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Author(s) : Rosi BRAIDOTTI

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Working towards the Posthumanities

Rosi BRAIDOTTI (Utrecht University)

I. Introduction

There is no denying that, over the last thirty years in most advanced liberal democracies, the public criticism of the Humanities has been increasing and a largely negative consensus has emerged, especially among right-wing and populist political parties, that the Humanities are not financially viable, that they are a luxurious hobby for the privileged few and that they do not deserve public funding. This paper will not go into the detailed analysis of what has become known as the "crisis" of the field, but it assumes its existence as a historical and socio-political phenomenon in the post-1989 world order in Europe. What this means concretely is that Humanities professors and scholars spend a disproportionate amount of time actually justifying or defending our existence to the public.

In this article I will first contextualize this debate in the larger frame of the question about the role and function of the university in the twenty-first century. I will subsequently go on to argue a case for the relevance of the "new" Humanities, which I refer to as "Posthumanities." My general hypothesis is simple: the Humanities can and will survive their present predicament and contradictions to the extent that they will show the ability and willingness to undergo a major process of transformation in response to both new technological advances and on-going geo-political developments. We need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently under way. More importantly, we need a new definition of our subjectivity in the direction of posthumanist and post-anthropocentric perspectives. We already live in post-Eurocentric states of transition, marked by intense mobility, in emancipated (post-feminist), multi-ethnic societies with high degrees of technological mediation. These are neither simple, nor linear events, but rather multi-layered and internally contradictory

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phenomena. They combine elements of ultra-modernity with splinters of neo-archaism: high tech advances and neo-primitivism, which defy the logic of excluded middle. The Humanities, therefore, need great creativity to cope with these challenges. In the main section of this paper I will give you some concrete examples of new trends in what I have called the "Posthumanities."[1]

Ⅱ. The "Crisis"

Let us start with the context. The trouble the Humanities are in is not unrelated to a more general discussion about the university today. A brief historical survey of this debate can give an idea of the extent of this crisis. The European Renaissance model of the Humanist academy, defined the scholar as an artist or artisan handcrafting his or her research patiently and without constraints over a long period of time is simply over. It has been replaced by a modern "Fordist" model of the university as a chain-production unit mass-producing academic good. Nussbaum's claim (*Cultivating Humanity*) that this model is still carried on today by the American Liberal Arts college is both elitist and nostalgic. Immanuel Kant's classical text on "The Conflicts of the Faculties," first published in 1789 (Kant) presents the blueprint for the modern university, based on the model of industrial production. Kant divided the university into "higher" faculties – Law, Medicine, and Theology – which are practically-oriented and "lower" faculties – the Arts, Humanities and Sciences – which are responsible for criticism and hence are withdrawn from markets and practical concerns.[2] This blueprint is still quite valid, in spite of several historical modifications. Probably the most significant is the nineteenth century von Humboldt model of the University as the place for training the highly selected, and till recently exclusively male, elites for leadership and intelligent citizenship. That model is still prevalent in Europe.

In his stimulating and at times devastating anatomy of the contemporary university Bill Readings argues however that the institution has become "post-historical," in that it has: "outlived itself, is now a survivor of the era in

1. In this paper I draw from and elaborate on the material presented in my book *The Posthuman* (2013), and especially on its chapter 4, "Posthuman Humanities: Life Beyond Theory."
2. For a contemporary critical update on Kant's vision of the university see Lambert.

which it defined itself in terms of the project of the historical development, affirmation and inculcation of national culture" (6). All the previous models of the university I mentioned above: the Kantian; the von Humboldt and even the British colonial defended by Cardinal Newman, have been de-stabilized by the global economy. In this respect, the decline of the nation-state has negative consequences for the university as a whole and especially for the Humanities. The central figure in academic life today is not the professor, argues Readings, but the administrator and the university is no longer a pillar of national identity, or an ideological arm of the nation-state and the state apparatus:

> The university is now no more of a parasitical drain, on resources, than the stock exchange or the insurance company are a drain on industrial production. Like the stock exchange, the university is a point of capital's self-knowledge, of capital's ability not just to manage risk or diversity, but to extract a surplus value from that management. In the case of the university, this extraction occurs as a result of speculation on differentials in information. (40)

In this context, the much-flaunted notion of "excellence" means nothing substantial, but is a crucial factor in the transnational exchange of academic capital. A mere "techno-bureaucratic ideal" (Readings 14), it has no content reference. This "de-referentialization" of academic standards has both negative and positive consequences.

On the negative front, the lack of specific referents means that "excellence" is indexed on money, markets' demands and consumers' satisfaction. On a more positive note, "de-referentialization" opens the possibility for new spaces "in which we can think the notions of country and community differently" (124). What can we do with these models of university today?

Let us start by looking at the classical conservative model, exemplified by John Searle in his defence of the key ideas in the Western rationalist tradition, as the core values of Humanities research. Firmly grounded in a realist practice of truth, the rationalist tradition is text-based and deploys theory in a self-critical manner. It rests on linear thinking because it assumes that the function of language is to communicate effectively. Consequently, truth is a matter of the accuracy of representation – according to a correspondence theory of truth which grounds statements in observable factual realities. It follows that knowledge is expected to be objective – because it relies on representations

of an independently existing reality and not on subjectivist interpretations. Rationality rules supreme and formal reason – as opposed to practical reason – has its own inner logic which provides standards of proof and validity. As a result intellectual standards are unnegotiable and grounded in objective criteria of excellence.

The traditional idea of the University is supposed to embody and uphold these criteria. Searle opposes to this the "postmodernist" university, influenced by imported anti-realist theories of truth which weaken the scientificity of the academic practice. The representativeness of the curriculum in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity – regrettably for Searle – becomes more important than its truth value, introducing a shallow intellectual egalitarianism under the guise of multiculturalism. This causes confusion between a domain to be studied and a cause to be defended, which disrupts the deployment of traditional Humanities methods and practices and erodes its self-confidence. In an eloquent response to Searle, Richard Rorty criticizes the over-emphasis on rationalism as "a secularized version of the Western monotheistic tradition" (33). Realism and the correspondence to reality are rather meaningless concepts, or rather: "a term without content" (26). The much-praised "objectivity of science," argues Rorty, rests on active inter-subjectivity and social interaction. Emphasizing the importance of socio-political factors in shaping meanings and truths, Rorty strikes a more pragmatic note:

> A healthy and free university accommodates generational change, radical religious and political disagreement and new social responsibilities as best it can. It muddles through. (28)

The question of theory and the aftermath of the "theory wars" comes back to haunt this discussion. Searle's conservative remarks are accurate as the expression of his emotional involvement in the Humanities' self-defence. He is nonetheless ruthless in blaming the postmodern theorists for the situation. Contrary to the facile anti-postmodernism of his approach, I would stress the serious methodological challenges that this approach has thrown to the Humanities. Indeed, blaming the postmodern messengers for bringing the sobering message that the humanistic master narratives are in trouble is a sleigh of hands that does not help further the cause of the Humanities today. It is a great pity that the serious debate about the future of humanistic higher education is caught up in the legacy of the 1990s "theory wars" and the

polemical in-fighting about feminism, postmodernism, multiculturalism and French philosophy. Joan Scott puts it brilliantly:

> As if postmodernists were the cause of all the problems of disciplinary uncertainty scholars are now facing; as if their banishment would end the questions about difference posed by demographic changes in university populations, by the emergence of postcolonial critiques of colonial assumptions, by developments in the history of philosophy that reach back to at least the nineteenth century, by the more recent end of the Cold War and by the extraordinary economic constraints of the last years. (171)

Referring back to John Dewey's[3] notion of the university as a disciplinary community, Scott deplores the politicized contests about postmodernism and knowledge, which over-emphasize "the presumed political implications of one's scholarly ideas, not the ideas themselves." Louis Menand goes further and suggests that conservative political forces are manipulating "theory wars" as a pretext to interfere in the internal academic affairs of the university, as evidence by the particularly targeted attacks against feminism, multiculturalism and post-colonialism. This critical insight is picked up by Edward Said who connects the identity crisis of the Humanities to the displacement of Euro-centric curricula in US universities and adds, quite ironically:

> Some critics have reacted as if the very nature of the University and academic freedom had been threatened because unduly politicized. Others have gone further: for them the critique of the Western canon, with its panoply of what its opponent have called Dead White European Males … has rather improbably signalled the outset of a new fascism, the demise of Western civilization itself, and the overturn of slavery, child marriage, bigamy and the harem. (214–15)

Irony left aside, it is quite clear that the real target of the conservatives' wrath is the threat that these new areas of studies pose to the power of corporate disciplines in two major ways: through their radical epistemologies and their methodological interdisciplinarity. The meltdown of disciplinary boundaries

3. Dewey played an important role in launching the American Association of University Professors in 1915.

and the subsequent loss of corporate power by the old disciplines is less of a theoretical, than an administrative crisis. As Menand astutely observes, given that the disciplines are not timeless entities, but historically contingent discursive formations their de-segregation in not itself a source of anxiety for the scholars, some of whom are even driving the process. It is however a major headache for the administrators in charge of the machinery of self-governance of Humanities faculties, who tend to "take advantage of the state of flux to reduce spending and increase forceful retrenchments" (19).

Instead of pursuing a polemic, I would rather start from the empirical imperative to think global, but act local, to develop an institutional frame that actualized a posthumanist practice that is "worthy of our times" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*) while resisting the violence, the injustice and the vulgarity of the times. Confronting the historicity of our condition means moving the activity of thinking outwards, into the real world, so as to assume accountability for the conditions that define our location. The epistemic and the ethical walk hand in hand into the complicated landscapes of the third millennium. We need conceptual creativity and intellectual courage to rise to the occasion, as there is no going back.

Although the issues of pastoral care and intergenerational justice are more topical than ever in the academic classroom, it is also the case that since the Cold War era the function of the University has been mostly research and development for the sake of social development and industrial growth and technological advances, including but not only the military. This is especially true of the U.S.A., but Europe and vast parts of Asia are also part of this model. According to Wernick, since the 1960s the university has mutated into a "multi-versity," fulfilling a variety of social and economic functions, often linked to the Cold war militarization of the social space and geo-political conflicts. The term "multi-versity" was coined in 1963 by the then Chancellor of the University of California system Clark Kerr to refer to the explosion of tasks and demands imposed on major universities. The University continued to mutate so that, over the next twenty years: "universities have become corporate, oriented to performance and de-traditionalized. Under the aegis of professional managers they have become post-historical institutions without a memory" (Wernick 561). As the professoriate and students' representative bodies lost their powers of governance to neo-liberal economic logic, the Humanities dispersed their foundational value to become a sort of luxury intellectual consumer good.

Can this trend be reversed? What is the most adequate model of the

university for the globalized era? I want to argue that the posthuman predicament affects also an issue as crucial as the civic responsibility of the University today. How can the academic and civic space inter-act in our globalized, technologically mediated world? The digital revolution paves the way for at least a partial answer: the new campuses will be virtual and hence global by definition. This means that the universal ideal of transcendent values defended by Searle is over. It is being rapidly replaced by the infrastructural vision of the university as a hub of both localized knowledge production and of global transmission of cognitive data. This need not necessarily result in either de-humanizing or dis-embedding the university, but in new forms of re-grounding and of accountability.

Ⅲ. Fatal Flaws

How do the Humanities look in this changing historical context? Two features have emerged as potential flaws at the core of the traditional practice of the Humanities. The first is structural anthropomorphism (Haraway) and the second is methodological nationalism (Beck). The former translates into sustained hostility towards, or genuine incompatibility with, the culture, practice and institutional existence of science and technology. It challenges the Humanities' ability to cope with the scientific rise of "Life" sciences and technologically mediated communication and knowledge transfer. The latter stresses the need to take into account cultural diversity, notably the political economy of globalized trade, perpetual wars and growing security apparati.

The issue of methodological nationalism is crucial in that it is in-built into the European Humanities self-representation. Humanism rests on the classical ideal of "Man," predicated on eighteenth and nineteenth century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals. This is an ideal image of masculine, white, able-bodied, metropolitan perfection in bodily and mental, discursive and spiritual terms. It is what Genevieve Lloyd has labelled: "the man of reason." Faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason forms an integral part of this high-humanistic creed. This vision of "Man" as the standard representation of the human combines rational thinking with the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress.

Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which

shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason. 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. 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.

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 behavior, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as "others." These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies (Braidotti, *Transpositions*; *The Posthuman* 2013). We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others. Feminist and postcolonial scholarship over the last thirty years has taught us that, because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these "others" raise issues of power and exclusion.

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.

Edward Said (*Orientalism*) reminded us that Humanism must shed its smug Euro-centrism and become an adventure in difference and alternative cultural traditions. This shift of perspectives requires a prior consciousness-raising on the part of Humanities scholars: "humanists must recognize with some alarm that the politics of identity and the nationalistically grounded system of education remain at the core of what most of us actually do, despite changed boundaries and objects of research" (55). 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.[4] Spivak echoes these concerns in her critique of the rhetoric and the politics of the "crisis of Man." To what an extent the institutional structure of the contemporary university still rests upon the nation state as the horizon for its research and educational practices is a burning question, as is the issue of whether this ancient institution actually has the potential to contribute to post-national perspectives (Habermas).

The second charge, that of anthropocentrism, raises different issues that re-open the debate on the "two cultures" of the Humanities and the sciences. The focus is on the changing interfaces between humans and technologies. The dualistic distinction nature-culture has collapsed and is replaced by complex systems of data-feedback, interaction and communication transfer. The profoundly anthropocentric core of the Humanities is displaced by this complex reconfiguration of knowledge dominated by science studies and technological information. Far from being a terminal crisis, however, this challenge opens up new global, eco-sophical dimensions (Guattari, *Chaosmosis*).

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 sexualised and racialised human "others" to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master-slave relations, the crisis of *anthropos* relinquishes the forces of the naturalised "others." Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole are called into play. The fact that our geological era is known as the "anthropocene"[5] stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by *anthropos* and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else (Rabinow). "Man" is no longer the measure of *all* things.

A high degree of moral and cognitive panic accompanies the realization that we are in the midst of a post-anthropocentric turn. Both solid social democrats like Jürgen Habermas, Peter Sloterdijk and liberal policy-makers like Fukuyama have expressed heart-felt concerns about the future of human nature. Less prone to panic, I see instead the emergence of a nature-culture continuum, or rather, of global natures and global cultures, as Franklin, Lury

4. As Morin; Passerini; Balibar and Bauman have also argued.
5. The term was coined by Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2002 and has become widely accepted.

and Stacey call it, as a new opportunity.

A non-anthropocentric approach deconstructs species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to notions of human nature, uniqueness or exceptionality. It has become difficult in many areas of scientific research to keep the categorical distinction between *anthropos* and his (the gender is no coincidence) bio-politics as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-human agents, also known as *zoe*. What comes to the fore instead – in neural, digital and environmental frameworks – is a nature-culture continuum that stresses the embodied structure of the extended self as a relational entity. The new human-non-human linkages, among them complex interfaces involving machinic assemblages of biological "wetware" and non-biological "hardware" (Bono, Dean and Ziarek 3), are at the core of this shift of perspective away from Man as *anthropos*. This move can be seen as a sort of "anthropological exodus" from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation (Hardt and Negri) – a colossal hybridisation of the species.

Ⅳ. How are the Humanities to Cope with This?

What is the place of the Humanities as a scientific enterprise in this globalized network culture (Terranova) that no longer upholds the unity of space and time as its governing principle? In the era of citizens' science[6] and citizens' journalism, what can be the role of academic research institutions? The displacement of anthropocentrism and the scrambling of species hierarchy leave the definition of the Human up for grabs, with dire consequences for the institutional practice of the Humanities. Whimster comments the paradoxical position in which this field finds itself: "a science of the human would seem either to have the capacity to be inhuman or, alternatively, to be humanistic but hardly scientific" (174).

Against the prophets of doom, I want to argue however that technologically mediated post-anthropocentrism can enlist the resources of bio-genetic codes, as well as telecommunication, new media and Information Technologies to the task of renewing the Humanities. We need to re-think the basic notion of the "knowing subject" that sustains the effort of the new Humanities in the contemporary world. Posthuman subjectivity reshapes the identity of

6. See http://www.citizensciencealliance.org/

humanistic practices, by stressing heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality, instead of autonomy and self-referential disciplinary purity and nomadic radical immanence instead of transcendental reason (Braidotti, *The Posthuman*).

Today, environmental, evolutionary, cognitive, bio-genetic and digital trans-disciplinary discursive fronts are emerging around the edges of the classical Humanities and across the disciplines. They rest on post-anthropocentric premises and technologically mediated emphasis on Life as a *zoe*-centered system of species egalitarianism (Braidotti, *Transpositions*), which are very promising for new research in the field. Probably the most significant example of the excellent health enjoyed by the post-anthropocentric Humanities is the recent explosion of scholarship in the fields of "Animal Studies" and of "Eco-criticism." Both areas are so rich and fast-growing that it is impossible to even attempt to summarize them.[7] Where do these developments leave the scholarship in the Humanities? Or rather: what's the posthuman understanding of the Human got to do with this shifting horizon? And what are the implications for the future of the Humanities in the university today?

Posthuman thinkers embrace creatively the challenge of our historicity without giving in to cognitive panic. The argument is straight-forward: if the proper study of mankind used to be Man and the proper study of humanity was the human, it seems to follow that the proper study of the posthuman condition is the posthuman itself. This new knowing subject is a complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major re-adjustments in our ways of thinking. This is not as abstract as it may sound at first. Let me give you some concrete examples.

The first is the fast-growing field of environmental Humanities, inspired by the awareness that human activity has a geological influence. Also known as sustainable Humanities (Braidotti, *Transpositions*) and as "anthropocene Humanities,"[8] this interdisciplinary field of study introduces major methodological as well as theoretical innovations. For one thing, it spells the end of the idea of a de-naturalized social order disconnected from its

7. A companion to animal studies has just been published (Gross and Vallely), whereas a complete eco-criticism reader has been available for a while (Glotfelty and Fromm). *The Journal of Ecocriticism* is quite established, while a recent issue of the prestigious *PMLA* papers (2012) was dedicated to the question of the animal. For younger generation of scholars (Rossini and Tyler) the animal is the posthuman question *par excellence*.
8. I am indebted to Debjani Ganguly and Poul Holm for this felicitous formulation.

environmental and organic foundations and calls for more complex schemes of understanding the multi-layered form of inter-dependence we all live in. Secondly, it stresses the specific contribution of the Humanities to the public debate on climate change, through the analysis of the social and cultural factors that underscore the public representation of these issues. Both the scale and the consequences of climate change are so momentous as to defy representation. Humanities and more specifically cultural research are best suited to fill in this deficit of the social imaginary and help us think the unthinkable.

In his analysis of the implications of climate change research for the discipline of history, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues for a more conceptual shift towards "Deep History." This is an interdisciplinary combination of geological and socio-economic history, which focusses both on the planetary or earth factors and on the cultural changes that have jointly created humanity over hundreds of thousands of years. It combines theories of historical subjectivity with "species thinking." This is, in my eyes, a post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge, which grants the earth the same role and agency as the human subjects that inhabit it.

The scale of these mental shifts is such as to almost defy representation, as I suggested above. Chakrabarty suggests further critical reflection on "the difference between the present historiography of globalization and the historiography demanded by anthropogenic theories of climate change" (216). This forces us to bring together categories of thought which were till now kept apart not only by disciplinary boundaries – between the earth sciences and literature and history, for instance – but also by the anthropocentric bias that has sustained the Humanities. Far from being a crisis, this new development has enormous inspirational force for the field. It also calls into questions some of the current ideas about the negative formation of a new sense of "the human" as bound together by shared vulnerability in relation to the possibility of extinction. Chakrabarty's insights about a critical climate change-driven Deep History also challenges some of the given assumptions about postcolonial critiques of the Western universal. I regret that I cannot pursue this insight here.

Another illuminating example of the advantages of a posthuman scientific position is the "One Health Movement," which defines its mission in terms of Public Health as follows:

> Recognizing that human health (including mental health via the human-animal bond phenomenon), animal health, and ecosystem health are inextricably linked, One Health seeks to promote, improve, and defend the health and well-being of all species by enhancing cooperation and collaboration between physicians, veterinarians, other scientific health and environmental professionals and by promoting strengths in leadership and management to achieve these goals.[9]

The movement is inspired by Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902), who coined the term "zoonosis," arguing that there should be no dividing lines between animal and human medicine. This position has been gathering momentum in the last fifteen years. The One Health initiative is a rather daring interdisciplinary alliance that unites physicians, osteopaths, veterinarians, dentists, nurses and other scientific-health and environmentally related disciplines, on the basis of a simple hypothesis, which is the isomorphism of structures between humans and animals in immunology, bacteriology and vaccine developments. This means that humans are both exposed and vulnerable to new diseases, like bird flu and other epidemics, which they share with animal species.

Obviously a response to the new pandemics that have emerged in the global era, like Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), better known as "mad cow disease," the One Health Initiative stresses the variety of shared diseases that tie humans and animals. For instance, animals suffer from many of the same chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, asthma, and arthritis as humans. It follows therefore that we should develop comparative medicine as the study of disease processes across species and that therefore we should also connect doctors and veterinarians in their daily practices, both therapeutic and research-based. Environmentally embedded, The One Health Movement pursues both ecological and social sustainability and has large social repercussions.

The common concerns about public health among humans and animals are intensified as a result of urbanization, globalization, climate change, wars and terrorism and microbial and chemical pollution of land and water sources, which have created new threats to the health of both animals and humans.[10]

9. See http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/mission.php, with thanks to my colleague Anton Pijpers.
10. Source: Wikipedia: One Health Initiative, consulted on April 26, 2012.

Medical doctors and veterinarians need to join forces with environmental health scientists and practitioners to deal with disease outbreaks, prevent chronic disease caused by chemical exposure, and create healthier living environments. One Health is the perfect post-anthropocentric concept that brings together human health care practitioners, veterinarians, and public health professionals for the sake of environmental social and individual sustainability.

Another significant example is the fast-growing field of the Digital Humanities – pioneered by Katherine Hayles – which deals with a rich agenda of thematic and methodological issues. One of them is the continuing relevance of the science of texts and the role of the press – from Gutenberg to 3D printing – in shaping human knowledge. Just as the Humanities led these discussions in the sixteenth century, when the printing press was introduced in the Western world, so are they at the forefront of contemporary frontiers of thought. And they are not alone.

This is a new and innovative agenda, which builds on but is not confined to either humanism or anthropocentrism – a genuinely new programme for the Humanities in the twentieth century.

Therefore, instead of turning backwards to a nostalgic vision of the Humanities as the repository and the executors of universal transcendental reason and inherent moral goodness, such as Martha Nussbaum (*Cultivaiting Humanity*; *Not for Profit*) proposes, I suggest that we move forward into multiple posthuman futures. We need an active effort to reinvent the academic field of the Humanities in a new global context and to develop an ethical framework worthy of our posthuman times. Affirmation, not nostalgia, is the road to pursue: not the idealization of philosophical meta-discourse, but the more pragmatic task of self-transformation through humble experimentation.

V. The "Proper" Subject of the Humanities is not "Man"

I have argued throughout this paper that posthuman theory requires a new vision of the subject as resting on a process ontology that challenges the traditional equation of subjectivity with rational consciousness, resisting the reduction of both to objectivity and linearity.[11] A collectively distributed

11. Fort an excellent critical account of the notion of objectivity, see Daston and Galison.

consciousness emerges from this, a transversal form of non-synthetic understanding of the relational bond that connects us. This places the relation and the notion of complexity at the centre of both the ethics and the epistemic structures and strategies of the posthuman subject (Braidotti, *Transpositions*).

This view has important implications for the production of scientific knowledge. The dominant vision of the scientific enterprise is based on the institutional implementation of a number of Laws that discipline the practice of scientific research and police the thematic and methodological borders of what counts as respectable, acceptable, and fundable science. In so doing, the laws of scientific practice regulate what a mind is allowed to do, and thus they control the structures of our thinking. Posthuman thought proposes an alternative vision of both the thinking subject, of his or her evolution on the planetary stage and the actual structure of thinking.

Deleuze and Guattari's idea that the task of thinking is to create new concepts is a great source of inspiration in this regard, because it rests on the parallelism between philosophy, science, and the arts. This is not to be mistaken for a flattening out of the differences between these intellectual pursuits, but rather a way of stressing the unity of purpose among the three branches of knowledge. Deleuze and Guattari take care to stress the differences between the distinctive styles of intelligence that philosophy, science, and the arts respectively embody. They also argue that they remain indexed on a common plane of intensive self-transforming Life energy (Deleuze and Guattari). This continuum sustains the ontology of becoming that is the conceptual motor of posthuman nomadic thought. In so far as science has to come to terms with the real physical processes of an actualized and defined world, it is less open to the processes of becoming or differentiation that characterize Deleuze's monistic ontology. Philosophy is at an advantage, being a subtler tool for the probing intellect, one that is more attuned to the virtual plane of immanence, to the generative force of a generative universe, or "chaosmosis" (Guattari *Chaosmosis*; *The Three*), which is nonhuman and in constant flux. Thinking is the conceptual counterpart of the ability to enter modes of relation, to affect and be affected, sustaining qualitative shifts and creative tensions accordingly, which is also the prerogative of art. Critical theory therefore has a major role to play.

The monistic ontology that sustains this vision of life as vitalist, self-organising matter also allows the critical thinker to re-unite the different branches of philosophy, the sciences and the arts in a new alliance. I see this

as a dynamic contemporary formula to redefine the relationship between the two cultures of the "subtle" (Humanities) and "hard" (Natural) sciences. They are different lines of approaching the vital matter that constitutes the core of both subjectivity and of its planetary and cosmic relations. As a consequence, one can venture the preliminary conclusion that the main implication of posthuman critical theory for the practice of science is that the scientific Laws need to be retuned according to a view of the subject of knowledge as a complex singularity, an affective assemblage, and a relational vitalist entity.

It follows from all this that the Humanities in the posthuman era of anthropocene should not stick to the Human – let alone "Man" – as its proper object of study. On the contrary, the field would benefit by being free from the empire of humanist Man, so as to be able to access in a post-anthropocentric manner issues of external and even planetary importance, such as scientific and technological advances, ecological and social sustainability and the multiple challenges of globalization. Such a change of focus requires assistance from other social and scientific actors as well.

My point is that the Humanities need to embrace the multiple opportunities offered by the posthuman condition. The Humanities can set their own objects of enquiry, free from the traditional or institutional assignment to the human and its humanistic derivatives. We know by now that the field is richly endowed with an archive of multiple possibilities which equip it with the methodological and theoretical resources to set up original and necessary debates with the sciences and technologies and other grand challenges of today. The question is what the Humanities can become, in the posthuman era and after the decline of the primacy of "Man" and of *anthropos*.

In other words, I think the Humanities can and will survive and prosper to the extent that they will show the ability and willingness to undergo a major process of transformation in the direction of the posthuman. To be worthy of our times, we need to be pragmatic: we need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently on the way. We already live in permanent states of transition, hybridization and nomadic mobility, in emancipated (post-feminist), multi-ethnic societies with high degrees of technological intervention. These are neither simple, nor linear events, but rather multi-layered and internally contradictory phenomena. They combine elements of ultra-modernity with splinters of neo-archaism: high tech advances and neo-primitivism, which defy the logic of excluded middle.

We do need to embrace non-profit as a key value in contemporary knowledge production, but this gratuitousness is linked to the construction of social horizons of hope and therefore it is a vote of confidence in the sheer sustainability of the future (Braidotti, *Transpositions*). The future is nothing more or less than inter-generational solidarity, responsibility for posterity, but it is also our shared dream, or a consensual hallucination.[12] Collini puts it beautifully: "we are merely custodians for the present generation of a complex intellectual inheritance which we did not create, and which is not ours to destroy" (199).

12. This is William Gibson's definition of cyberspace.

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years in most advanced liberal democracies, the public criticism of the Humanities has been increasing and a largely negative consensus has emerged, especially among right-wing and populist political parties, that the Humanities are not financially viable, that they are a luxurious hobby for the privileged few and that they do not deserve public funding. In this article I will first contextualize this debate in the larger frame of the question about the role and function of the university in the Twenty-first century. I will subsequently go on to argue a case for the relevance of the "new" Humanities, which I refer to as "Posthumanities." My general hypothesis is simple: the Humanities can and will survive their present predicament and contradictions to the extent that they will show the ability and willingness to undergo a major process of transformation in response to both new technological advances and on-going geo-political developments. We need schemes of thought and figurations that enable us to account in empowering terms for the changes and transformations currently under way. More importantly, we need a new definition of our subjectivity in the direction of posthumanist and postanthropocentric perspectives. In the main section of this paper I will give you some concrete examples of new trends in what I have called the "Posthumanities."

Keywords: post-anthropocentrism, posthuman theory, the University, post-humanism, contemporary knowledge production, new directions in Humanities, posthumanities.

Rosi BRAIDOTTI is Professor and Director of the Centre for the Humanities at Utrecht University. Her research and writing engages feminist philosophy and cultural studies, poststructuralism and critical theory as well as epistemology and Deleuze studies. Her main publications include: *Patterns of Dissonance*, Polity Press, 1991; *Nomadic Subjects*, Columbia University Press, 1994 and 2011a; *Metamorphoses*, Polity Press, 2002; *Transpositions*, Polity Press, 2006; *La philosophie, lá où on ne l'attend pas*, Larousse, 2009; *Nomadic Theory*, Columbia University Press, 2011b and *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, 2013. More information: www.rosibraidotti.com
R.Braidotti@uu.nl

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