

Valedictory lecture: We are rooted but we flow

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Abstract

This is the text of the valedictory lecture that Rosi Braidotti delivered in June 2022, to mark the retirement from her academic position at Utrecht University. It was conceived as a spoken text and written within the rhetorical tradition of valedictory speeches. The text traces the different phases of Braidotti's career in terms of institutional practice and theoretical developments over the last 40 years. Combining academic analysis with deep ethical passion, Braidotti argues for the need of combining critique with creativity, and radicalism with excellence, to highlight the relevance of the new humanities for our troubled world. Ending on a high note of affirmative ethics, Braidotti calls for a more inclusive, diverse and critical practice of the humanities, as a living experiment of what we are capable of becoming.

KEYWORDS

affirmation, critical theory, feminist theory, Humanities, inclusion, nomadic subjects, posthuman, posthumanities

1 | INTRODUCTION

This is the text of the valedictory lecture I delivered at the University of Utrecht on 13 June 2022, in the fully packed Aula of the Academy Hall, in the presence of the Rector Magnificus, distinguished colleagues and students, my partner, cherished family and friends. I experienced it as a great honour to be able to deliver the lecture in such a grand manner and I am grateful to all who attended in person and online.¹ The lecture was the concluding event in a day of festive celebrations, which had started earlier on. My younger colleagues² were kind enough to organise a symposium about my work, which included live presentations, as well as prerecorded video comments by many friends and colleagues from near and afar. I was deeply touched, intellectually gratified and quite emotional about the proceedings, truth be told.

¹You can find the recording link here: <https://rosibraidotti.com/2022/06/09/recording-rosi-braidottisvaledictory-lecture/>

²With special thanks to Iris van der Tuin, Rick Dolphijn, Eva Midden, Sandra Ponzanesi, Marlise Mensink and others.

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My official retirement was indeed a milestone date for me: I started in Utrecht way back in 1988, when I was appointed as the founding professor in Women's Studies and led a young and enthusiastic team to create one of the first undergraduate curricula in that new interdisciplinary field. We then expanded it to a postgraduate curriculum, and in 1995 I was appointed the founding director of the Netherlands Research School in Women's Studies, which was a PhD-awarding programme officially credited by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. I will never forget the unique feeling of awarding the first 'feminist PhD'. I also devoted a great deal of time and energy to inter and intra-European networking activities in our field. In 1993 we set up the teaching network NOISE, funded by the Erasmus Programme of the European Union—it ran successfully for over twenty years. In 1996 we united all the women's, gender and feminist studies programmes in Europe in a Socrates Thematic Network—ATHENA—funded by the EU and I was appointed the founding director.

The network was so successful that in 2010 it received the Erasmus Prize from the European Commission. We also set up the 'Gender Graduates', Marie Curie Early Stage Training consortium for graduate students in 2005–2006. We did pioneering work of high quality and quantity in European international relations and did our best to network feminist Europe.

In 2005 I stepped down from the direction of the Utrecht University Women's Studies programmes, to allow a younger team to take over and guide the programme further. It proved a wise and productive decision: the new team did an amazing job over the years and it is a great joy to retire knowing the programme in Gender Studies at Utrecht is doing so well. As a Distinguished University Professor, I was given by Utrecht all the freedom and the means to pursue my research and explore new developments in the contemporary Humanities. Throughout this long career, I was blessed by the love and support of my partner Anneke Smelik without whom none of this would have been possible.

The awareness of all these life achievements and challenges, and the feeling of contentment at a job well done, mixed with slight sadness at having to go, weighed quite heavily upon my heart, as I approached the lectern and raised my eyes towards the full Aula. And thus I spoke.

2 | OPENING

How do you end a successful academic career that stretched over three decades in one of Europe's best universities? Well, at first gradually, and then all at once. In May 1990, I stood in this very Academy Hall, at this same lectern, to deliver my inaugural lecture as the founding Professor of Women's Studies in the Humanities at Utrecht University. Some of you were not even born then, but some of you were already there and may still remember the collective excitement, the sense of possibility, the high energy and sheer joy at starting what became known as: 'the feminist long march through the institutions'. Our motto was: 'we are what's happening!'

Our aims were loud and clear: we wanted to see more women—in all their intersectional diversity—more women of colour, more LBGTQ+ people—and also more contemporary popular culture, in the academic institutions and the world of scientific research. We wanted to modernise and disrupt, but not rock the boat entirely; our aspiration was towards more justice, equality, and solidarity, within university teaching and research. We were driven by great convictions and by even greater impatience. We believed in power to the imagination.

I would like to infuse some of that joyful affect in this event today, which marks my retirement from the University and my becoming a Professor Emerita for the rest of my life. It is the formal end of my institutional appointment, but certainly, I hope, not the end of my academic career as a thinker, writer and researcher. I want today to be an affirmative and happy event, a moment of togetherness, celebration, recollection, which allows not so much a

flash-back nor a flash-forward, but a ‘back-cast’. That means I would like to cast nonlinear paths of becoming from the past, to the future, and back-forth till now.

The mode of this farewell address is therefore the continuous present of an academic and intellectual task that is partly achieved, but still unfulfilled. It is also the future past of a project that pertains to the last decades but is still relevant to a present that is trying to become a sustainable future. All in all, it will have been quite a journey! Yes, I am a feminist professor and philosopher. And I know for a fact that this movement of ideas and action, with its multiple waves and changing tides, is simply inexhaustible and always about to reinvent itself, back and forth. Feminism, by any other name, endures.

3 | BACK-CASTING

Looking back to the future from May 1990—did I achieve my aims? Not all of them perhaps, but – together with the amazing teams I had the fortune of working with – we sure made a roaring start to a process that will take generations to complete. The sheer number of women professors present here today is evidence of how far we have come, but the equally evident under-representation of women of colour, of migrant and refugee status, and of LBGTQ+ people shows how much farther we need to go.

I am proud and grateful to have been part of this cultural revolution and to have contributed to the process of knowledge transfer from the women's, the students, the gay rights and the antiwar, peace movements of the 1970s, to the ancient institution of the university. Let us now intensify the efforts to implement these commonly shared beliefs.

4 | MY DRIVE TO KNOW

Two main factors have established and driven my intellectual and academic efforts: on the one hand a huge thirst for knowledge, a deep fascination for science and scholarship, and on the other hand an intense curiosity towards the contemporary world.

The former—love of knowledge—is something that hardly needs explaining to the distinguished community of scholars gathered here today, as we all share it.

So let me add this: for my generation of academics, reading or perusing a hundred books a year was the norm. Choosing an academic career also meant choosing a life-style, somewhat ascetic—monastic in origins—a quiet life of reading and writing, and teaching about your readings and writings.

So may I—at long last—come out as a fully-fledged nerd?

I just love language. I love books, archives, manuscripts. I adore libraries and in every city I ever lived, I established a deep bond to both the municipal and the university libraries. It started with the small lending library in my birth town in North-Eastern Italy and then, after migration, it was consolidated by a life-long love for the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne. My first university library was the Chiefly Library at the Australia National University in Canberra—where I spent blissful hours in my undergraduate years. And for my post-graduate training in Paris in the late 1970s, in addition to the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, I studied at the SaintGeneviève Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale—the original one, rue Richelieu—as well as in the recently opened and distressingly contemporary, open-shelf library at the Centre Pompidou. I also remember with gratitude the libraries of the universities I had the fortune to visit as a researcher: the Historical Studies and Social Science Library at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton; the Library of the European University Institute; the Senate House Library at the University of London. And then of course our own glorious university libraries, as well as the public library of the city of Utrecht. I salute and thank them all today!

I really have no words to convey to you my intense, utterly irrational love of reading. Honestly, if I had nothing else at hand, I would read out the street directory, the shopping lists, I would memorise names and reorganise them as poems. So my parting words to the younger ones are: when you are bored and confused—just read! When you are down—read! When you do not know what to do with yourself—read some more!

How to honour and celebrate the pleasures of the text?

Close textual reading and commentary is the key to the Humanities, in all their variations and for me—of the pre-digital-screen generation—it is deeply connected to the Gutenberg Galaxy of printed books. The smell of paper, the pages that one turns and returns to, and the annotations of course, strictly by pencil! There is just nothing like it. Reading, thinking, and writing about what you have been reading and thinking, is a way of living life at a higher intensity. It is meditative, but also pro-active. It is a cognitive but also affective acceleration that makes us apprehend and comprehend much more than we could have anticipated. Language matters.

Reading enhances you and your thinking, always.

Thinking reflectively takes you somewhat by surprise to open up new modes of relation to reality. Especially critical thinking does that—that precious mental disposition that takes off from the empirical concreteness of texts, or fragments of texts, traces of texts. Even hallucinations of fragment of traces of texts can heighten your perception. Books are vectors, connectors, highways to many possible worlds.

Feminist critical thinking and literature in particular connect to the lived experience of real-life women and LBGQTQ+ people in the world, with a force of undeniable, in-your-face evidence that, at times, just takes your scholarly breath away. Critical thinking, supported by extensive readings of the experiences of others, opens up new paths of reflection, new modes of reaching out to the people out there, in unfamiliar zones. It is life collectively shared and more justly lived.

5 | CURIOSITY FOR THE PRESENT

Which takes me to the other source of motivation for my scholarly work, an intense attachment to and curiosity towards the contemporary world. I love academic knowledge, science and scholarship, but as an impatient baby-boomer I found out very early in my life that the education system tended to be devoted to the preservation of the past and was hence rather inward-looking. The function of so many academic disciplines in my preferred field—the Humanities—is to do justice to their own history, so as to preserve it and transmit it. As a systemic reader and devoted scholar, I value these ideals and share them. I consider them as a necessary reason to study one of the Humanities disciplines, in my case Continental philosophy. Necessary, but not sufficient as a reason. Why?

Because the challenges of growing up in a fast-changing world propelled us into a far closer and more urgent relationship to the present. I and my generation had to come to terms with those fast changes as we witnessed the arrival of the first televisions, vacuum-cleaners and washing and copying machines, LP's, transistor radios, the first walk-men, CD players etc. I have my own private museum of dead media at home. Because times, they are a-changing! And the scale and speed of the ongoing transformations has fascinated, preoccupied me, and worried me sick at times. In any case, it has never stopped interpellating me, calling out to me, asking me to think again, to think harder and, more importantly, to think otherwise.

As a member of a gender, a sex and a class that were historically excluded from higher education and research to begin with,³ I found that the main significance of studying the past was as a site that can be explored and interrogated. In order better to understand the patterns,

³I am the first member of my family to attend university.

the alleged reasons and the web of entitlements and privileges that made these structural exclusions possible. This approach kept me going in my research on feminist, gender, LGBTQ+, race, ethnicity, ecology and posthumanist themes. I wanted to hold the past to accountability, while trusting in our present scholarly ability to cast light on these underexposed aspects of our history, both in society and in scholarship. And to improve them in the short-term future (Braidotti, 1991).

In my explorations of contemporary culture, the guiding factor in setting the research questions—as well as the answers we collectively attempted to formulate—are the lives and the experiences of those who are not included. The excluded are many: those who do not conform to set expectations of what a scholar should look like, in terms of gender, class, race, ethnicity, disabilities. Those with a different language or the wrong accent. Those who do not even know the cultural taste, the table manners, the dressing code of a class of people who conformed to the standard vision of the academic subject of knowledge.

My teacher Genny Lloyd gave a name to this standard vision, ‘The Man of Reason’ (1984): the professor, the academic, the scientist. He who knows best; he who shall not be disputed; he who has the fingers on the power switches of pass/fail, inclusion/exclusion. For my generation, it was definitely a He, representing the standard and the norm against which women, especially Black women, and LGBTQ+ people were found lacking. The marginals have to be three times better than the norm to achieve what dominant subjects take for granted as their due. The marginals will be free when they can at last be as mediocre as the average dominant subjects, and do as well as they.

6 | OTHER SUBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE

The reductive and exclusionary vision of the subject of knowledge, together with the European claim to represent the universal human, were targeted for persistent criticism by feminist theory. They became the objects of enquiry, analyses, comments and corrections that displeased those who worship and fetishize Eurocentric universalism. But they also carried into academic knowledge and research a vast new repertoire of issues and insights. They liberated the enormous potential of alternative voices and marginalised intellectual resources.

The first woman student to attend this university, Anna Maria van Schuurman, in 1638, could follow classes by special dispensation, provided she stayed hidden behind a partition in order not to distract the male students (Schurman, 1641). It appears that the poor darlings had a fragile nervous system. Van Schuurman was already by then a renowned writer and thinker befriended by queens, philosophers and celebrities, but was not admitted to a university degree. She believed that to change the world, women needed to show nothing other than their own intelligence. Problem is that the institutions did not let Anna Maria *show* even that.

I am happy that the University Bell, which was cast in 2011 by the Utrecht Guild of Bellringers—of which I am a proud member⁴—was named after and offered in memory of this great woman. I am very honoured that the Anna Maria University Bell will be rung for us today, just as we leave this Aula.⁵

Virginia Woolf mused over exclusion as well in 1938, standing on the bridge of a Cambridge College that would *not* admit women, let alone tolerate any criticism of its sexist, classist, colonial ways. She assessed critically the price of joining the academic procession of the learned men and what it would take to gain admission to the formal professions, as well as to scientific research and scholarship. She advised us to take that risk and march right in.

⁴I have been an active member of the Utrecht Bell-ringing Guild (funded in 1979) for decades and cherish the feeling of the crisp Sunday morning air as we climb up the bell tower to reach our heavenly ringing hall. <https://www-utrechtsklokkenuidersgilde.nl>.

⁵I thank my colleague Louis Akkermans for ringing the Anna Maria academic bell.

But other voices echo as well. Sojourner Truth, a black activist looking at white suffragettes in 1851, listening to their emancipatory message, asking: ‘Ain't I a woman too? Do I also count? Or does my blackness delete my femaleness, so that I'm neither fully human, nor correctly gendered?’ (1994). The sexualised and racialised ontology of the human is called into question fully by these simple words, that resonate here today, across time, to trace a path for the future.

The presence of the excluded is something I can neither forget, nor forgive. I carry their voices, their demands, in my heart and mind, and I think alongside them. I have often said that remembering injustice, exclusion and oppression, and choosing to bear witness to these wrongs is a way of ‘forgetting to forget’, of being inhabited, haunted maybe, by the pain of others. Living with, thinking across and processing this pain, produces a critical approach that combines life and knowledge in very distinctive ways.

Those who wish to de-legitimise this way of knowing, dismiss it as activist research, or just a therapeutic process. As if these were terms of abuse. However, activism and therapy are deadserious matters. Studying the psychopathology of sexism, racism and colonialism is a serious scholarly endeavour, as shown by De Beauvoir's account of the social costs of making some people into ‘the second sex’. Black philosopher and psychotherapist Franz Fanon, in his pathbreaking analysis of the psychic damages caused by colonialism and enslavement, cast a new light on the connection between psychotherapy and scientific understanding. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he studied how the traces and signs of traumatic violence in colonialism affect identity and also impact on political subjectivity.

In the 1980s, feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde (1984) voiced the pain and the resilience of black women and lesbians. In the same period, feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) demonstrated how deeply the symbolic wounds and the pain of erasure are rooted in the psyche of the excluded. And how they need specific ways of healing and modes of political activism. This is no activist research, but scholarly insight and deeper understanding, and with them, profound wisdom and empathy. Living and thinking with, that is to say honouring the pain of, the excluded is an epistemic and methodological process. It is a technique of analysis that extracts knowledge from pain, insight from humiliation, wisdom from watching the folly of others. Minority knowledges, in their huge diversity, share this epistemic root when they confront academic scholarship and established disciplines.

I have devoted much of my research to register, transcribe, transpose and reframe these nonacademic sources of knowledge. And to bring them in, into these hallowed halls of recognition and esteem. I have done so by combining activism with academic excellence. I chose this path because I believe that academic knowledge is *in* and *of* the world and that scholars are accountable to their communities—and not only to their disciplines—for the knowledge they produce. Which also makes us accountable for the marginal or minority knowledges as a massive resource, an untapped potential to generate alternatives, illuminate the past otherwise and design possible futures.

7 | KEY IDEAS

Investigating the ways of knowing by and through those who are excluded—whom I call ‘the missing people’—is the project that unfolded through my two most recent trilogies of books; respectively on nomadism (Braidotti, 1994, 2002, 2006, 2011a, 2011b) and on posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013, 2019, 2022). I developed a philosophy of the nomadic subject and then the posthuman subject. Weird-sounding terms both of them and strange titles perhaps, but deliberately chosen so as to jolt reading and thinking habits and illuminate new terrains, bringing forth under-explored experiences and voices.

One red thread running across both trilogy projects is my commitment to critical and feminist genealogies, in a very situated, materialist intergenerational approach to the history of ideas. Virginia Woolf (1929) first taught me also the strategy of ‘thinking back through the women’ and to honour the previous generation of feminists, especially those who came of age in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s like Simone de Beauvoir, before the second feminist wave. My generation of feminists was fortunate enough to experience the institutional presence and support of talented women teachers and supervisors, many of whom were feminists themselves. Their influence on my generation of younger philosophers radicalised by feminism was immense.

The concern for genealogical lines of interconnection is a matter of great concern for me and it manifests itself in my work in two distinct ways: first by using the scholarly apparatus of bibliographies and footnotes as a genealogical tool. These textual instruments are for me not only a form of accountability—footnotes as democratic participatory devices—but also a living memory of what I inherited from the past. I handle references with loving care and feel enormous respect for the scholarship that preceded me. The second tool I adopted as my method is the publication of academic collections, anthologies and, after a while, encyclopaedias, glossaries (Braidotti et al., 2022; Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018), and reference manuals in philosophy, (Braidotti, 2010a) as well as critical (Braidotti et al., 2018; Braidotti & Gilroy, 2016) and feminist theory (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Braidotti & Griffin, 2002). All these are team efforts, collectively thought out and coproduced. These guiding principles of honouring the past and working affirmatively for the future find their most concrete application in the archive of papers, documents, manuscripts and books that I have built up, over the space of my career, at the International Archive of the Women's Movement (IIAV) in Amsterdam.⁶ Equally, my numerous Italian publications and papers which are archived at the Italian Women's Library in Bologna.

8 | NOMADISM

The different theoretical phases of my work are not chronologically separate and distinct, but rather nodes of concentrated efforts that are continuous and flowing in and out of one another. Looking more specifically at my nomadic concept, outlined in a series of books on non-unitary or fluid identities and mobility, it is clear that they emerged from the specific historical context of the mid-1990s. This has gone down in history as the era of postmodernism, which launched the discussion about non-fixed and nonbinary subjects. Trained in Paris by the poststructuralist philosophers like Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze who initiated this movement of ideas, I became interested in the construction of robust counter-subjectivities, not only in their deconstruction.

The core of my philosophical project of nomadism deals with identity, subjectivity and transformative politics, raising issues of entitlement, empowerment and ontological desire. What fascinated me was and still is the emergence of alternative subject formations, as the result of a collective effort or praxis, ‘external’ to the individual selves, which however also mobilises their innermost resources and singular structures. The nomadic subject is a heterogeneous assemblage, made of constant shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, that is to say entrapment and empowerment. Whatever semblance of unity there may be in our subjectivity, it is the effect of affective encounters and collective constructions. That is to say the dramatisation of multilayered relations, inter-connections and encounters with multiple others.

⁶With deep thanks to Annette Mevis in particular. https://atria.nl/?gclid=EAlaIqobChMI96aklZSS_Q1Vhf3Ch0M6gE8EAYASA_AEgK90vD_BwE.

The implication of this process ontology is that which sustains the entire process of becoming-subject, is a founding, primary, vital, and original desire to become, a form of power as *potentia* that calls for actualisation. For me nomadic thought is situated embodied and embedded ethics that contests the institution of fixed dominant identities to propose alternatives. Nomadism stands for heterogeneity, complexity, affectivity, neo-materialism and intersectionality, as well as multiple forms of mobility. I focussed consequently on the counter-subjectivity of marginalised subjects, like women & LBGTQ+ people, Black, migrant and Indigenous people. I always defended their ability to generate alternative visions of subjectivity, norms and values—and of what it means to be human. As the title of my lecture indicates: we are all rooted, though we flow.

What preoccupied me most in thinking about fluid subject positions was to contextualise them within the rather opportunistic forms of mobility engendered in the fast-moving context of advanced capitalism. This is a system that functions by a commodified form of controlled mobility: goods, commodities, capital and data circulate much more freely than human subjects or, in some cases, the less-than-human subjects who constitute the bulk of migrants, asylumseekers and illegal inhabitants of the world.

Free circulation of capital and data does not mean free movement of all people. On the contrary, many walls and electronic barriers have gone up since the Berlin wall came down. Borders are fraught with violence and contestation. We do not all flow with the same ease. Advanced capitalism functions as an internally fractured system that combines high degrees of mobility, with even higher forms of regulation and control often through mechanisms of technological surveillance (Zuboff, 2019). It also makes technological mediation compatible with deep social and economic inequalities.

My project maps these contradictions and how the different speeds and forms of mobility—or lack thereof—of our times construct new marginal subject positions: the migrants, asylumseekers, unregistered alien others, hyphenated citizens and others. Nomadism adds material grounds, heterogeneity, complexity, and intersectionality to the discussion on fluid identities. Yet, I claim that while we may flow, we are also rooted. Therefore, I say that nomadic subjects are embodied and embedded, starting from very different locations in space and time. My focus on the ‘disposable’ bodies of the sexualised, racialised and naturalised others, shows to what an extent we may all be humans, but how some are definitely more nomadic or even more mortal than others.

In this respect, my nomadic project is also a decolonial and anti-nationalist project, a critique of Eurocentrism from within and a way of activating the centre away from inertia and selfreplication. I defend a nomadic European project of revisiting the uncomfortable moments of our history, including colonialism, fascism and persistent inequalities (Braidotti, 2010b). I see the European Union as an anti-fascist and anti-racist project, calling into question the privileges of whiteness and enacting therefore a critique of methodological nationalism (Beck, 2007) joins a planetary debate which black, anti-racists, postcolonial and other critical thinkers have put on the map.

9 | POSTHUMANISM

The posthuman phase follows on quite smoothly from the work on nomadic identities. To those who think that the posthuman is an awful term—I could not agree more. But I only adopted it to make a critical analysis of cognitive capitalism, which is a system that profits from the knowledge and the capitalisation of all living matter. At a time when living matter and the environment are depleted and devastated. What marks the posthuman turn is the expansion of technological mediation of the very fabrics of living systems—both human and nonhuman.

The so-called Fourth Industrial revolution is driven by the convergence between previously distinct branches of technology, notably bio-genetics, neural sciences, information technologies and AI, nanotechnologies and the Internet of things. It has come to indicate the relative marginalisation of human intervention in this technological universe run by machineto-machine communication and technologically enhanced, data-collecting and retrieving devices, or ‘smart’ things. Informational capital—the regenerative potency and selforganizational vitality of matter itself—is what it is all about. For instance, through knowledge of the genetic codes of entire species, including our own, and an extended system of patenting. Or the capitalisation of data, bits and bytes of codes that transfer massive amounts of information.

I started working on critical posthumanism to resist this commodification of living systems, drawing also a critical light on the role of the contemporary university in supporting such a system that monetarises life itself. In my posthuman work, however I also take on the tacit anthropocentrism of so much work in the Humanities, that assumes the exceptionalism of our species and its hierarchically dominant position in the natural order. The urgent question is how to displace this species hierarchy in the context of the current climate crisis.

Remember that we are not all human in the same way or to the same extent, but in this amazing historical moment we are going through, with the speed and scale of technological expansion matched by the scale and speed of environmental degradation, between promises of superhuman evolution and enhancement on the one hand and stark possibilities of extinction by climate change on the other, in this conflicting intersection of opposite forces—at such a time let us remember that ‘we’-are-in-*this*-together-but-we-are-not-One-and-the-Same.

Posthumanist perspectives do not just criticise, but also offer alternatives. I especially foreground the relevance for the posthumanist debate of the knowledge practices of those sexualised, racialised and naturalised ‘others’, whose exclusion is necessary to the selfassertion of the dominant subject. The contribution of marginal and minority knowledges is essential in planning sustainable futures. All the more so as we need to enlist the resources of the imagination to co-write possible scenarios together. Feminist science fiction, Afrofuturism, speculative literature, world literature, the arts in the great variety—art practice as research methodology—are all inspirational contributions to visions of possible futures.

These speculative efforts are sustained by affirmative passions and design alternative worlds. This is a pragmatic attempt to inject inspiration and vision in a world that is gasping for air, wondering what may come next. Knowing, with Anna Maria van Schuurman, Sojourner Truth and Virginia Woolf and million others, that the human was *never* neutral to begin with, I explored how we—the voices of the minorities—can intervene in the contemporary debate about posthuman becoming. Think we must, critically and collectively, about what kind of humans and posthumans we are in the process of becoming.

9.1 | The new humanities

My posthuman work is also a commentary on and a contribution to the contemporary academic Humanities (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019). In this phase, I wanted to pursue the double aim of critiquing both humanism and anthropocentrism. It is crucial to honour the criticism of the humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the measure of all things in light of feminist, anti-racist, decolonial and anti-fascist theories. Negative and exclusionary processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalisation of marginalised and excluded ‘others’ are coextensive with the formation of the human as coinciding with this humanist vision of ‘Man’. This vision of the human defines himself as much by what it excludes as by what it includes in his self-representation.

This bias, which claims to be universalistic, in fact over-represents the interests and preferences of ‘Man’ in a Eurocentric, masculinist biased manner. Far from being an abstract

universalist ideal, this human coincides with masculine, white, Eurocentric, dominant languages, normative ideals. Making such a statement does not mean to fall into relativism, of the cognitive or moral kind, but rather to respect the diversity of perspectives emerging from different locations, as I stated above. The Humanities consequently should stop neglecting the viewpoints and knowledge practices of those sexualised, racialized and naturalised ‘others’ whose exclusion is necessary to the self-assertion of the dominant subject. Their viewpoint is especially generative and important for posthuman scholarship and public discussions about the future of humanity.

It is equally important however to explore the consequences of the critique of anthropocentrism. The status of naturalized others deserves special attention in that it challenges further unspoken assumptions within the Humanities. It specifically calls into question a far more pervasive bias—anthropocentrism or species supremacy—which is at work as much in mainstream ideas about ‘Man’ as in the academic Humanities, but is also present in some radical epistemologies. In so far as much critical theories rest on a social constructivist method, they function by dualistic distinctions between nature and culture, mind and body, the environment and society, that are unable to take on the contemporary challenges framed by the posthuman convergence. Unless they can take up a nature-culture continuum in the redefinition of subjectivity and knowledge, critical theories run the risk of remaining anthropocentric in spite of their often professed anti-humanism.

The rise of the Environmental Humanities to address climate change and species extinction, and of the Digital or Computational Humanities, as well as the Neural and Medical Humanities, is changing the game. Ultimately, my critical work on the posthuman gets enlisted to the task of renewed advocacy for the ‘new’ Humanities, also known as the Posthumanities (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Braidotti, 2019, 2022). The posthuman future of the Humanities looks very promising (Braidotti et al., [forthcoming](#))

10 | POWERS OF AFFIRMATION

Against the sceptics and the prophets of doom, I want to stress the affirmative side of the situation we are in, within the posthuman convergence. In science and scholarship we trust. And being profoundly in love with the world and with the present, I did and do my best to rethink subjectivity in such changing conditions. I studied how our self-perception and self-representation are dealing with the posthuman transition and what happens to subjectivity in this complex field of forces. We alternate between exhilaration and anxiety in confronting the magnitude of the changes in our technologically mediated environmentally dilapidated world. I remain fascinated by what are we capable of becoming, as a community of scholars and citizens.

I have placed my trust in the posthuman ethics of affirmation. Affirmation is a social practice, a relational daily effort at constructing a communitarian ethics of relationality and care for both humans and non-humans. It aims at creating social horizons of hope, inclusion, equality and justice. Affirmation is not the shallow optimism of our consumer society and a market economy that sells youth and beauty, while relentlessly consuming all that lives, and commodifying even our aspirations and desires. Affirmative ethics underscores instead the more sober efforts of extracting knowledge from the pain of exclusion. It sustains the will to honour those who are missing, who simply could not—nor were they allowed to—be here, at least not yet, not in this way. Many of them are not even alive anymore.

The presence of these excluded is an affirmative force that drives the production of counter-memories and alternative knowledges generated by and from the margins. This is beneficial to all, especially to those who still believe they are the centre. Affirmation is the force that endures and carries on, in spite of the times, together with the times, for the love of the world—and for the hell of it.

11 | CONCLUSION

All things said and done, at this twilight hour, as a career ends and so many others begin or explode and rise further, what is left to say? That I feel nothing but gratitude for all the opportunities and challenges this distinguished old university has given me. And immense affection for the many generations of students, colleagues, Deans and Rectors I had the privilege to work with and who shaped my academic practice and career.

I am aware of how much more remains to be done and have no illusions about having provided ultimate answers to the complex issues raised by systemic exclusions and disqualification from scientific knowledge production. But I do know—and this is for the young ones—that they may delay you, but they will NEVER manage to delete you.

What is inexhaustible is our desire to persevere in thinking, against all odds. Enduring in our intensities is the innermost essence, or *potentia* of all living entities: the life in me that does not answer to my name. This vital sense of life is not to be taken for granted, or be sacralised in religious terms. It remains—for me—materialist and secular. ‘Just a life’ expresses a deep sense of belonging to a common world, the only one world we have.

The desire to get on with it, is the fragile yet irrepressible bond that interconnects all living entities. This produces a roar of energy that is mostly unperceived and imperceptible, yet indispensable. And knowledge, scholarly research, and hence the university are major mechanisms of capture for your intensive energies. So my parting message to the new generations is: don't drop out, drop *in*! And I did not say ‘lean in’—just *stay* in academic research and help build the next generations of bright critical minds committed to a better more just and equitable future. Let curiosity be your guiding light.

Find the courage to resist conformism and habit. Do speak truth to power, and remember that it is the rebel in you that is creative, not the conformist. Continue to share in the somewhat oldfashioned yet indispensable ideal of service to the community, the love of knowledge, the faith in scientific evidence. Continue to be critical, radical, disruptive, but do it with excellence, with grace and conviction. You, who bear witness to the missing people, to that pain and critical insight—you are the future of the world.

Critique and affirmation; Radicalism and excellence; the world and the academic archives—what a glorious programme! And what a challenge! I have done my best to be a good ancestor for you and now the time has come for me to wish you all the best, as I bow out as elegantly as I can. It has been a deep honour to belong to this amazing community and a profound joy to serve it to the best of my ability. From the depth of my heart, Utrecht—THANK YOU!

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