The Posthuman

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Introduction

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history. Not if by 'human' we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: 'The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian "community of reasonable beings", or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on' (Wolfe, 2010a). And yet the term enjoys widespread consensus and it maintains the re-assuring familiarity of common sense. We assert our attachment to the species as if it were a matter of fact, a given. So much so that we construct a fundamental notion of Rights around the Human. But is it so?

While conservative, religious social forces today often labour to re-inscribe the human within a paradigm of natural law, the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns. After the postmodern, the post-colonial, the post-industrial, the post-communist and even the much contested post-feminist conditions, we seem to have entered the post-human predicament. Far from being the nth variation in a sequence of prefixes that may appear both endless and somehow arbitrary, the posthuman condition introduces a

qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises serious questions as to the very structures of our shared identity – as humans – amidst the complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations. Discourses and representations of the non-human, the inhuman, the anti-human, the inhumane and the posthuman proliferate and overlap in our globalized, technologically mediated societies.

The debates in mainstream culture range from hard-nosed business discussions of robotics, prosthetic technologies, neuroscience and bio-genetic capital to fuzzier new age visions of trans-humanism and techno-transcendence. Human enhancement is at the core of these debates. In academic culture, on the other hand, the posthuman is alternatively celebrated as the next frontier in critical and cultural theory or shunned as the latest in a series of annoying 'post' fads. The posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety (Habermas, 2003) about the possibility of a serious de-centring of 'Man', the former measure of all things. There is widespread concern about the loss of relevance and mastery suffered by the dominant vision of the human subject and by the field of scholarship centred on it, namely the Humanities.

In my view, the common denominator for the posthuman condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself. This nature–culture continuum is the shared starting point for my take on posthuman theory. Whether this post-naturalistic assumption subsequently results in playful experimentations with the boundaries of perfectibility of the body, in moral panic about the disruption of centuries-old beliefs about human 'nature' or in exploitative and profit-minded pursuit of genetic and neural capital, remains however to be seen. In this book I will try to examine these approaches and engage critically with them, while arguing my case for posthuman subjectivity.

What does this nature–culture continuum amount to? It marks a scientific paradigm that takes its distance from the social constructivist approach, which has enjoyed widespread consensus. This approach posits a categorical distinction between the given (nature) and the constructed (culture). The distinction allows for a sharper focus in social analysis and it

provides robust foundations to study and critique the social mechanisms that support the construction of key identities, institutions and practices. In progressive politics, social constructivist methods sustain the efforts to de-naturalize social differences and thus show their man-made and historically contingent structure. Just think of the world-changing effect of Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'one is not born, one becomes a woman'. This insight into the socially bound and therefore historically variable nature of social inequalities paves the road to their resolution by human intervention through social policy and activism.

My point is that this approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature–culture interaction. In my view the latter is associated to and supported by a monistic philosophy, which rejects dualism, especially the opposition nature–culture and stresses instead the self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter. The boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances. This book starts from the assumption that social theory needs to take stock of the transformation of concepts, methods and political practices brought about by this change of paradigm. Conversely, the question of what kind of political analysis and which progressive politics is supported by the approach based on the nature–culture continuum is central to the agenda of the posthuman predicament.

The main questions I want to address in this book are: firstly what is the posthuman? More specifically, what are the intellectual and historical itineraries that may lead us to the posthuman? Secondly: where does the posthuman condition leave humanity? More specifically, what new forms of subjectivity are supported by the posthuman? Thirdly: how does the posthuman engender its own forms of inhumanity? More specifically, how might we resist the inhuman(e) aspects of our era? And last, how does the posthuman affect the practice of the Humanities today? More specifically, what is the function of theory in posthuman times?

This book rides the wave of simultaneous fascination for the posthuman condition as a crucial aspect of our historicity, but

also of concern for its aberrations, its abuses of power and the sustainability of some of its basic premises. Part of the fascination is due to my sense of what the task of critical theorists should be in the world today, namely, to provide adequate representations of our situated historical location. This in itself humble cartographic aim, that is connected to the ideal of producing socially relevant knowledge, flips over into a more ambitious and abstract question, namely the status and value of theory itself.

Several cultural critics have commented on the ambivalent nature of the 'post-theoretical malaise' that has struck the contemporary Human and Social Sciences. For instance, Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller (2012) emphasize the positive aspect of this 'post-theory' phase, namely the fact that it actually registers the new opportunities as well as the threats that emerge from contemporary science. The negative aspects, however, are just as striking, notably the lack of suitable critical schemes to scrutinize the present.

I think that the anti-theory shift is linked to the vicissitudes of the ideological context. After the official end of the Cold War, the political movements of the second half of the twentieth century have been discarded and their theoretical efforts dismissed as failed historical experiments. The 'new' ideology of the free market economy has steamrolled all oppositions, in spite of massive protest from many sectors of society, imposing anti-intellectualism as a salient feature of our times. This is especially hard on the Humanities because it penalizes subtlety of analysis by paying undue allegiance to 'common sense' – the tyranny of doxa – and to economic profit – the banality of self-interest. In this context, 'theory' has lost status and is often dismissed as a form of fantasy or narcissistic self-indulgence. Consequently, a shallow version of neo-empiricism – which is often nothing more than data-mining – has become the methodological norm in Humanities research.

The question of method deserves serious consideration: after the official end of ideologies and in view of the advances in neural, evolutionary and bio-genetic sciences, can we still hold the powers of theoretical interpretation in the same esteem they have enjoyed since the end of the Second World War? Is the posthuman predicament not also linked to a post-theory mood? For instance, Bruno Latour (2004) – not exactly a classical

humanist in his epistemological work on how knowledge is produced by networks of human and non-human actors, things and objects – recently commented on the tradition of critical theory and its connection to European humanism. Critical thought rests on a social constructivist paradigm which intrinsically proclaims faith in theory as a tool to apprehend and represent reality, but is such faith still legitimate today? Latour raised serious self-questioning doubts about the function of theory today.

There is an undeniably gloomy connotation to the posthuman condition, especially in relation to genealogies of critical thought. It is as if, after the great explosion of theoretical creativity of the 1970s and 1980s, we had entered a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholia. A spectral dimension has seeped into our patterns of thinking, boosted, on the right of the political spectrum, by ideas about the end of ideological time (Fukuyama, 1989) and the inevitability of civilizational crusades (Huntington, 1996). On the political left, on the other hand, the rejection of theory has resulted in a wave of resentment and negative thought against the previous intellectual generations. In this context of theory-fatigue, neo-communist intellectuals (Badiou and Žižek, 2009) have argued for the need to return to concrete political action, even violent antagonism if necessary, rather than indulge in more theoretical speculations. They have contributed to push the philosophical theories of post-structuralism way out of fashion.

In response to this generally negative social climate, I want to approach posthuman theory as both a genealogical and a navigational tool. I find it useful as a term to explore ways of engaging affirmatively with the present, accounting for some of its features in a manner that is empirically grounded without being reductive and remains critical while avoiding negativity. I want to map out some of the ways in which the posthuman is circulating as a dominant term in our globally linked and technologically mediated societies. More specifically, posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'anthropocene', the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet. By extension, it can also help us re-think the basic tenets

of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale.

Let me give some examples of the contradictions offered by our posthuman historical condition.

Vignette 1
In November 2007 Pekka-Eric Auvinen, an eighteen-year-old Finnish boy, opened fire on his classmates in a high school near Helsinki, killing eight people before shooting himself. Prior to the carnage, the young killer posted a video on YouTube, in which he showed himself, wearing a t-shirt with the caption 'Humanity is overrated'.

That humanity be in a critical condition – some may even say approaching extinction – has been a *leitmotif* in European philosophy ever since Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the 'death of God' and of the idea of Man that was built upon it. This bombastic assertion was meant to drive home a more modest point. What Nietzsche asserted was the end of the self-evident status attributed to human nature as the common sense belief in the metaphysically stable and universal validity of the European humanistic subject. Nietzschean genealogy stresses the importance of interpretation over dogmatic implementation of natural laws and values. Ever since then, the main items on the philosophical agenda have been: firstly, how to develop critical thought, after the shock of recognition of a state of ontological uncertainty, and, secondly, how to reconstitute a sense of community held together by affinity and ethical accountability, without falling into the negative passions of doubt and suspicion.

As the Finnish episode points out, however, philosophical anti-humanism must not be confused with cynical and nihilistic misanthropy. Humanity may well be over-rated, but as the human population on earth reaches its eighth billion mark, any talk of extinction seems downright silly. And yet, the issue of both ecological and social sustainability is at the top of most governmental programmes across the world, in view of the environmental crisis and climate change. Thus, the question Bertrand Russell formulated in 1963, at the height of the Cold War and of nuclear confrontation, sounds more relevant than ever: has Man a future indeed? Does

the choice between sustainability and extinction frame the horizon of our shared future, or are there other options? The issue of the limits of both humanism and of its anti-humanist critics is therefore central to the debate on the posthuman predicament and I will accordingly devote the first chapter to it.

Vignette 2
The Guardian *reported that people in war-torn lands like Afghanistan were reduced to eating grass in order to survive.*[1] *At the same point in history, cows in the United Kingdom and parts of the European Union were fed meat-based fodder. The agricultural bio-technological sector of the over-developed world had taken an unexpected cannibalistic turn by fattening cows, sheep and chickens on animal feed. This action was later diagnosed as the source for the lethal disease Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), vulgarly called 'mad cow disease', which caused the brain structure of the animals to corrode and turn to pulp. The madness here, however, is decidedly on the side of the humans and their bio-technological industries.*

Advanced capitalism and its bio-genetic technologies engender a perverse form of the posthuman. At its core there is a radical disruption of the human–animal interaction, but all living species are caught in the spinning machine of the global economy. The genetic code of living matter – 'Life itself' (Rose, 2007) – is the main capital. Globalization means the commercialization of planet Earth in all its forms, through a series of inter-related modes of appropriation. According to Haraway, these are the techno-military proliferation of micro-conflicts on a global scale; the hyper-capitalist accumulation of wealth; the turning of the ecosystem into a planetary apparatus of production, and the global infotainment apparatus of the new multimedia environment.

The phenomenon of Dolly the sheep is emblematic of the complications engendered by the bio-genetic structure of contemporary technologies and their stock-market backers. Animals provide living material for scientific experiments.

[1] *The Guardian Weekly*, 3–5 January 2002, p. 2.

They are manipulated, mistreated, tortured and genetically recombined in ways that are productive for our bio-technological agriculture, the cosmetics industry, drugs and pharmaceutical industries and other sectors of the economy. Animals are also sold as exotic commodities and constitute the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms, but ahead of women.

Mice, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, rabbits, birds, poultry and cats are bred in industrial farming, locked up in battery-cage production units. As George Orwell prophetically put it, however, all animals may be equal, but some are definitely more equal than others. Thus, because they are an integral part of the bio-technological industrial complex, livestock in the European Union receives subsidy to the tune of US$803 per cow. This is considerably less than the US$1,057 that is granted to each American cow and US$2,555 given to each cow in Japan. These figures look all the more ominous when compared to the gross national income *per capita* in countries like Ethiopia (US$120), Bangladesh (US$360), Angola (US$660) or Honduras (US$920).[2]

The counterpart of this global commodification of living organisms is that animals have become partly humanized themselves. In the field of bio-ethics, for instance, the issue of the 'human' rights of animals has been raised as a way of countering these excesses. The defence of animals' rights is a hot political issue in most liberal democracies. This combination of investments and abuse is the paradoxical posthuman condition engendered by advanced capitalism itself, which triggers multiple forms of resistance. I will discuss the new postanthropocentric views of animals at length in chapter 2.

Vignette 3
On 10 October 2011, Muammar Gaddafi, deposed leader of Libya, was captured in his hometown of Sirte, beaten and killed by members of the National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC). Before he was shot by the rebel forces, however, Colonel Gaddafi's convoy was bombed by French jets and by an American Predator Drone which was flown out of the

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[2] *The Guardian Weekly*, 11–17 September 2003, p. 5.

American Air Force base in Sicily and controlled via satellite from a base outside Las Vegas.[3]

Although world media focused on the brutality of the actual shooting and on the indignity of the global visual exposure of Gaddafi's wounded and bleeding body, less attention was paid to what can only described as the posthuman aspect of contemporary warfare: the tele-thanatological machines created by our own advanced technology. The atrocity of Gaddafi's end – his own tyrannical despotism notwithstanding – was enough to make one feel slightly ashamed of being human. The denial of the role played by the advanced world's sophisticated death-technology of drones in his demise, however, added an extra layer of moral and political discomfort.

The posthuman predicament has more than its fair share of inhuman(e) moments. The brutality of the new wars, in a globalized world run by the governance of fear, refers not only to the government of the living, but also to multiple practices of dying, especially in countries in transition. Bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin, as Mbembe (2003) brilliantly argues. The post-Cold War world has seen not only a dramatic increase in warfare, but also a profound transformation of the practice of war as such in the direction of a more complex management of survival and of extinction. Contemporary death-technologies are posthuman because of the intense technological mediation within which they operate. Can the digital operator that flew the American Predator Drone from a computer room in Las Vegas be considered a 'pilot'? How does he differ from the Air Force boys who flew the Enola Gay plane over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Contemporary wars have heightened our necro-political power to a new level of administration of 'the material destruction of human bodies and population' (Mbembe, 2003: 19). And *not* only human.

The new necro-technologies operate in a social climate dominated by a political economy of nostalgia and paranoia on the one hand, and euphoria or exaltation on the other.

[3] *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 2011.

This manic-depressive condition enacts a number of variations: from the fear of the imminent disaster, the catastrophe just waiting to happen, to hurricane Katrina or the next environmental accident. From a plane flying too low, to genetic mutations and immunity breakdowns: the accident is there, just about to unfold and virtually certain; it is just a question of time (Massumi, 1992). As a result of this state of insecurity, the socially enforced aim is not change, but conservation or survival. I shall return to these necro-political aspects in chapter 3.

Vignette 4
At a scientific meeting organized by the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences about the future of the academic field of the Humanities a few years ago, a professor in Cognitive Sciences attacked the Humanities head-on. His attacks rested on what he perceived as the two major shortcomings of the Humanities: their intrinsic anthropocentrism and their methodological nationalism. The distinguished researcher found these two flaws to be fatal for the field, which was deemed unsuitable for contemporary science and hence not eligible for financial support by the relevant Ministry and the government.

The crisis of the human and its posthuman fallout has dire consequences for the academic field most closely associated with it – the Humanities. In the neo-liberal social climate of most advanced democracies today, Humanistic studies have been downgraded beyond the 'soft' sciences level, to something like a finishing school for the leisurely classes. Considered more of a personal hobby than a professional research field, I believe that the Humanities are in serious danger of disappearing from the twenty-first-century European university curriculum.

Another motivation behind my engagement with the topic of the posthuman therefore can be related to a profound sense of civic responsibility for the role of the academic today. A thinker from the Humanities, a figure who used to be known as an 'intellectual', may be at a loss to know what role to play in contemporary social public scenarios. One could say that my interest in the posthuman emerges from an all too human concern about the kind of knowledge and intellectual values

we are producing as a society today. More specifically, I worry about the status of university research in what we are still calling, for lack of a better word, the human sciences or the Humanities. I will develop my ideas about the university today in chapter 4.

This sense of responsibility also expresses a habit of thought which is dear to my heart and mind, as I belong to a generation that had a dream. It was and still is the dream of actually constituting communities of learning: schools, universities, books and curricula, debating societies, theatre, radio, television and media programmes – and later, websites and computer environments – that look like the society they both reflect, serve and help to construct. It is the dream of producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice, the respect for human decency and diversity, the rejection of false universalisms; the affirmation of the positivity of difference; the principles of academic freedom, anti-racism, openness to others and conviviality. Although I am inclined towards anti-humanism, I have no difficulty in recognizing that these ideals are perfectly compatible with the best humanist values. This book is not about taking sides in academic disputes, but rather aims to make sense of the complexities we find ourselves in. I will propose new ways of combining critique with creativity, putting the 'active' back into 'activism', thus moving towards a vision of posthuman humanity for the global era.

Posthuman knowledge – and the knowing subjects that sustain it – enacts a fundamental aspiration to principles of community bonding, while avoiding the twin pitfalls of conservative nostalgia and neo-liberal euphoria. This book is motivated by my belief in new generations of 'knowing subjects' who affirm a constructive type of pan-humanity by working hard to free us from the provincialism of the mind, the sectarianism of ideologies, the dishonesty of grandiose posturing and the grip of fear. This aspiration also shapes my vision of what a university should look like – a *universum* that serves the world of today, not only as the epistemological site of scientific production, but also as the epistemophilic yearning for the empowerment that comes with knowledge and sustains our subjectivity. I would define this yearning as a radical aspiration to freedom through the understanding of

the specific conditions and relations of power that are immi-
nent to our historical locations. These conditions include the
power that each and every one of us exercises in the everyday
network of social relations, at both the micro- and macro-
political levels.

In some ways, my interest in the posthuman is directly
proportional to the sense of frustration I feel about the
human, all too human, resources and limitations that frame
our collective and personal levels of intensity and creativity.
This is why the issue of subjectivity is so central to this book:
we need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes
of subject formation to match the profound transformations
we are undergoing. That means that we need to learn to think
differently about ourselves. I take the posthuman predicament
as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes
of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman
condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who
and what we are actually in the process of becoming.

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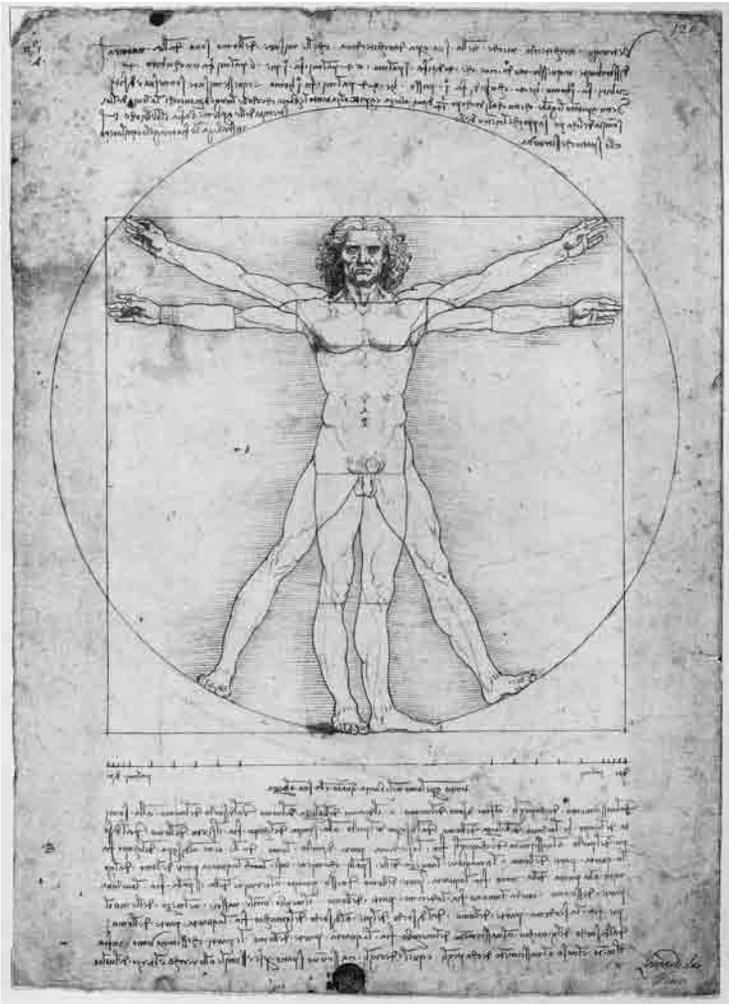
Figure 1.1   Vitruvian Man, 1492, Leonardo da Vinci
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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) is 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 epidermic 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,[1] 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

[1] 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 became 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.[2] 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,[3] 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.

[2] 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).

[3] 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).[4]

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

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[4] 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.[5] 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

[5] 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 transhumanist faith (Bostrom, 2005) in the potential of the posthuman 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[6] 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

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[6] 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 segrega-
tion 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 refer-
ence for the human today. Technological intervention upon
all living matter creates a negative unity and mutual depend-
ence 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 episte-
mological 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 commer-
cially 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 moral-ize 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 perti-nent 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,[7] we are now confronted by a new situation, which makes

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[7] 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 irrel-
evant. *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' deci-
sion making, while the cognitive capacities are already in
place.

As they become smarter and more widespread, autono-
mous 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 appropri-
ately, 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 man-
ufacturer, 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.[8]

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:

[8] 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 infrahuman 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 postmodernity (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 para-
doxes 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 glo-
balization. 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 posthu-
man 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 norma-
tive 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 loca-
tion', 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.[9] 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

[9] 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 posthuman 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 re-compositions 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.

Chapter 2
Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species

I loved George Eliot's prose well before I even knew that she actually translated Spinoza, my favourite philosopher, into English. Mary Evans was a woman of many talents and anyone who ever identified with Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1973) or Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* (2003) may not be cognitively aware of the fact that s/he stepped – surreptitiously and fatally – into a monistic universe of intersecting affective relations that simply make the world go round. George Eliot has authored my favourite sentence in the English language:

> If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk around well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 1973: 226)

The roar which lies on the other side of the urbane, civilized veneer that allows for bound identities and efficient social interaction is the Spinozist indicator of the raw cosmic energy that underscores the making of civilizations, societies and their subjects. Vitalist materialism is a concept that helps us make sense of that external dimension, which in fact enfolds within the subject as the internalized score of cosmic vibra-

tions (Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). It also constitutes the core of a posthuman sensibility that aims at overcoming anthropocentrism.

Let me spell out some of these rather dense ideas. A 'monistic universe' refers to Spinoza's central concept that matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition. The obvious target of criticism here is Descartes' famous mind–body distinction, but for Spinoza the concept goes even further: matter is one, driven by the desire for self-expression and ontologically free. The absence of any reference to negativity and to violent dialectical oppositions caused intense criticism of Spinoza on the part of Hegel and the Marxist-Hegelians. Spinoza's monistic worldview was seen as politically ineffective and holistic at heart. This situation changed dramatically in the 1970s in France, when a new wave of scholars rehabilitated Spinozist monism precisely as an antidote to some of the contradictions of Marxism and as a way of clarifying Hegel's relationship to Marx.[1] The main idea is to overcome dialectical oppositions, engendering non-dialectical understandings of materialism itself (Braidotti, 1991; Cheah, 2008), as an alternative to the Hegelian scheme. The 'Spinozist legacy' therefore consists in a very active concept of monism, which allowed these modern French philosophers to define matter as vital and self-organizing, thereby producing the staggering combination of 'vitalist materialism'. Because this approach rejects all forms of transcendentalism, it is also known as 'radical immanence'. Monism results in relocating difference outside the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others.

These monistic premises are for me the building blocks for a posthuman theory of subjectivity that does not rely on classical Humanism and carefully avoids anthropocentrism. The

[1] The group around Althusser started the debate in the mid-1960s; Deleuze's path-breaking study of Spinoza dates from 1968 (in English in 1990); Macherey's Hegel–Spinoza analysis came out in 1979 (in English in 2011); Negri's work on the imagination in Spinoza in 1981 (in English in 1991).

classical emphasis on the unity of all matter, which is central to Spinoza, is reinforced by an updated scientific understanding of the self-organizing or 'smart' structure of living matter. These ideas are supported by new advances in contemporary biosciences, neural and cognitive sciences and by the informatics sector. Posthuman subjects are technologically mediated to an unprecedented degree. For instance, a neo-Spinozist approach is supported and expanded today by new developments in the mind–body interrelation within the neural sciences (Damasio, 2003). In my view, there is a direct connection between monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity.

Global Warning

George Eliot's work is a good lead into at least some aspects of this materialist (or, as I will argue later in the chapter, 'matter-realist') worldview. The support is welcome, as many of the assumptions and premises of the post-anthropocentric universe are somewhat counter intuitive, although the term has acquired widespread currency nowadays. In mainstream public debates, for instance, the posthuman is usually coated in anxiety about the excesses of technological intervention and the threat of climate change, or by elation about the potential for human enhancement. In academic culture, on the other hand, the critique of anthropocentrism has even more shattering implications than the transformative agenda of posthumanism which I analysed in the previous chapter. The post-anthropocentric turn, linked to the compounded impacts of globalization and of technology-driven forms of mediation, strikes the human at his/her heart and shifts the parameters that used to define *anthropos*.

In this chapter I want to argue that the issue of the posthuman in relation to post-anthropocentrism is of an altogether different order than in post-humanism. For one thing, whereas the latter mobilized primarily the disciplinary field of philosophy, history, cultural studies and the classical Humanities in general, the issue of post-anthropocentrism enlists also science and technology studies, new media and digital culture, envi-

ronmentalism and earth-sciences, bio-genetics, neuroscience and robotics, evolutionary theory, critical legal theory, primatology, animal rights and science fiction. This high degree of trans-disciplinarity alone adds an extra layer of complexity to the issue. The key question for me is: what understandings of contemporary subjectivity and subject-formation are enabled by a post-anthropocentric approach? What comes after the anthropocentric subject?

How one reacts to this change of perspective depends to a large extent on one's relationship to technology. Being rather technophilic myself, I am quite upbeat. I will always side firmly with the liberatory and even transgressive potential of these technologies, against those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile, or to a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates individualism. I do think that one of the most pointed paradoxes of our era is precisely the tension between the urgency of finding new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency for our technologically mediated world and the inertia of established mental habits on the other. Donna Haraway put it with customary wit: the machines are so alive, whereas the humans are so inert! (Haraway, 1985). As if to mirror this, science and technology studies nowadays is a thriving area in academic institutions, whereas the Humanities are in serious trouble.

It may be useful to start by clarifying some aspects of the globalized context in which the decentring of anthropocentrism is taking place. As I argued elsewhere (Braidotti, 2002, 2006), advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification. It is a multiplier of deterritorialized differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of 'new, dynamic and negotiable identities' and an endless choice of consumer goods. This logic triggers a proliferation and a vampiric consumption of quantitative options. Many of them have to do with cultural 'others', from fusion cooking to 'world music'. Jackie Stacey, in her analysis of the new organic food industry (Franklin et al., 2000) argues that we literally eat the global economy. Paul Gilroy (2000) and Celia Lury (1998) remind us that we also wear it, listen to it and watch it on our many screens, on a daily basis.

The global circulation of goods, data, capital, bits and bytes of information frames the interaction of contemporary subjects on a daily basis. Multiple choices confront consumers at every step, but with varying degrees of actual freedom of choice. Take for instance the transformations incurred by the formerly elementary task of making a call to the local bank. What we have grown to expect nowadays is either an automated posthuman system of replies offering subsets of numbers that connect us to a further web of pre-recorded messages. Or else we welcome the relief of hearing a real-life human voice, knowing all along that it is emanating from some call centre miles away, in one of the emerging economies of the world. The end result is that phone calls are cheaper than ever but the actual length of the calls is definitely getting longer, as the caller wades through multiple new hurdles. Of course Internet communication is replacing all this, but my point is that the spinning differential force of our economic system is such that we have to run twice as fast, across automated replies or transcontinental phone lines, just to stay in the same place.

The most salient trait of the contemporary global economy is therefore its techno-scientific structure. It is built on the convergence between different and previously differentiated branches of technology, notably the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science. The bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is especially important and central to the discussion on the posthuman. This aspect involves the Human Genome project, stem cell research and bio-technological intervention upon animals, seeds, cells and plants. In substance, advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives. This context produces a paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of post-anthropocentrism on the part of market forces which happily trade on Life itself.

The commodification of Life by bio-genetic advanced capitalism, however, is a complex affair. Consider my argument: the great scientific advances of molecular biology have taught us that matter is self-organized (autopoietic), whereas monistic philosophy adds that it is also structurally relational and

hence connected to a variety of environments. These insights combine in defining intelligent vitality or self-organizing capacity as a force that is not confined within feedback loops internal to the individual human self, but is present in all living matter. Why is matter so intelligent, though? Because it is driven by informational codes, which both deploy their own bars of information, and interact in multiple ways with the social, psychic and ecological environments (Guattari, 2000). What happens to subjectivity in this complex field of forces and data flows? My argument is that it becomes an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of all these factors (Braidotti 1991, 2011a). The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements. Living matter – including the flesh – is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life. I therefore do not work completely within the social constructivist method but rather emphasize the non-human, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*.

Post-anthropocentrism is marked by the emergence of 'the politics of life itself' (Rose, 2007). 'Life', far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe*. *Zoe* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself (Braidotti 2006, 2011b) stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism. It is also an affirmative reaction of social and cultural theory to the great advances made by the other culture, that of the sciences. The relationship between the two will be addressed in chapter 4.

A posthuman theory of the subject emerges, therefore, as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing. These non-profit experiments with contemporary subjectivity actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature–culture continuum and is technologically mediated.

Not surprisingly, this non-profit, experimental approach to different practices of subjectivity is not exactly the spirit of contemporary capitalism. Under the cover of individualism, fuelled by a quantitative range of consumer choices, that system effectively promotes uniformity and conformism to the dominant ideology. The perversity of advanced capitalism, and its undeniable success, consists in reattaching the potential for experimentation with new subject formations back to an overinflated notion of possessive individualism (MacPherson, 1962), tied to the profit principle. This is precisely the opposite direction from the non-profit experimentations with intensity, which I defend in my theory of posthuman subjectivity. The opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism turns Life/*zoe* – that is to say human and non-human intelligent matter – into a commodity for trade and profit.

What the neo-liberal market forces are after, and what they financially invest in, is the informational power of living matter itself. The capitalization of living matter produces a new political economy, which Melinda Cooper (2008) calls 'Life as surplus'. It introduces discursive and material political techniques of population control of a very different order from the administration of demographics, which preoccupied Foucault's work on bio-political governmentality. The warnings are now global. Today, we are undertaking 'risk analyses' not only of entire social and national systems, but also of whole sections of the population in the world risk society (Beck, 1999). Data banks of bio-genetic, neural and mediatic information about individuals are the true capital today, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. 'Data-mining' includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as special strategic targets for capital investments. This kind of predictive analytics of the human amounts to 'Life-

mining',[2] with visibility, predictability and exportability as the key criteria.

Cooper sums up lucidly the complications of this political economy (2008: 3):

> Where does (re)production end and technical invention begin, when life is out to work at the microbiological or cellular level? What is at stake in the extension of property law to cover everything from the molecular elements of life (biological patents) to the biospheric accident (catastrophe bonds)? What is the relationship between new theories of biological growth, complexity and evolution and recent neoliberal theories of accumulation? And how is it possible to counter these new dogmatisms without falling into the trap of neofundamentalist politics of life (the right-to-life movement or ecological survivalism, for example)?

It is significant to note the emphasis Cooper places on the risk of neo-fundamentalist positions, like the biological determinism of 'natural law' advocates, or ecological holism. This essentialist risk is high in our current socio-political context and it requires constant critical scrutiny on the part of scholars who start instead from the posthuman idea of the nature–culture continuum.

Patricia Clough pursues a similar line in her analysis of the 'affective turn' (2008). Because advanced capitalism reduces bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources, it levels out other categorical differences, so that 'equivalencies might be found to value one form of life against another, one vital capacity against another' (Clough, 2008: 17). What constitutes capital value in our social system is the accumulation of information itself, its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. Clough provides an impressive list of the concrete techniques employed by 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier Boutang, 2012) to test and monitor the capacities of affective or 'bio-mediated' bodies: DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection and iris or hand recognition. All these are also immediately operationalized as surveillance techniques both in civil society and in the war against terror. This necro-political governmentality is the topic of the next chapter.

[2] With thanks to Jose van Dijck for this formulation.

For now, let me stress my main point: the opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity. The image of Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man on a Starbucks coffee cup (see figure 2.1) captures ironically the meretricious character of the posthuman connections engendered by global capital: 'I shop therefore I am!' may well be its motto.

The global economy is post-anthropocentric in that it ultimately unifies all species under the imperative of the market and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole. A negative sort of cosmopolitan interconnection is therefore established through a pan-human bond of vulnerability. The size of recent scholarship on the environmental
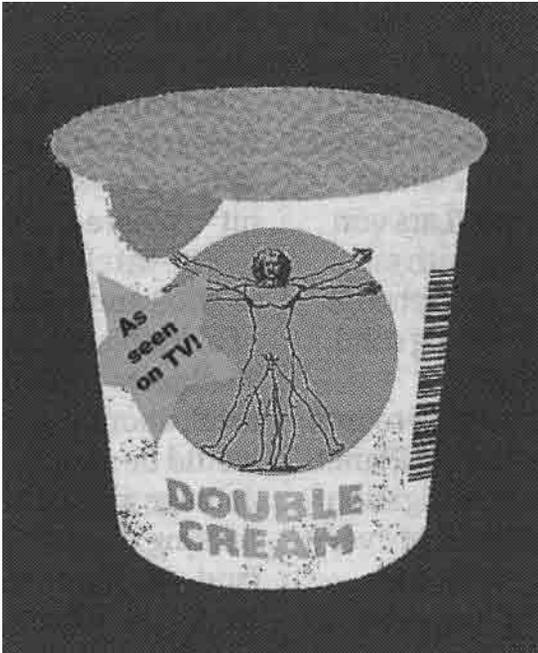
Figure 2.1   Vitruvian Man on Starbucks Coffee Cup
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crisis and climate change alone testifies to this state of emergency and to the emergence of the earth as a political agent. Post-anthropocentrism is especially thriving in popular culture and has been criticized (Smelik and Lykke, 2008) as a negative tendency to represent the transformations of the relations between humans and technological *apparatus* or machines in the mode of neo-gothic horror. The literature and cinema of extinction of our and other species, including disaster movies, is a successful genre of its own, enjoying broad popular appeal. I have labelled this narrow and negative social imaginary as techno-teratological (Braidotti, 2002), that is to say as the object of cultural admiration and aberration. This dystopian reflection of the bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is crucial to explain the popularity of this genre.

The social theory literature on shared anxiety about the future of both our species and of our humanist legacy is also rich and varied. Important liberal thinkers like Habermas (2003) and influential ones like Fukuyama (2002) are very alert on this issue, as are social critics like Sloterdijk (2009) and Borradori (2003). In different ways, they express deep concern for the status of the human, and seem particularly struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for it. I share their concern, but as a posthuman thinker with distinct anti-humanist feelings, I am less prone to panic at the prospect of a displacement of the centrality of the human and can also see the advantages of such an evolution.

For instance: once these post-anthropocentric practices blur the qualitative lines of demarcation not only among categories (male/female, black/white, human/animal, dead/alive, centre/margin, etc.), but also within each one of them, the human becomes subsumed into global networks of control and commodification which have taken 'Life' as the main target. The generic figure of the human is consequently in trouble. Donna Haraway puts is as follows:

> our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally branded intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly avail-

able for the progress of science and the advancement of indus-
try. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand.
(1997: 74)

We know by now that the standard which was posited in the
universal mode of 'Man' has been widely criticized (Lloyd,
1984) precisely because of its partiality. Universal 'Man', in
fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized,
speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a
reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity
(Irigaray, 1985b; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). How non-
representative can you get? As if this line of criticism were
not enough, this 'Man' is also called to task and brought back
to its species specificity as *anthropos* (Rabinow, 2003;
Esposito, 2008), that is to say as the representative of a hier-
archical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose cen-
trality is now challenged by a combination of scientific
advances and global economic concerns. Massumi refers to
this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': 'a genetic matrix embedded
in the materiality of the human' (1998: 60) and as such
undergoing significant mutations: 'species integrity is lost in
a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human
matter' (1998: 60).

These analyses indicate in my view that the political
economy of bio-genetic capitalism is post-anthropocentric in
its very structures, but not necessarily or automatically post-
humanistic. It also tends to be deeply inhuman(e), as we shall
see in the next chapter. The posthuman dimension of post-
anthropocentrism can consequently be seen as a deconstruc-
tive move. What it deconstructs is species supremacy, but it
also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature,
anthropos and *bios*, as categorically distinct from the life of
animals and non-humans, or *zoe*. What comes to the fore
instead is a nature–culture continuum in the very embodied
structure of the extended self, as I argued earlier. This shift
can be seen as a sort of 'anthropological exodus' from the
dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation
(Hardt and Negri, 2000: 215) – a colossal hybridization of
the species.

Once the centrality of *anthropos* is challenged, a number
of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling

down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives. Thus, if the crisis of Humanism inaugurates the posthuman by empowering the sexualized and racialized human 'others' to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master–slave relations, the crisis of *anthropos* relinquishes the demonic forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play. This places a different burden of responsibility on our species, which is the primary cause for the mess. The fact that our geological era is known as the 'anthropocene'[3] stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by *anthropos* and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else.

Furthermore, the transposition of naturalized others poses a number of conceptual and methodological complications linked to the critique of anthropocentrism. This is due to the pragmatic fact that, as embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of nature, even though academic philosophy continues to claim transcendental grounds for human consciousness. How to reconcile this materialist awareness with the task of critical thought? As a brand of vital materialism, posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the 'exceptionalism' of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its non-human aspects. This requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to think at all, let alone think critically.

In the rest of this chapter I will develop this insight into a number of interrelated fields of post-anthropocentric enquiry. My focus is on the productive aspects of the posthuman predicament and the extent to which it opens up perspectives for affirmative transformations of both the structures of subjectivity and the production of theory and knowledge. I have labelled these processes as 'becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine', with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, though I am very independent in relation to them. Thus, the becoming-animal axis of transformation

[3] The term was coined by Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2002 and has become widely accepted.