of horrors. There is a clear generational link between these historical phenomena and the rejection of Humanism in the 1960s and 1970s. Let me explain.

At the levels of their own ideological content, these two historical phenomena, Fascism and Communism, rejected openly or implicitly the basic tenets of European Humanism and betrayed them violently. They remain, however, quite different as movements in their structures and aims. Whereas fascism preached a ruthless departure from the very roots of Enlightenment-based respect for the autonomy of reason and the moral good, socialism pursued a communitarian notion of humanist solidarity. Socialist Humanism had been a feature of the European Left since the utopian socialist movements of the eighteenth century. Admittedly, Marxist-Leninism rejected these 'soft-headed' aspects of socialist humanism, notably the emphasis on the fulfilment of the human beings' potential for authenticity (as opposed to alienation). It offered as an alternative 'proletarian Humanism', also known as the 'revolutionary Humanism' of the USSR and its ruthless pursuit of universal, rational human 'freedom' through and under Communism.

Two factors contributed to the relative popularity of communist Humanism in the post-war era. The first is the disastrous effects of Fascism upon European social but also intellectual history. The period of Fascism and Nazism enacted a major disruption in the history of critical theory in Continental Europe in that it destroyed and banned from Europe the

very schools of thought – notably Marxism, psychoanalysis, the Frankfurt School and the disruptive charge of Nietzschean genealogy (though the case of Nietzsche is admittedly quite complex) – which had been central to philosophy in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Cold War and the opposition of the two geo-political blocks, which followed the end of the Second World War kept Europe split asunder and dichotomized until 1989, and did not facilitate the re-implantation of those radical theories back into the Continent which had cast them away with such violence and self-destruction. It is significant, for instance, that most of the authors which Michel Foucault singled out as heralding the philosophical era of critical post-modernity (Marx, Freud, Darwin) are the same authors whom the Nazis condemned and burned at the stake in the 1930s.

The second reason for the popularity of Marxist Humanism is that Communism, under the aegis of the USSR, played a pivotal role in defeating Fascism and hence, to all ends and purposes came out of the Second World War as the winner. It follows therefore that the generation that came of age politically in 1968 inherited a positive view of Marxist praxis and ideology as a result of socialists' and communists' opposition to fascism and to the Soviet Union's war effort against Nazism. This clashes with the almost epidemic anti-communism of American culture and remains to date a point of great intellectual tension between Europe and the USA. It is sometimes difficult at the dawn of the third millennium to remember that Communist parties were the single largest emblem of anti-fascist resistance throughout Europe. They also played a significant role in national liberation movements throughout the world, notably in Africa and Asia. André Malraux's seminal text: *Man's Fate* (*La condition humaine*, 1934) bears testimony to both the moral stature and the tragic dimension of Communism, as does, in a different era and geo-political context, Nelson Mandela's (1994) life and work.

Speaking from his position within the United States of America, Edward Said adds another significant insight:

Antihumanism took hold on the United States intellectual scene partly because of widespread revulsion with the Vietnam War. Part of that revulsion was the emergence of a resistance movement to racism, imperialism generally and the dry-as-dust aca-

demic Humanities that had for years represented an apolitical, unworldly and oblivious (sometimes even manipulative) attitude to the present, all the while adamantly extolling the virtues of the past. (2004: 13)

The 'new' Left in the USA throughout the 1960s and 1970s embodied a militant brand of radical anti-humanism, which was posited in opposition not only to the Liberal majority, but also to the Marxist Humanism of the traditional Left.

I am fully aware of the fact that the notion that Marxism, by now socially coded as an inhumane and violent ideology, may actually be a Humanism will shock the younger generations and all who are unschooled in Continental philosophy. Suffice it, however, to think of the emphasis that philosophers of the calibre of Sartre and de Beauvoir placed on Humanism as a secular tool of critical analysis, to see how the argument may have shaped up. Existentialism stressed Humanist conscience as the source of both moral responsibility and political freedom.

France occupies a very special position in the genealogy of anti-humanist critical theory. The prestige of French intellectuals was linked not only to the formidable educational structure of that country, but also to contextual considerations. Foremost among them is the high moral stature of France at the end of the Second World War, thanks to the anti-Nazi resistance of Charles de Gaulle. French intellectuals continued accordingly to enjoy a very high status, especially in comparison with the wasteland that was post-war Germany. Hence the huge international reputation of Sartre and de Beauvoir, but also Aron, Mauriac, Camus and Malraux. Tony Judt sums it up succinctly (2005: 210):

Despite France's shattering defeat in 1940, its humiliating subjugation under four years of German occupation, the moral ambiguity (and worse) of Marshall Petain's Vichy regime, and the country's embarrassing subordination to the US and Britain in the international diplomacy of the post-war years, French culture became once again the centre of international attention: French intellectuals acquired a special international significance as spokesmen for the age, and the tenor of French political arguments epitomised the ideological rent in the world at large. Once more – and for the last time – Paris was the capital of Europe.

Throughout the post-war years, Paris continued to function as a magnet that attracted and engendered all sorts of critical thinkers. For example, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was first published in France in the 1970s, after being smuggled out of the USSR in samizdat form. It was out of his Parisian retreat that the Ayatollah Khomeini led the Iranian revolution of 1979, which installed the world's first Islamist government. In some ways, the French context of those days was open to all sorts of radical political movements. As a matter of fact, so many critical schools of thought flourished on the Left and Right Bank in that period, that French philosophy became almost synonymous with theory itself, with mixed long-term consequences, as we shall see in chapter 4.

Up until the 1960s, philosophical reason had escaped relatively unscathed from the question of its responsibilities in perpetuating historical models of domination and exclusion. Both Sartre and de Beauvoir, influenced by Marxist theories of alienation and ideology, did connect the triumph of reason with the might of dominant powers, thus disclosing the complicity between philosophical ratio and real-life social practices of injustice. They continued, however, to defend a universalist idea of reason and to rely on a dialectical model for the resolution of these contradictions. This methodological approach, while being critical of hegemonic models of violent appropriation and consumption of the 'others', also defined the task of philosophy as a privileged and culturally hegemonic tool of political analysis. With Sartre and de Beauvoir, the image of the philosopher-king is built into the general picture, albeit in a critical mode. As a critic of ideology and the conscience of the oppressed, the philosopher is a thinking human being who continues to pursue grand theoretical systems and overarching truths. Sartre and de Beauvoir consider humanistic universalism as the distinctive trait of Western culture, i.e. its specific form of particularism. They use the conceptual tools provided by Humanism to precipitate a confrontation of philosophy with its own historical responsibilities and conceptual power-brokering.

This humanistic universalism, coupled with the social constructivist emphasis on the man-made and historically variable nature of social inequalities, lays the grounds for a robust political ontology. For instance, de Beauvoir's emancipatory



**Figure 1.2** New Vitruvian Woman

Source: Friedrich Saurer/Science Photo Library

feminism builds on the Humanist principle that ‘Woman is the measure of all things female’ (see figure 1.2) and that to account for herself, the feminist philosopher needs to take into account the situation of all women. This creates on the theoretical level a productive synthesis of self and others. Politically, the Vitruvian female forged a bond of solidarity between one and the many, which in the hands of the second feminist wave in the 1960s was to grow into the principle of political sisterhood. This posits a common grounding among women, taking being-women-in-the-world as the starting

point for all critical reflection and jointly articulated political praxis.

Humanist feminism introduced a new brand of materialism, of the embodied and embedded kind (Braidotti, 1991). The cornerstone of this theoretical innovation is a specific brand of situated epistemology (Haraway, 1988), which evolved from the practice of 'the politics of locations' (Rich, 1987) and infused standpoint feminist theory and the subsequent debates with postmodernist feminism throughout the 1990s (Harding, 1991). The theoretical premise of humanist feminism is a materialist notion of embodiment that spells the premises of new and more accurate analyses of power. These are based on the radical critique of masculinist universalism, but are still dependent on a form of activist and equality-minded Humanism.

Feminist theory and practice worked faster and more efficiently than most social movements of the 1970s. It developed original tools and methods of analysis that allowed for more incisive accounts of how power works. Feminists also explicitly targeted the masculinism and the sexist habits of the allegedly 'revolutionary' Left and denounced them as contradictory with their ideology, as well as intrinsically offensive.

Within the mainstream Left, however, a new generation of post-war thinkers had other priorities. They rebelled against the high moral status of post-war European Communist parties in Western Europe, as well as in the Soviet empire. This had resulted in an authoritarian hold over the interpretation of Marxist texts and their key philosophical concepts. The new forms of philosophical radicalism developed in France and throughout Europe in the late 1960s expressed a vocal critique of the dogmatic structure of Communist thought and practice. They included a critique of the political alliance between philosophers like Sartre and de Beauvoir and the Communist Left,<sup>1</sup> which lasted at least until the Hungarian insurrection of 1956. In response to the dogma and the violence of Communism, the generation of 1968 appealed directly to the subversive potential of the texts of Marx, so as to recover their anti-institutional roots. Their radicalism was expressed in terms of a critique of

<sup>1</sup> Although Sartre and de Beauvoir were not members of the French Communist Party.

the humanistic implications and the political conservatism of the institutions that embodied Marxist dogma.

Anti-humanism emerged as the rallying cry of this generation of radical thinkers who later were to become world-famous as the 'post-structuralist generation'. In fact, they were post-communists *avant la lettre*. They stepped out of the dialectical oppositional thinking and developed a third way to deal with changing understandings of human subjectivity. By the time Michel Foucault published his ground-breaking critique of Humanism in *The Order of Things* (1970), the question of what, if anything, was the idea of 'the human' was circulating in the radical discourses of the time and had set the anti-humanist agenda for an array of political groups. The 'death of Man', announced by Foucault formalizes an epistemological and moral crisis that goes beyond binary oppositions and cuts across the different poles of the political spectrum. What is targeted is the implicit Humanism of Marxism, more specifically the humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the centre of world history. Even Marxism, under the cover of a master theory of historical materialism, continued to define the subject of European thought as unitary and hegemonic and to assign him (the gender is no coincidence) a royal place as the motor of human history. Anti-humanism consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting. Different and sharper power relations emerge, once this formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur and is no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress.

The radical thinkers of the post-1968 generation rejected Humanism both in its classical and its socialist versions. The Vitruvian ideal of Man as the standard of both perfection and perfectibility (as shown in figure 1.1) was literally pulled down from his pedestal and deconstructed. This humanistic ideal constituted, in fact, the core of a liberal individualistic view of the subject, which defined perfectibility in terms of autonomy and self-determination. These are precisely the qualifications the post-structuralists objected to.

It turned out that this Man, far from being the canon of perfect proportions, spelling out a universalistic ideal that by

now had reached the status of a natural law, was in fact a historical construct and as such contingent as to values and locations. Individualism is not an intrinsic part of 'human nature', as liberal thinkers are prone to believe, but rather a historically and culturally specific discursive formation, one which, moreover, is becoming increasingly problematic. The deconstructive brand of social constructivism introduced by post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida (2001a) also contributed to a radical revision of the Humanist tenets. An entire philosophical generation called for insubordination from received Humanist ideas of 'human nature'.

Feminists like Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) pointed out that the allegedly abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied; of his sexuality nothing much can be guessed, though plenty of speculation surrounds that of its painter, Leonardo da Vinci. What this ideal model may have in common with the statistical average of most members of the species and the civilization he is supposed to represent is a very good question indeed. Feminist critiques of patriarchal posturing through abstract masculinity (Hartsock, 1987) and triumphant whiteness (hooks, 1981; Ware, 1992) argued that this Humanist universalism is objectionable not only on epistemological, but also on ethical and political grounds.

Anti-colonial thinkers adopted a similar critical stance by questioning the primacy of whiteness in the Vitruvian ideal as the aesthetic canon of beauty (see figure 1.2). Re-grounding such lofty claims onto the history of colonialism, anti-racist and post-colonial thinkers explicitly questioned the relevance of the Humanistic ideal, in view of the obvious contradictions imposed by its Eurocentric assumptions, but at the same time they did not entirely cast it aside. They held the Europeans accountable for the uses and abuses of this ideal by looking at colonial history and the violent domination of other cultures, but still upheld its basic premises. Frantz Fanon, for instance, wanted to rescue Humanism from its European perpetuators arguing that we have betrayed and misused the humanist ideal. As Sartre put it in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963: 7): 'the yellow and black voices still spoke of our Humanism, but only to



reproach us with our inhumanity'. Post-colonial thought asserts that if Humanism has a future at all, it has to come from outside the Western world and by-pass the limitations of Eurocentrism. By extension, the claim to universality by scientific rationality is challenged on both epistemological and political grounds (Spivak, 1999; Said, 2004), all knowledge claims being expressions of Western culture and of its drive to mastery.

French post-structuralist philosophers pursued the same post-colonial aim through different routes and means.<sup>2</sup> They argued that in the aftermath of colonialism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag – to mention but a few of the horrors of modern history – we Europeans need to develop a critique of Europe's delusion of grandeur in positing ourselves as the moral guardian of the world and as the motor of human evolution. Thus, the philosophical generation of the 1970s, that proclaimed the 'death of Man' was anti-fascist, post-communist, post-colonial and post-humanist, in a variety of different combinations of the terms. They led to the rejection of the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality and the universal. The feminist philosophies of sexual difference,<sup>3</sup> through the spectrum of the critique of dominant masculinity, also stressed the ethnocentric nature of European claims to universalism. They advocated the need to open it up to the 'others within' (Kristeva, 1991) in such a way as to re-locate diversity and multiple belongings to a central position as a structural component of European subjectivity.

Anti-humanism is consequently an important source for posthuman thought. It is by no means the only one, nor is the connection between anti-humanism and the posthuman logically necessary or historically inevitable. And yet it turned out to be so for my own work, although this story is still unfinished and in some ways, as I will argue in the next section, my relation to Humanism remains unresolved.

<sup>2</sup> This line is pursued in philosophy by Deleuze's rejection of the transcendental vision of the subject (1994); Irigaray's de-centring of phallogocentrism (1985a, 1985b); Foucault's critique of Humanism (1977) and Derrida's deconstruction of Eurocentrism (1992).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Irigaray (1993), Cixous (1997) and Braidotti (1991).

## The Death of Man, the Deconstruction of Woman

As indicated in the genealogical itinerary I have just sketched, anti-humanism is one of the historical and theoretical paths that can lead to the posthuman. I owe my anti-humanism to my beloved post-1968 teachers, some of whom were amazing philosophers whose legacy I continue to respect and admire: Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze especially. The human of Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location. The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human: from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity. This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature’.

My anti-humanism leads me to object to the unitary subject of Humanism, including its socialist variables, and to replace it with a more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities. Equally central to this approach is the insight I learned from Foucault on power as both a restrictive (*potestas*) and productive (*potentia*) force. This means that power formations not only function at the material level but are also expressed in systems of theoretical and cultural representation, political and normative narratives and social modes of identification. These are neither coherent, nor rational and their makeshift nature is instrumental to their hegemonic force. The awareness of the instability and the lack of coherence of the narratives that compose the social structures and relations, far from resulting in a suspension of political and

moral action, become the starting point to elaborate new forms of resistance suited to the polycentric and dynamic structure of contemporary power (Patton, 2000). This engenders a pragmatic form of micro-politics that reflects the complex and nomadic nature of contemporary social systems and of the subjects that inhabit them. If power is complex, scattered and productive, so must be our resistance to it. Once this deconstructive move is activated, both the standard notion of Man and his second sex, Woman, are challenged in terms of their internal complexities.

This clearly affects the task and the methods status of theory. Discourse, as Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), is about the political currency that is attributed to certain meanings, or systems of meaning, in such a way as to invest them with scientific legitimacy; there is nothing neutral or given about it. Thus, a critical, materialist link is established between scientific truth, discursive currency and power relations. This approach of discourse analysis primarily aims at dislodging the belief in the 'natural' foundations of socially coded and enforced 'differences' and of the systems of scientific validity, ethical values and representation which they support (Coward and Ellis, 1977).<sup>4</sup>

Feminist anti-Humanism, also known as postmodernist feminism, rejected the unitary identities indexed on that Eurocentric and normative humanist ideal of 'Man' (Braidotti, 2002). It went further, however, and argued that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about women, natives and other marginal subjects. The emphasis falls instead on issues of diversity and differences among them and on the internal fractures of each category. In this respect, anti-humanism rejects the dialectical scheme of thought, where difference or otherness played a constitutive role, marking off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth). These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror

<sup>4</sup> This approach has also been adopted by intersectional analysis, which argues for the methodological parallelism of gender, race, class and sexual factors, without flattening out any differences between them but rather investing politically the question of their complex interaction (Crenshaw, 1995).

function that confirmed the Same in His superior position (Braidotti, 2006). This political economy of difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued and therefore disposable others: to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than'. The dominant norm of the subject was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference.<sup>5</sup> This is the former 'Man' of classical Humanism.

The negative dialectical processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization of those who are marginalized or excluded have another important implication: they result in the active production of half-truths, or forms of partial knowledge about these others. Dialectical and pejorative otherness induces structural ignorance about those who, by being others, are posited as the outside of major categorical divides in the attribution of Humanity. Paul Gilroy (2010) refers to this phenomenon as 'agnatology' or enforced and structural ignorance. This is one of the paradoxical effects of the alleged universalist reach of humanist knowledge. The 'bellicose dismissiveness' of other cultures and civilizations is what Edward Said criticizes as: 'self-puffery, not humanism and certainly not enlightened criticism' (2004: 27). The reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization.

These radical critiques of humanistic arrogance from feminist and post-colonial theory are not merely negative, because they propose new alternative ways to look at the 'human' from a more inclusive and diverse angle. They also offer significant and innovative insights into the image of thought that is implicitly conveyed by the humanistic vision of Man as the measure of all things, standard-bearer of the 'human'. Thus, they further the analysis of power by developing the

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze calls it 'the Majority subject' or the Molar centre of being (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Irigaray calls it 'the Same', or the hyper-inflated, falsely universal 'He' (Irigaray, 1985b, 1993), whereas Hill Collins calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of this particular subject of humanistic knowledge (1991).

tools and the terminology by which we can come to terms with masculinism, racism, white superiority, the dogma of scientific reason and other socially supported systems of dominant values.

Having practically grown up with theories about the death of God (Nietzsche), the end of Man (Foucault) and the decline of ideologies (Fukuyama), it took me a while to realize that, actually, one touches humanism at one's own risk and peril. The anti-humanist position is certainly not free of contradictions. As Badmington wisely reminds us: 'Apocalyptic accounts of the end of "man" [. . .] ignore Humanism's capacity for regeneration and, quite literally, recapitulation' (2003: 11). The Vitruvian Man rises over and over again from his ashes, continues to uphold universal standards and to exercise a fatal attraction.

The thought did occur to me, as I was listening to Diamanda Galas' 'Plague Mass' (1991) for the victims of AIDS: it is one thing to loudly announce an anti-humanist stance, quite another to act accordingly, with a modicum of consistency. Anti-humanism is a position fraught with such contradictions that the more one tries to overcome them, the more slippery it gets. Not only do anti-humanists often end up espousing humanist ideals – freedom being my favourite one – but also, in some ways, the work of critical thought is supported by intrinsic humanist discursive values (Soper, 1986). Somehow, neither humanism nor anti-humanism is adequate to the task.

The best example of the intrinsic contradictions generated by the anti-humanist stance is emancipation and progressive politics in general, which I consider one of the most valuable aspects of the humanistic tradition and its most enduring legacy. Across the political spectrum, Humanism has supported on the liberal side individualism, autonomy, responsibility and self-determination (Todorov, 2002). On the more radical front, it has promoted solidarity, community-bonding, social justice and principles of equality. Profoundly secular in orientation, Humanism promotes respect for science and culture, against the authority of holy texts and religious dogma. It also contains an adventurous element, a curiosity-driven yearning for discovery and a project-oriented approach that is extremely valuable in its pragmatism. These principles are so deeply

entrenched in our habits of thought that it is difficult to leave them behind altogether.

And why should we? Anti-humanism criticizes the implicit assumptions about the human subject that are upheld by the humanist image of Man, but this does not amount to a complete rejection.

For me it is impossible, both intellectually and ethically, to disengage the positive elements of Humanism from their problematic counterparts: individualism breeds egotism and self-centredness; self-determination can turn to arrogance and domination; and science is not free from its own dogmatic tendencies. The difficulties inherent in trying to overcome Humanism as an intellectual tradition, a normative frame and an institutionalized practice, lie at the core of the deconstructive approach to the posthuman. Derrida (2001a) opened this discussion by pointing out the violence implicit in the assignation of meaning. His followers pressed the case further: 'the assertion that Humanism can be decisively left behind ironically subscribes to a basic humanist assumption with regard to volition and agency, as if the "end" of Humanism might be subjected to human control, as if we bear the capacity to erase the traces of Humanism from either the present or an imagined future' (Peterson, 2011: 128). The emphasis falls therefore on the difficulty of erasing the trace of the epistemic violence by which a non-humanist position might be carved out of the institutions of Humanism. The acknowledgment of epistemic violence goes hand in hand with the recognition of the real-life violence which was and still is practised against non-human animals and the dehumanized social and political 'others' of the humanist norm. In this deconstructive tradition, Cary Wolfe (2010b) is especially interesting, as he attempts to strike a new position that combines sensitivity to epistemic and word-historical violence with a distinctly trans-humanist faith (Bostrom, 2005) in the potential of the post-human condition as conducive to human enhancement.

I have great respect for deconstruction, but also some impatience with the limitations of its linguistic frame of reference. I prefer to take a more materialist route to deal with the complexities of the posthuman as a key feature of our historicity. That road, too, is fraught with perils, as we shall see in the next section.

## The Postsecular Turn

As a progressive political creed, Humanism bears a privileged relation to two other interlocked ideas: human emancipation in the pursuit of equality, and secularism through rational governance. These two premises emerge from the concept of Humanism just like the classical goddess Athena is raised from Zeus' head, fully clad and armed for battle. As John Gray (2002: xiii) argued: 'Humanism is the transformation of the Christian doctrine of salvation into a project of universal human emancipation. The idea of progress is a secular version of the Christian belief in providence. That is why among the ancient pagans it was unknown'. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the side-effects of the decline of Humanism is the rise of the post-secular condition (Braidotti, 2008; Habermas, 2008).

If the death of Man proved to be a bit of a hasty statement, that of God turned out to be positively delusional. The first cracks in the edifice of self-assured secularity appeared at the end of the 1970s. As the revolutionary zeal cooled off and social movements started to dissipate, conform or mutate, former militant agnostics joined a wave of conversions to a variety of conventional monotheistic or imported Eastern religions. This turn of events raised serious doubts as to the future of secularity. The doubt crept into the collective and individual mind: how secular are 'we' – feminists, anti-racists, post-colonialists, environmentalists, etc. – really?

The doubt was even sharper for intellectual activists. Science is intrinsically secular, secularity being a key tenet of Humanism, alongside universalism, the unitary subject and the primacy of rationality. Science itself, however, in spite of its secular foundations, is far from immune from its own forms of dogmatism. Freud was one of the first critical thinkers to warn us against the fanatical atheism of the supporters of scientific reason. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1928), Freud compares different forms of rigid dogmatism, classifying rationalist scientism alongside religion as a source of superstitious belief, a position best illustrated today by the extremism with which Richard Dawkins defends his atheist faith (Dawkins, 1976). Moreover, the much-celebrated objectivity

of science has also been shown to be quite flawed. The uses and abuses of scientific experimentation under Fascism and in the colonial era prove that science is not immunized against nationalist, racist and hegemonic discourses and practices. Any claim to scientific purity, objectivity and autonomy needs therefore to be firmly resisted. Where does that leave Humanism and its anti-humanist critics?

Secularity is one of the pillars of Western Humanism, thus an instinctive form of aversion to religion and to the church is historically an integral aspect of emancipatory politics. The socialist humanist tradition, which was so central to the European Left and the women's movements in Europe since the eighteenth century, is justified in claiming to be secular in the narrow sense of the term: to be agnostic if not atheist and to descend from the Enlightenment critique of religious dogma and clerical authority. Like other emancipatory philosophies and political practices, the feminist struggle for women's rights in Europe has historically built on secular foundations. The lasting influence exercised by existentialist feminism (de Beauvoir, 1973), and Marxist or socialist feminisms<sup>6</sup> on the second feminist wave, may also account for the perpetuation of this position. As the secular and rebellious daughters of the Enlightenment, European feminists were raised in rational argumentation and detached self-irony. The feminist belief-system is accordingly civic, not theistic and viscerally opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy. Feminist politics is also and at the same time a double-edged vision (Kelly, 1979) that combines rational arguments with political passions and creates alternative social blueprints and value systems.

However proud twentieth-century feminism may be of its secular roots, it is nonetheless the case that it has historically produced various alternative spiritual practices alongside and often in antagonism to the mainstream political secularist line. Major writers in the radical feminist tradition of the second American wave, notably Audre Lorde (1984), Alice

<sup>6</sup> Central figures in this tradition are: Firestone (1970), Rowbotham (1973), Mitchell (1974), Barrett (1980), Davis (1981), Coward (1983) and Delphy (1984).



Walker (1984) and Adrienne Rich (1987), acknowledged the importance of the spiritual dimension of women's struggle for equality and symbolic recognition. The work of Mary Daly (1973), Schussler Fiorenza (1983) and Luce Irigaray (1993), to name but a few, highlights a specific feminist tradition of non-male-centred spiritual and religious practices. Feminist theology in the Christian (Keller, 1998; Wadud, 1999), Muslim (Tayyab, 1998) and Judaic (Adler, 1998) traditions produced well-established communities of both critical resistance and affirmation of creative alternatives. The call for new rituals and ceremonies makes the fortune of the witches' movement, currently best exemplified by Starhawk (1999) and reclaimed among others by the epistemologist Stengers (1997). Neo-pagan elements have also emerged in technologically mediated cyber-culture, producing various brands of posthuman techno-asceticism (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995; Braidotti, 2002).

Black and post-colonial theories have never been loudly secular. In the very religious context of the USA, African-American women's literature is filled with references to Christianity, as bell hooks (1990) and Cornell West (1994) demonstrate. Furthermore, as we shall see later on in this chapter, post-colonial and critical race theories today have developed non-theistic brands of situated neo-humanism, often based on non-Western sources and traditions.

Contemporary popular culture has intensified the post-secular trend. Madonna, known in her Judaic (con)version as Esther, has a standing dialogue and stage act as/with Jesus Christ and has revived the tradition of female crucifixions. Evelyn Fox Keller (1983), in her seminal work on feminist epistemology, recognizes the importance of Buddhism in the making of contemporary microbiologist McClintock's Nobel-prize winning discoveries. Henrietta Moore's recent anthropological research on sexuality in Kenya (2007) argues that, considering the impact of grass-roots religious organizations, being white is less of a problem in the field today than being a failed Christian. Recently Donna Haraway came out as a failed secularist (Haraway, 2006); while Helen Cixous (2004) saw it fit to write a book entitled *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*. Now, let me ask once again: how secular is all this?

The notion that flatly and hastily equates secularity and secularism with women's emancipation emerges therefore as problematic. As Joan Scott cogently argues (2007), this notion can be easily challenged by contradictory historical evidence. If we take, for instance, the French Revolution as the historical point of origin of European secularism, there is no evidence that a concern for the equal status of women was a priority for those who acted to separate church from state. High secularism is essentially a political doctrine of the separation of powers, which was even historically consolidated in Europe and is still prominent in political theory today (British Humanist Association, 2007). This tradition of secularism, however, introduces a polarization between religion and citizenship, which is socially enacted in a new partition between a private belief system and the public political sphere. This public-private distinction is thoroughly gendered. Historically, women in Europe have been assigned to both the private domain and to the realm of faith and religion, Humanism being 'white Man's burden'. This traditional attribution of religious faith to women stands in the way of granting them full political citizenship. European women were encouraged to engage in religious activity, rather than to participate in public affairs. This is not only a source of social marginalization, but also a dubious privilege, in view of the entrenched sexism of monotheistic religions and their shared conviction of the necessity to exclude women from the ministry and the administration of sacred functions. Secularity therefore reinforced the distinction between emotions or un-reason, including faith and rational judgement. In this polarized scheme, women were assigned to the pole of un-reason, passions and emotions, including religion, and these factors combined to keep them in the private sphere. Thus secularism actually re-enforces the oppression of women and their exclusion from the public sphere of rational citizenship and politics. The fact that idealized secularism in European political history does not guarantee that women were considered the political equals of men opens a series of critical questions, according to Joan Scott. What are European feminists to make of the fact that, both logically and historically, equality within the secular state does not guarantee the respect for difference, let alone diversity?

These sobering and important questions can be raised in the aftermath of decades of anti-humanist critical theory, which generated innovative feminist, post-colonial and environmental insights. Complexity becomes the key word, as it is clear that one single narrative does not suffice to account for secularity as an unfinished project and its relationship to Humanism and emancipatory politics. A post-secular approach, posited on firm anti-humanist grounds makes manifest the previously unacceptable notion that rational agency and political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality. Belief systems and their rituals are perhaps not incompatible with critical thought and practices of citizenship. Simone de Beauvoir would be distressed at the very suggestion of such a possibility.

Let me approach the limits of the feminist secular position from another angle. My monistic philosophy of becomings rests on the idea that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing. This means that matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them. This produces a different scheme of emancipation and a non-dialectical politics of human liberation. This position has another important corollary, namely that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities. Subjectivity is rather a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti, 2006). This process-oriented political ontology can accommodate a post-secular turn, a position that is also defended within feminism by a variety of thinkers, such as Harding (2000) and Mahmood (2005). The double challenge of linking political subjectivity to religious agency and of disengaging both from oppositional consciousness, and from critique defined as negativity, is one of the main issues raised by the posthumanist condition.

Things around Humanism, however, are always more complex than one expects them to be. The return of religion in the public sphere and the strident tone reached by the

global public debate on the 'clash of civilizations', not to speak of the permanent state of war on terror that ensued from this context, took many anti-humanists by surprise. To speak of a 'return' of religion is inappropriate, as it suggests a regressive movement. What we are experiencing at present is a more complicated situation. The crisis of secularism, defined as the essentialist belief in the axioms of secularity, is a phenomenon that takes place within the social and political horizon of late globalized post-modernity, not in pre-modern times. It is of the here and now. Moreover, it spreads across all religions, amidst both second and third generation descendants of Muslim immigrants; and amidst born-again fundamentalist Christians and by Hindi, Hebrew and others.

This is the paradoxical and violent global context where the posture of Western 'exceptionalism' has taken the form of self-aggrandizing praise of the Enlightenment Humanist legacy. This claim to an exceptional cultural status foregrounds the emancipation of women, gays and lesbians as the defining feature of the West, coupled with extensive geopolitical armed interventions against the rest. Humanism has once again become enlisted in a civilizational crusade. Simultaneously over-estimated in its emancipatory historical role and manipulated for xenophobic purposes by populist politicians across Europe, Humanism may need to be rescued from these over-simplifications and violent abuses. I wonder, therefore, whether nowadays one can continue to uphold a simple anti-humanist position. Is a residual form of Humanism inevitable, intellectually, politically and methodologically, after all? If the new belligerent discourses about the alleged superiority of the West are expressed in terms of the legacy of secular Humanism, while the most vehement opposition to them takes the form of post-secular practices of politicized religion, where can an anti-humanist position rest? To be simply secular would be complicitous with neo-colonial Western supremacist positions, while rejecting the Enlightenment legacy would be inherently contradictory for any critical project. The vicious circle is stifling.

It is out of contradictions of this magnitude that the seemingly endless polemic between Humanism and anti-humanism reaches a dead-end. This position is not only unproductive; it also actively prevents an adequate reading of our immediate

context. Leaving behind the tensions that surround Humanism and its self-contradictory refutation is now a priority. Another option becomes increasingly desirable and necessary: posthumanism as a move beyond these lethal binaries. Let us turn to it next.

## The Posthuman Challenge

Posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives. The starting point for me is the anti-humanist death of Wo/Man which marks the decline of some of the fundamental premises of the Enlightenment, namely the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of reason and of secular scientific rationality allegedly aimed at the perfectibility of 'Man'. The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man. It works instead towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject. I will emphasize the priority of the issue of posthuman subjectivity throughout this book.

The crisis of Humanism means that the structural others of the modern humanistic subject re-emerge with a vengeance in postmodernity (Braidotti, 2002). It is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the resurgent 'others': the women's rights movement; the anti-racism and de-colonization movements; the anti-nuclear and pro-environment movements are the voices of the structural Others of modernity. They inevitably mark the crisis of the former humanist 'centre' or dominant subject-position and are not merely anti-humanist, but move beyond it to an altogether novel, posthuman project. These social and political movements are simultaneously the symptom of the crisis of the subject, and for conservatives even its 'cause', and also the expression of positive, pro-active alternatives. In the language of my nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b), they express both the crisis of the majority

and the patterns of becoming of the minorities. The challenge for critical theory consists in being able to tell the difference between these different flows of mutation.

In other words, the posthumanist position I am defending builds on the anti-humanist legacy, more specifically on the epistemological and political foundations of the post-structuralist generation, and moves further. The alternative views about the human and the new formations of subjectivity that have emerged from the radical epistemologies of Continental philosophy in the last thirty years do not merely oppose Humanism but create other visions of the self. Sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences, far from being the categorical boundary-keepers of the subject of Humanism, have evolved into fully fledged alternative models of the human subject. The extent to which they bring about the displacement of the human will become even clearer in the next chapter, which analyses the post-anthropocentric turn. For now, I want to emphasize this shift away from anti-Humanism towards an affirmative posthuman position and examine critically some of its components.

I see three major strands in contemporary posthuman thought: the first comes from moral philosophy and develops a reactive form of the posthuman; the second, from science and technology studies, enforces an analytic form of the posthuman; and the third, from my own tradition of anti-humanist philosophies of subjectivity, proposes a critical post-humanism. Let us look at each of these in turn.

The reactive approach to the posthuman is defended, both conceptually and politically, by contemporary liberal thinkers like Martha Nussbaum (1999, 2010). She develops a thorough contemporary defence of Humanism as the guarantee of democracy, freedom and the respect for human dignity, and rejects the very idea of a crisis of European Humanism, let alone the possibility of its historical decline. Nussbaum does acknowledge the challenges presented by contemporary, technology-driven global economies, but responds to them by re-asserting classical humanist ideals and progressive liberal politics. She defends the need for universal humanistic values as a remedy for the fragmentation and the relativistic drift of our times, which is the result of globalization itself. Humanistic cosmopolitan universalism is also presented as an anti-

dote against nationalism and ethnocentrism, which plague the contemporary world, and to the prevailing American attitude of ignorance of the rest of the world.

Central to the reactive or negative post-humanism of Nussbaum is the idea that one of the effects of globalization is a sort of re-contextualization induced by the market economy. This produces a new sense of inter-connection which in turn calls for a neo-humanist ethics. For Nussbaum, abstract universalism is the only stance that is capable of providing solid foundations for moral values such as compassion and respect for others, which she firmly attaches to the tradition of American liberal individualism. I am very happy that Nussbaum stresses the importance of subjectivity, but less happy about the fact that she re-attaches it to a universalistic belief in individualism, fixed identities, steady locations and moral ties that bind.

In other words, Nussbaum rejects the insights of the radical anti-humanist philosophies of the last thirty years. Notably, she embraces universalism over and against the feminist and post-colonial insights about the importance of the politics of location and careful grounding in geo-political terms. By embracing dis-embedded universalism, Nussbaum ends up being paradoxically parochial in her vision of what counts as the human (Bhabha, 1996a). There is no room for experimenting with new models of the self; for Nussbaum the posthuman condition can be solved by restoring a humanist vision of the subject. As we shall see in the next section, whereas Nussbaum fills the ethical vacuum of the globalized world with classical Humanistic norms, critical post-humanists take the experimental path. They attempt to devise renewed claims to community and belonging by singular subjects who have taken critical distance from humanist individualism.

A second significant posthuman development comes from science and technology studies. This contemporary interdisciplinary field raises crucial ethical and conceptual questions about the status of the human, but is generally reluctant to undertake a full study of their implications for a theory of subjectivity. The influence of Bruno Latour's anti-epistemology and anti-subjectivity position accounts partly for this reluctance. Concretely, it results in parallel and non-

communicating lines of posthuman enquiry. A new segregation of knowledge is produced, along the dividing lines of the 'two cultures', the Humanities and the Sciences, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 4.

For now, let me stress that there is a posthuman agreement that contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living and have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today. Technological intervention upon all living matter creates a negative unity and mutual dependence among humans and other species. The Human Genome Project, for instance, unifies all the human species on the basis of a thorough grasp of our genetic structure. This point of consensus, however, generates diverging paths of enquiry. The Humanities continue to ask the question of the epistemological and political implications of the posthuman predicament for our understanding of the human subject. They also raise deep anxieties both about the moral status of the human and express the political desire to resist commercially owned and profit-minded abuses of the new genetic know-how.

Contemporary science and technology studies, on the other hand, adopt a different agenda. They have developed an analytic form of posthuman theory. For instance, Franklin, Lury and Stacey, working within a socio-cultural frame of reference, refer to the technologically mediated world of today as 'panhumanity' (2000: 26). This indicates a global sense of inter-connection among all humans, but also between the human and the non-human environment, including the urban, social and political, which creates a web of intricate inter-dependences. This new pan-humanity is paradoxical in two ways: firstly, because a great deal of its inter-connections are negative and based on a shared sense of vulnerability and fear of imminent catastrophes and, secondly, because this new global proximity does not always breed tolerance and peaceful co-existence; on the contrary, forms of xenophobic rejection of otherness and increasing armed violence are key features of our times, as I will argue in chapter 3.

Another relevant example of the same analytic posthuman thought, within the disciplinary field of science studies, is the work of sociologist Nicholas Rose (2007). He has written



eloquently about the new forms of 'bio-sociality' and bio-citizenship that are emerging from the shared recognition of the bio-political nature of contemporary subjectivity. Resting on a Foucauldian understanding of how bio-political management of Life defines advanced capitalist economies today, Rose has developed an effective, empirically grounded analysis of the dilemmas of the posthuman condition. This posthuman analytic frame advocates a Foucauldian brand of neo-Kantian normativity. I find this position quite helpful, also because it defends a vision of the subject as a relational process, with reference to the last phase of Foucault's work (Foucault 1978, 1985, 1986). As I will argue in detail in the next chapter, however, the return to a notion of Kantian moral responsibility re-instates the individual at the core of the debate. This is not compatible with the Foucauldian process ontology and creates both theoretical and practical contradictions that defeat the stated purpose of developing a posthuman approach.

Another significant case for analytic post-humanism is advocated by Peter-Paul Verbeek (2011). Starting from the recognition of the intimate and productive association between human subjects and technological artefacts, as well as the theoretical impossibility of keeping them apart, Verbeek hints at the need for a post-anthropological turn that links humans to non-humans, but he is also very careful not to trespass certain limits. His analytic form of post-humanism is immediately qualified by a profoundly humanist and thus normative approach to technology itself. Verbeek's main argument is that 'technologies contribute actively to how humans do ethics' (2011: 5); a revised and updated form of humanist ethics gets superimposed on post-humanist technologies.

In order to defend the humanist principle at the heart of contemporary technologies, Verbeek emphasizes the moral nature of technological tools as agents that can guide human decision making on normative issues. He also introduces multiple forms of machinic intentionality, all of them indexed on non-human forms of moral consciousness. Only by taking seriously the morality of things, argues Verbeek, can we hope to integrate our technology into the wider social community and bring a posthuman brand of Humanism into the twenty-

first century. This results in shifting the location of traditional moral intentionality from autonomous transcendental consciousness to the technological artefacts themselves.

The analytic post-humanism of science and technology studies is one of the most important elements of the contemporary posthuman landscape. In terms of critical theories of the subject, which is the focus of my position, however, this position falls wide of the mark, because it introduces selected segments of humanistic values without addressing the contradictions engendered by such a grafting exercise.

The pride in technological achievements and in the wealth that comes with them must not prevent us from seeing the great contradictions and the forms of social and moral inequality engendered by our advanced technologies. Not addressing them, in the name of either scientific neutrality or of a hastily reconstructed sense of the pan-human bond induced by globalization, simply begs the question.

In my eyes, what is striking about the science and technology studies approach, whether it relies theoretically on moral philosophy or on socio-cultural theory, is the high degree of political neutrality it expresses about the posthuman predicament. Both Rose and Franklin et al., for instance, make it clear that the focus of their research is analytic and aims to achieve a better, more thorough and in some ways intimate ethnographic understanding of how these new technologies actually function. Science and technology studies tend to dismiss the implications of their positions for a revised vision of the subject. Subjectivity is out of the picture and, with it, a sustained political analysis of the posthuman condition. In my view, a focus on subjectivity is necessary because this notion enables us to string together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains. For instance, issues such as norms and values, forms of community bonding and social belonging as well as questions of political governance both assume and require a notion of the subject. Critical posthuman thought wants to re-assemble a discursive community out of the different, fragmented contemporary strands of posthumanism.

I cannot help noticing, moreover, a rather bizarre and highly problematic division of labour on the question of subjectivity between science and technology studies on the

one hand, and political analyses of advanced capitalism on the other. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), or the Italian school of Lazzarato (2004) and Virno (2004), tend to avoid science and technology and not to treat it with anything like the depth and sophistication that they devote to the analysis of subjectivity. I think we may need to review this segregation of discursive fields and work towards a re-integrated posthuman theory that includes both scientific and technological complexity and its implications for political subjectivity, political economy and forms of governance. I will develop this project gradually in the chapters that follow.

There is another fundamental problem with the residual humanism of the analytically posthuman attempts to moralize technology and sideline experiments with new forms of subjectivity, namely their over-confidence about the moral intentionality of the technology itself. More specifically, they neglect the current state of autonomy reached by the machines. The complexity of our smart technologies lies at the core of the post-anthropocentric turn that will be the theme of the next chapter. For now, let us consider just one aspect of our technological smartness.

A recent issue of the weekly magazine *The Economist* (2 June 2012) on 'Morals and the machine' raises some pertinent issues about the degree of autonomy reached by robots and calls for society to develop new rules to manage them. The analysis is significant: in contrast to the modernist idea of the robot as subservient to the human, as exemplified by Isaac Asimov's 'three laws of robotics' formulated in 1942,<sup>7</sup> we are now confronted by a new situation, which makes

<sup>7</sup> These three laws are: (1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. (2) A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. (3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. These rules were set up by Isaac Asimov in a short story in 1942 and then re-printed in the world best-seller: *I, Robot*, in 1950. They became foundational notions in cyber-studies. Later, Asimov added a fourth law which precedes all others: (0) A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

human intervention rather peripheral if not completely irrelevant. *The Economist* argues (2012: 11):

As robots become more autonomous, the notion of computer-controlled machines facing ethical decisions is moving out of the realm of science fiction and into the real world.

Most of these new robots are military in purpose and I will return to them in chapter 3, but many others are used for perfectly reasonable civilian purposes. All of them share a crucial feature: they have made it technologically feasible to by-pass human decision making at both the operational and the moral levels. According to this report, humans will increasingly operate not 'in the loop' but 'on the loop', monitoring armed and working robots rather than fully controlling them. Only ethical and legal issues remain to be solved to grant responsibility to autonomous machines' decision making, while the cognitive capacities are already in place.

As they become smarter and more widespread, autonomous machines are bound to make life-or-death decisions and thus assume agency. Whether this high degree of autonomy, however, results in moral decision making is at best an open question. Against claims to the in-built moral intentionality of the technology, I would claim that it is normatively neutral. Take some burning issues, such as: should an unmanned flying vehicle, also known as a drone, fire on a house where a target is known to be hiding, which also shelters civilians? Should robots involved in disaster relief tell people the truth about their conditions, thus causing panic and pain? Such questions lead to the field of 'machine ethics', which aims to give machines the ability to make such choices appropriately, in other words, to tell right from wrong. And who is to decide?

According to *The Economist* (2012), a new ethical approach needs to be developed by active experiments. They should focus on three areas especially: firstly, the rule of Laws to determine whether the designer, the programmer, the manufacturer, or the operator is at fault if a machine goes wrong. To allocate responsibility, a detailed logs system is needed so that it can explain the reasoning behind the decision-making process. This has implications for design, with a preference

for systems that obey pre-defined rules rather than decision-making systems. Secondly, when ethical systems are embedded in robots, the judgements they make need to be ones that seem right to most people. The techniques of experimental philosophy, which studies how people respond to ethical dilemmas, should be able to help. Thirdly, new interdisciplinary collaboration is required between engineers, ethicists, lawyers and policy-makers, all of whom would draw up very different rules if left to their own devices. They all stand to gain by working with each other.

What is posthuman about the situation outlined in *The Economist* is that it does not assume a human, individualized self as the deciding factor of main subject. It rather envisages what I would call a transversal inter-connection or an 'assemblage' of human and non-human actors, not unlike Latour's Actor Network Theory (Law and Hassard, 1999). It is significant that a rather cautious and conservative journal like *The Economist*, faced with the challenge of the posthuman powers of the technologies we have developed, does not call for a return to humanist values, but for pragmatic experimentation. This prompts three comments on my part: firstly, that I could not agree more that this is no time for nostalgic longings for the humanist past, but for forward-looking experiments with new forms of subjectivity. Secondly, I want to emphasize the normatively neutral structure of contemporary technologies: they are not endowed with intrinsic humanistic agency. Thirdly, I note that the advocates of advanced capitalism seem to be faster in grasping the creative potential of the posthuman than some of the well-meaning and progressive neo-humanist opponents of this system. I will return in the next chapter to the opportunist brand of the posthuman developed in the contemporary market economy.

## Critical Posthumanism

The third strand of posthuman thought, my own variation, shows no conceptual or normative ambivalence towards posthumanism. I want to move beyond analytic posthumanism and develop affirmative perspectives on the posthuman subject. My inspiration for taking the jump into critical post-

humanism comes from my anti-humanist roots, of course. More specifically, the current of thought that has gone further in unfolding the productive potential of the posthuman predicament can be genealogically traced back to the post-structuralists, the anti-universalism of feminism and the anti-colonial phenomenology of Frantz Fanon (1967) and of his teacher Aimé Césaire (1955). What they have in common in a sustained commitment to work out the implications of posthumanism for our shared understandings of the human subject and of humanity as a whole.

The work of post-colonial and race theorists displays a situated cosmopolitan posthumanism that is supported as much by the European tradition as by non-Western sources of moral and intellectual inspiration. The examples are manifold and deserve more in-depth analysis than I can grant them here; for now, let me pick out the main gist of it.<sup>8</sup>

Edward Said (1978) was among the first to alert critical theorists in the West to the need to develop a reasoned scholarly account of Enlightenment-based secular Humanism, which would take into account the colonial experience, its violent abuses and structural injustice, as well as post-colonial existence. Post-colonial theory developed this insight into the notion that ideals of reason, secular tolerance, equality under the Law and democratic rule, need not be, and indeed historically have not been, mutually exclusive with European practices of violent domination, exclusion and systematic and instrumental use of terror. Acknowledging that reason and barbarism are not self-contradictory, nor are Enlightenment and horror, need not result in either cultural relativism, or in moral nihilism, but rather in a radical critique of the notion of Humanism and its link with both democratic criticism and secularism. Edward Said defends the idea that:

<sup>8</sup> Significant examples are: Avtar Brah's diasporic ethics (1996) echoes Vandana Shiva's anti-global neo-Humanism (1997). African Humanism or Ubuntu is receiving more attention, from Patricia Hill Collins (1991) to Drucilla Cornell (2002). In a more nomadic vein, Edouard Glissant's politics of relations (1997) inscribed multi-lingual hybridity at the heart of the contemporary posthuman condition. Homi Bhabha's 'subaltern secularism' (1994) builds on the huge legacy of Edward Said.

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)

Fighting for such subaltern secular spaces is a priority for a posthuman quest for what is known in some quarters as a 'global ethic for global politics and economics' (Kung, 1998).

Paul Gilroy's planetary cosmopolitanism (2000) also proposes a productive form of contemporary critical posthumanism. Gilroy holds Europe and the Europeans accountable for our collective failure in implementing the ideals of the humanist Enlightenment. Like the feminists, race theorists are suspicious of deconstructing a subject-position, which historically they never gained the right to. Gilroy considers colonialism and fascism as a betrayal of the European ideal of the Enlightenment, which he is determined to defend, holding Europeans accountable for their ethical and political failings. Racism splits common humanity and disengages whites from any ethical sensibility, reducing them to an inhuman moral status. It also reduces non-whites to a subhuman ontological status that exposes them to murderous violence. Taking a strong stand against the return of fundamentalist appeals to ethnic differences by a variety of white, black, Serbian, Rwandan, Texan and other nationalists, Gilroy denounces what Deleuze calls 'micro-fascisms' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as the epidemics of our globalized times. He locates the site of the ethical transformation in the critique of each nationalistic category, not in the assertion of a new dominant one. He sets diasporic mobility and the transcultural interconnections up against the forces of nationalism. This is a theory of mixture, hybridity and cosmopolitanism that is resolutely non-racial. Against the enduring power of nation states, Gilroy posits instead the affirmative politics of transversal movements, such as anti-slavery, feminism, *Médécins sans frontières* and the like.

An altogether different and powerful source of inspiration for contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism

is ecology and environmentalism. They rest on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others. This practice of relating to others requires and is enhanced by the rejection of self-centred individualism. It produces a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged community, based on environmental inter-connections.

Environmental theory stresses the link between the humanistic emphasis on Man as the measure of all things and the domination and exploitation of nature and condemns the abuses of science and technology. Both of them involve epistemic and physical violence over the structural 'others' and are related to the European Enlightenment ideal of 'reason'. The worldview which equated Mastery with rational scientific control over 'others' also militated against the respect for the diversity of living matters and of human cultures (Mies and Shiva, 1993). The environmental alternative is a new holistic approach that combines cosmology with anthropology and post-secular, mostly feminist spirituality, to assert the need for loving respect for diversity in both its human and non-human forms. Significantly, Shiva and Mies stress the importance of life-sustaining spirituality in this struggle for new concrete forms of universality: a reverence for the sacredness of life, of deeply seated respect for all that lives. This attitude is opposed to Western Humanism and to the West's investment in rationality and secularity as the pre-condition for development through science and technology. In a holistic perspective, they call for the 're-enchantment of the world' (1993: 18), or for healing the Earth and that which has been so cruelly disconnected. Instead of the emphasis on emancipation from the realm of natural necessity, Shiva pleads for a form of emancipation that occurs within that realm and in harmony with it. From this shift of perspective there follows a critique of the ideal of equality as the emulation of masculine modes of behaviour and also the rejection of the model of development that is built upon this ideal and is compatible with world-wide forms of market domination.

Although ecological posthumanists like Shiva take great care to distance themselves from anything that is even remotely related to 'post'-modernism, post-colonialism, or post-feminism, paradoxically, they share in the epistemic



premises of posthuman critiques. For instance, they agree with the post-structuralist generation on the critique of the homogenization of cultures under the effects of globalized advanced capitalism. They propose as an alternative a robust type of environmentalism, based on non-Western neo-humanism. What matters for Mies and Shiva is the reassertion of the need for new universal values in the sense of interconnectedness among humans, on a worldwide scale. Thus, universal needs are amalgamated to universal rights and they cover as much basic and concrete necessities, such as food, shelter, health, safety, as higher cultural needs, like education, identity, dignity, knowledge, affection, joy and care. These constitute the material grounding of the situated claims to new ethical values.

A new ecological posthumanism thus raises issues of power and entitlement in the age of globalization and calls for self-reflexivity on the part of the subjects who occupy the former humanist centre, but also those who dwell in one of the many scattered centres of power of advanced post-modernity (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994).

In my own work, I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable. Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building.

My position is in favour of complexity and promotes radical posthuman subjectivity, resting on the ethics of becoming, as we shall see in the next chapter. The focus is shifted accordingly from unitary to nomadic subjectivity, thus running against the grain of high humanism and its contemporary variations. This view rejects individualism, but also asserts an equally strong distance from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism. A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the

obstacle of self-centred individualism. As we saw earlier, contemporary bio-genetic capitalism generates a global form of reactive mutual inter-dependence of all living organisms, including non-humans. This sort of unity tends to be of the negative kind, as a shared form of vulnerability, that is to say a global sense of inter-connection between the human and the non-human environment in the face of common threats. The posthuman recomposition of human interaction that I propose is not the same as the reactive bond of vulnerability, but is an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others.

As we shall see in the next chapter, for me there is a necessary link between critical posthumanism and the move beyond anthropocentrism. I refer to this move as expanding the notion of Life towards the non-human or *zoe*. This results in radical posthumanism as a position that transposes hybridity, nomadism, diasporas and creolization processes into means of re-grounding claims to subjectivity, connections and community among subjects of the human and the non-human kind. This is the next step of the argument, which I will outline in chapter 2.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced my own itinerary out of the multiple possible genealogies of the posthuman, including the rise of alternative forms of critical posthumanism. These new formations are postulated on the demise of that 'Man' – the former measure of all things. Eurocentrism, masculinism and anthropocentrism are exposed accordingly as complex and internally differentiated phenomena. This alone is in keeping with the highly complex character of the concept of Humanism itself. There are in fact many Humanisms and my own itinerary, generationally and geo-politically, struggles essentially with one specific genealogical line:

The romantic and positivistic Humanisms through which the European bourgeoisies established their hegemonies over (modernity), the revolutionary Humanism that shook the world and the liberal Humanism that sought to tame it, the

Humanism of the Nazis and the Humanisms of their victims and opponents, the antihumanist Humanism of Heidegger and the humanist antihumanism of Foucault and Althusser, the secularist Humanism of Huxley and Dawkins or the post-humanism of Gibson and Haraway. (Davies, 1997: 141)

The fact that these different humanisms cannot be reduced to one linear narrative is part of the problem and the paradoxes involved in attempting to overcome Humanism. What seems absolutely clear to me is the historical, ethical and political necessity to overcome this notion, in the light of its history of unfulfilled promises and unacknowledged brutality. A key methodological and tactical measure to support this process is to practise the politics of location, or situated and accountable knowledge practices.

Let me conclude with three crucial remarks: firstly, that we do need a new theory of the subject that takes stock of the posthuman turn and hence acknowledges the decline of Humanism. Secondly, as shown by the proliferation of critical posthuman positions both within and outside the Western philosophical tradition, the end of classical Humanism is not a crisis, but entails positive consequences. Thirdly, advanced capitalism has been quick in sensing and exploiting the opportunities opened by the decline of western Humanism and the processes of cultural hybridization induced by globalization. I will address the latter in the next chapter, so let me say something briefly about the other two points.

Firstly, we need to work out the implications of the posthuman predicament in the sense of the decline of European Humanism in order to develop a robust foundation for ethical and political subjectivity. The posthuman era is ripe with contradictions as we shall see in the next two chapters. These call for ethical evaluation, political intervention and normative action. It follows therefore that the posthuman subject is not postmodern, that is to say it is not anti-foundationalist. Nor is it deconstructivist, because it is not linguistically framed. The posthuman subjectivity I advocate is rather materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere, according to the feminist 'politics of location', which I have stressed throughout this chapter. Why do I stress so much the issue of the subject? Because a theory

of subjectivity as both materialist and relational, ‘nature-cultural’ and self-organizing is crucial in order to elaborate critical tools suited to the complexity and contradictions of our times. A merely analytical form of posthuman thought does not go far enough. More especially, a serious concern for the subject allows us to take into account the elements of creativity and imagination, desire, hopes and aspirations (Moore, 2011) without which we simply cannot make sense of contemporary global culture and its posthuman overtones. We need a vision of the subject that is ‘worthy of the present’.

This brings us to my second concluding remark: the issue of Eurocentrism in terms of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck, 2007) and its long-standing bond to Humanism. Contemporary European subjects of knowledge must meet the ethical obligation to be accountable for their past history and the long shadow it casts on their present-day politics.<sup>9</sup> The new mission that Europe has to embrace entails the criticism of narrow-minded self-interests, intolerance and xenophobic rejection of otherness. Symbolic of the closure of the European mind is the fate of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who bear the brunt of racism in contemporary Europe.

A new agenda needs to be set, which is no longer that of European or Eurocentric universal, rational subjectivity, but rather a radical transformation of it, in a break from Europe’s imperial, fascistic and undemocratic tendencies. As I stated earlier on in this chapter, since the second half of the twentieth century, the crisis of philosophical Humanism – also known as the death of ‘Man’ – both reflected and amplified larger concerns about the decline of the geo-political status of Europe as an imperial world-power. Theory and world-historical phenomena work in tandem when it comes to the question of European Humanism. Because of this resonance between the two dimensions, critical theory has a unique contribution to make to the debate on Europe.

I believe that the posthuman condition can facilitate the task of redefining a new role for Europe in an age where global capitalism is both triumphant and clearly deficient in

<sup>9</sup> As Morin (1987), Passerini (1998), Balibar (2004) and Bauman (2004) have also argued.

terms of sustainability and social justice (Holland, 2011). This hopeful belief rests on the post-nationalist approach (Habermas, 2001; Braidotti, 2006) which expresses the decline of Eurocentrism as a historical event and calls for a qualitative shift of perspective in our collective sense of identity. Seyla Benhabib, in her brilliant work on alternative cosmopolitanism (2007), addresses the question of Europe as a site of transformation. Her emphasis on a pluralist cosmopolitan practice and her commitment to the rights of refugees and stateless people, as well as migrants, innovates on classical universalist notions of cosmopolitanism and calls for situated and context-specific practices. This resonates positively with my situated posthuman ethics. A primary task for posthuman critical theory therefore is to draw accurate and precise cartographies for these different subject positions as spring-boards towards posthuman recompositions of a pan-human cosmopolitan bond.

More specifically, I would like to push the case further than Habermas' social democratic aspiration and argue for a post-human project of 'becoming-minoritarian' or becoming-nomad of Europe (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Braidotti, 2008). This is a way of by-passing a number of binary pitfalls, for instance between a globalized and culturally diverse Europe on the one hand, and the narrow and xenophobic definitions of European identity on the other. The becoming-nomad of Europe entails resistance against nationalism, xenophobia and racism, bad habits of the old imperial Europe. As such, it is the opposite of the grandiose and aggressive universalism of the past, which is replaced by a situated and accountable perspective. It embraces a new political and ethical project, by taking a firm stand also against the 'Fortress Europe' syndrome and reviving tolerance as a tool of social justice (Brown, 2006).

The posthuman turn can support and enhance this project in so far as it displaces the exclusive focus on the idea of Europe as the cradle of Humanism, driven by a form of universalism that endows it with a unique sense of historical purpose. The process of becoming-minoritarian or becoming-nomad of Europe involves the rejection of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world. If it is the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place

in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of 'the others'. It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of 'the same', the former centre. The project of developing a new kind of post-nationalist nomadic European identity is certainly challenging in that it requires dis-identification from established, nation-bound identities. This project is political at heart, but it has a strong affective core made of convictions, vision and active desire for change. We can collectively empower these alternative becomings.

My posthuman sensibility may come across as visionary and even impatient, but it is very pro-active or, to use my favourite term: affirmative. Affirmative politics combines critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects. As far as I am concerned, the challenge of the post-human condition consists in grabbing the opportunities offered by the decline of the unitary subject position upheld by Humanism, which has mutated in a number of complex directions. For instance: the cultural inter-mixity already available within our post-industrial ethno-scapes and the recompositions of genders and sexualities sizzling under the apparently sedate image of equal opportunities, far from being indicators of a crisis, are productive events. They are the new starting points that bring into play untapped possibilities for bonding, community building and empowerment. Similarly, the current scientific revolution, led by contemporary bio-genetic, environmental, neural and other sciences, creates powerful alternatives to established practices and definitions of subjectivity. Instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized, the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times. To meet this task, new conceptual creativity is needed.