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ANOTHER HUMANITY

DECOLONIAL ETHICS FROM DU BOIS TO ARENDT

Benjamin P. Davis

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And to the Columbia University student journalists of WKCR who, on the night of 30 April 2024, scraped together a radio broadcast of the police raid on their campus and, when they returned to music on the afternoon of 1 May, uplifted us with Donald Joyce's organ, playing Philip Glass

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Part II: Risking the Personal

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For legal reasons, I need to say that the epigraph is a quote from Freud and the Non-European by Edward Said. Copyright © 2003 by Edward W. Said, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

Finally, I would like to thank my editor, Carol Macdonald, for her ongoing support of my work.

Preface

In his appraisal of Picasso's 1937 painting *Guernica*, named after the small Basque town on which German planes dropped bombs in the Spanish Civil War, the Trinidadian historian and activist C. L. R. James noted that the painting was 'produced at the time of universal crisis'.[1] Paying particular attention to the woman with the lamp, James read her suffering as itself 'open opposition to the total chaos' as well as a form of 'intellectual resistance'.[2] Thinking across species, James saw in the bull not just the invincibility of the Spanish people, but 'a solid, material living figure which stands for the eternal human value of survival'.[3]

When I look at the painting today, I see an almost photographic report in the greys, blacks and whites. I see unnamed creatures trying to hold on.

It strikes me that our time is not the time of the Spanish Civil War. I don't know anyone who has given up their position to fight against fascism. No, our time is a much more professionalised time, a time when solidarity is more likely to be proclaimed loudly than lived out humbly and through sacrifice. But ours is still very much a time of war.

I finished writing this book as Israel's planes dropped US-made bombs on Palestinian people during an ongoing war on Palestine. Al Jazeera played in the background of my days, sleep felt like the impossible goal of my nights, and my phone continually dinged as friends let me know they are 'OK'

(whatever that means) or that they can't say much via text because, for instance, in Jerusalem random body searches have increased and they could be arrested for what they send to me. My phone rang and rang as colleagues who started to write, speak or post about Palestine for the first time began to face repercussions and wondered if their sudden feeling of paranoia made any sense. (It does.)

From October to now, as I write this Preface in December, I have watched the survival of ordinary families in Gaza. I have wondered whether my friends in the West Bank are still alive amidst increasing settler/military aggression there. I have seen in the ordinary resistance of Palestinians, in their courage and witness, a compelling spirit of human survival. And I have returned yet again to the philosophers who, for a number of years, have been those to whom I turn in times of 'total chaos', my lights making visible how people over time have stood together for 'human value': W. E. B. Du Bois, Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Wynter, Edward Said and Hannah Arendt.

This book is about these philosophers' inviting and imaginative visions of what it means to be human. It is about how we might together re-construct, perform and defend a truly universal sense of humanity, another humanity, one that responds to, and might lead us beyond, our time of universal crisis.

Benjamin P. Davis
Madrid
20 December 2023

Notes

1. C. L. R. James, 'The Olympia Statues, Picasso's *Guernica* and the Frescoes of Michelangelo in the Capella Paolina', in *The Future in the Present* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1977), p. 229.
2. Ibid. pp. 230, 232.
3. Ibid. p. 232.

Freud's uneasy relationship with the orthodoxy of his own community is very much a part of the complex of ideas so well described by Deutscher, who forgets to mention what I think is an essential component of it: its irremediably diasporic, unhoused character . . . But I would want to qualify Deutscher by saying that this needn't be seen only as a Jewish characteristic; in our age of vast population transfers, of refugees, exiles, expatriates and immigrants, it can also be identified in the diasporic, wandering, unresolved, cosmopolitan consciousness of someone who is both inside and outside his or her community. This is now a relatively widespread phenomenon, even though an understanding of what that condition means is far from common.

—Edward W. Said, 'Freud and the Non-European'

Introduction: Thinking Race and Humanity Together (An Attempt)

When I read academic books, my biggest wish is usually that the authors would tell me how they arrived at their questions – not just what their questions are, but how they got there.

I wrote this book as a settler in the United States who has come to see the present as a time of war – a global war about land against Indigenous peoples, a war that is deeply tied to the forced labour of Black people, a war densely bound up with racism and with race.[1] I have seen this ongoing war, with its tremendous dispossession of land and labour, play out not just in the United States, but also in Brazil, Palestine and South Africa. From that position and those travels, I wrote as a way of testing out ideas for living otherwise.

When I tell you about a place before I offer an argument, it is because I am sympathetic to the writer Binyavanga Wainaina's suggestion that 'maybe all that is required of us is to document, to simply document our times if we are writers, document in the flawed way that seems true to us'.[2] When I move to my reading of a philosopher and make an argument based on that reading, I try to do so in what Frantz Fanon called a 'concrete language', which he contrasted to a 'technical language' that, by obscuring ideas and making people

feel they cannot understand the world around them, is itself another form of dispossession.[3]

By writing personally and concretely, I am trying to respond to social problems. When I cite a theorist, it is because they helped me to think about the series of ethical questions that motivates this book: What does it mean to be part of war and dispossession? How to own up to that violence? How to account for that suffering? How to challenge the structures and forces and companies and people that create that displacement, and how to see what new relations (and possibilities) emerge as a result? What are my responsibilities, and what is my place (in every sense), amidst a dispossessive form of life that predominates today? How to criticise every element of that coercion without losing sight of what we can construct?

'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly', Theodor Adorno asserted, and that insight seems correct in this context.[4] So too does Sylvia Wynter's observation that empire's educational apparatus 'instructs us' – all of us – 'to want to be of a specific ethnoclass of humanity'.[5] This means that even if most of us, in practice, side against Adorno and try to live our wrong lives a little more rightly, we are still susceptible (even likely) to follow social incentives that implicate us in dispossession – that normalise owning property, accumulating investment assets and dressing like the member of a rowing club (in our blazers, loafers and neutral sweaters, all made far away by people we don't know and don't really think about). What can ethical theory do, given all that? What can any of us do, given all that?

The authors I read in this book don't necessarily answer these questions, but they have sustained my belief in the importance of raising them. By staying with the questions and theories that have emerged from dispossession (and, relatedly, from racialisation), and by thinking with five diasporic philosophers as the book proceeds, I am ultimately asking: What

would the theory and practice of humanity look like if it started from and referred back to the dispossessed?[6] If at times I take too moralising of a tone in these pages, it is because I also want to stress the corollary question: Are we who are *not* part of what Fanon called *les damnés de la terre* willing to redistribute or repatriate – to give up with a view towards repair – the wealth and the land (and the psychological status they provide) that we have gained from this dispossession?[7]

When Said says in the epigraph that an understanding of where humanity is today is 'far from common', I include myself in the group that lacks understanding. I read the work of the aforementioned authors in order to dwell with this lack, to sit with the many forms of displacement that mark our time, and even, in an intellectual sense, to pursue exile (as Said encourages) – to consider 'what that condition means' for how we have come to understand ourselves, one another, and the political forms that we inherited but did not choose, that we uphold in accepting and performing their reality, and that we can make anew and make differently. By testing out my guiding authors' concepts in documented situations and through the essays that make up this book, and by tracing the figures of 'the human' and 'humanity' in their work, I read Du Bois, Glissant, Wynter, Said and Arendt as instructing us towards different wants, towards different forms of life – ultimately, towards another way of practising 'the human', what Glissant describes in terms of *living* 'another . . . humanity'.[8] In this way, I follow the philosopher Zahi Zalloua in saying that 'it is not at all clear that decolonizing the mind is a metaphor'.[9]

* * *

This book is a sequel to my 2023 book *Choose Your Bearing: Édouard Glissant, Human Rights and Decolonial Ethics*. In that book, I re-constructed the concept of 'human rights' by focusing on

the utility of rights claims for organising across communities and countries.[10] I still believe in the importance of connecting ethics and rights – beginning from, in Said's words, 'recognition of the fact that *citizens with rights* . . . are the moral norm'.[11] But rather than elaborate on that argument further, in this book I will enter a more esoteric debate: the contemporary debate in critical theory around the status of 'the human', a debate that perhaps initially seems further removed from ordinary life than the question of rights. It will be my task to bring this debate back to the ground in the pages that follow, to demonstrate how fundamental this question is, not least because the notion of 'the human' subtends any claim to human rights. Moreover, competing ideas around what it means to be human – and whether 'the human' is an ideal that is useful at all – continue to inform what the legal scholar Patricia Williams called 'the alchemy of race and rights' we all live amidst.[12]

Importantly, the authors who are the focus of this book are not just the authors to whom I have returned in searching for different forms of life; they are also – alongside Frantz Fanon, Joy James and a few others – the foundational sources to whom both promoters and critics of 'the human' and 'humanity' return in advancing two remarkably separate lines of critical theory today. By starting from Du Bois, Glissant and Wynter in this book, I am starting from three foundational authors in debates around the human, humanity and human rights today – debates that have also taken on Said and Arendt in varying ways, which I will elaborate upon in later chapters.

One response to the critics of 'the human' and 'humanity' would be to philosophically oppose their claims point for point. This role, the philosopher as the one who performs a scholastic refutation, can be important, and I will address some central criticisms below. But this mode of philosophising did not call to me following October 2023, as I existed in a state of what Said

described as being 'emotionally reclaimed . . . by Palestine', as being at once 'shattered' and 'reinvigorated'.[13] No, what I was after then, as now, was a much more constructive approach – a way of reading and thinking that returns us to that ancient, anchoring question of philosophy as a way of life or as an art of living.[14] It is in that spirit, more ancient than medieval, more about practices of repair than about scholarly refutations, that I have written what follows in regard to the question of the human today.

In *Another Humanity*, I will argue that the concepts of 'the human' and 'humanity' are sufficient tools to motivate a transition towards a decolonised future. My claim is not that critical theories are wrong in pointing out the limitations of 'the human' with respect to its historical and ongoing operations of exclusion based on race, gender, species and other axes of power. Rather, I start from the premise that in our modern/colonial world, all concepts are contaminated by histories of asymmetrical power, indeed by histories of domination, such that the task becomes not to throw out problematic concepts (which would leave us with none) but instead to strategically leverage the concepts that could be the most politically useful. To put this another way: if we are indeed living in a time of 'the coloniality of being', then our search for an untainted 'exteriority' no longer makes sense.[15] The needed conceptual work becomes strategic; we need what the cultural theorist Stuart Hall called 'strategic points of departure'.[16] I contend that 'the human' is a strategic point of departure for necessary political work today: the work of building a world where human rights are truly universal and defended by our very forms of life. I will make this argument throughout the course of this book. But at the outset, I need to qualify my argument. To do so, I will just tell a story.

* * *

One of the most rewarding parts about having written a book is receiving invitations to speak about it and being received by others with their questions and critiques and confirmations. As someone who grew up in a small river town in Minnesota, I never take for granted the opportunity to learn how people in various places experience the world. This is also a research method I have actively pursued for some time, only realising it could be called a method when I first read Du Bois's Preface to *Color and Democracy*, where he justifies that book's thesis based on 'long study and wide travel'.[17] Speaking about *Choose Your Bearing* has only heightened my fascination with how theory travels, and it has made me want to study more in turn.

After I submitted this book, but before I revised it, I was invited to speak at Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha, South Africa. There I learned for the first time about a position of 'non-racialism' advanced by a group of scholars who rely on the language of 'the human'. I was told that the anthropologist Zimitri Erasmus is part of this group – I had asked a colleague about her because I enjoyed and learned from her book *Race Otherwise*, especially how it called for a 'double politics', meaning 'to acknowledge the ways in which race continues to matter, while working towards its undoing'.[18] As I understand Erasmus in this claim, both steps are crucial, as is their order: settlers and white people often zoom to the second element without starting from, referring back to, and allowing the first acknowledgement to bear on our theory and praxis. We cannot start from the working beyond, the undoing, without first being conditioned by the initial acknowledgement of how 'race continues to matter'.

For Erasmus, 'double politics' also involves taking action 'against racism as a power structure, as well as against the meanings of race that underpin this structure'.[19] The promise of 'double politics' is to outline a practice that could lead to

'unity among the subjugated in defiance of colonial racial codification and its consequences'.[20] Such a 'double politics' still sounds good to me – and yet, as always, the way we get to this 'unity' matters very much, as does defining who counts as 'subjugated'. And even more so I wonder what this double politics would look like in everyday life: in our ordinary interactions on the bus, in the classroom, or as we make food with friends in our kitchens – other spaces we theorists rarely discuss.[21]

To be honest with you as we begin, reader, I do not know how to practise this double politics. I do not know what it means, precisely and concretely, both to acknowledge and to undo race in conversations with colleagues, friends and partners. I do not know how to minimise harm in even having these conversations, given where we are at, right now, as a species, and given how race is often experienced as simultaneously a form of alienation and a site of belonging. Perhaps it is out of this deeply personal uncertainty – and the missteps and connections that have come from it in community and friendship and loss – that I have written this book.[22] If that is true, then my guiding questions have emerged, as Du Bois said in reflecting on his work, 'not so much of my study, as of my human companionship'.[23]

In any case, one morning in Gqeberha, a few days after my conversation about Erasmus, I had breakfast right when the dining room opened (half past six) at the four-star hotel where the conference organisers had generously put us up. As I sat drinking English breakfast tea after eating a hot meal that was prepared for me by a short-order cook, a colleague who is part of this non-racialism group of scholars asked to join me. I said yes, and we began talking about our research. I told him about this book, and he explained that my archive here is more or less that of the non-racialists, especially insofar as I take inspiration from Paul Gilroy's work in and following

his 2000 book *Against Race*. In response, I asked my colleague about his approach. Likely due to my time in a Black Studies Department – and specifically due to Chris Tinson's magnanimous and continual invitation for me to think more about *how* arguments about race are made – the more I heard about my colleague's specific version of the non-racialist position that morning, the less sense it made to me.

For to travel extensively in a short period of time is also to witness how densely the colour line still belts the world, meaning that we have not, in this century, yet surpassed the greatest problem of the past century, which Du Bois diagnosed in his famous words: 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.'[24] From the Senegalese man who approached me at a Florence café and asked me to buy his self-published book on migration, to the Ethiopians who scrub the floor of Ben-Gurion Airport, to the Black woman who makes coffee at the LAX Hyatt before 5 a.m. for frequent flyers travelling early or for hotel guests (like me) who can't sleep, it is evident that race still conditions/determines mobility and labour, as well as exposure to pollution and accumulations of fatigue, across the planet today.

As the winter breeze came off the Indian Ocean that morning in South Africa, I made this observation about mobility and labour to my colleague, and I noted that some would say it makes good sense to think with race for descriptive sociological accuracy, or to organise politically on the lines already set by a structuring force, just as workers do. And I heard in reply – a collegial reply, as this was a genial and generative conversation – points that I myself have made before: that to think or to organise through race is *nationalist* or *reductive* or *too easy* or *a capitulation to colonial categories*.[25] But I have come to disagree with these characterisations of theory that starts from questions of race. More and more they strike me as trying to read the world as if reading Du Bois's *Color and*

Democracy and only wanting to talk about democracy; they avoid what is foregrounded, determining and demanding to be worked through.

Indeed, and perhaps to the surprise of some friends, I have become part of the 'we' that the philosopher Norman Ajari describes in writing, 'We have all grown weary of the endless reminders that there is no biological basis to race.'[26] Those reminders usually function to shut down conversations that would be more helpful – socially and personally – if they were only just beginning. But instead, in the contexts with which I am most familiar, and as the political theorist Utz McKnight has argued, although 'the US is still very much a racial polity', the fact is that '[t]he conversation about race is attenuated in public so as to guard against its leading to questions about the place of Whiteness in society today'.[27]

Stuart Hall said that race is 'the modality in which class is "lived"'.[28] That line applies to white people as much as to Black people, rich people as much as to poor people. It explains why middle-class people around the world have no problem – or perhaps remain deliberately ignorant about – investing their money in the companies that make the weapons that ultimately kill Palestinians. In practice (that is, in our financial and affective investments, because practices are always already value-laden; practices are lived judgements), the deaths of racialised people are seen as a small price to pay for climbing towards the status of a dominant ethnoclass, or for maintaining one's position there. After all, isn't race one compelling explanation for how Christians in the US vocally and financially support the plight of white Ukrainian Christian refugees while staying much quieter about African Christians and Palestinian Christians who are Black or Arab refugees?[29] In the past few years, have you seen a US Christian church that flies the Nigerian and Palestinian flags alongside the Ukrainian flag? As a lawyer at the Palestinian

human rights group al-Haq (declared a 'terrorist organisation' by the Israeli government) explained to me in Ramallah, the way Israeli chemical factories have moved their operations to Tulkarem in the West Bank always made a certain kind of sense to him, because he grew up in Louisiana's 'cancer alley', where pollution from chemical plants disproportionately affects Black communities. And as South African scholars who draw from Black consciousness (instead of non-racialist) approaches stressed to me, to talk about Gaza is to talk about race.[30] Racialisation serves nation-states' and companies' and middle-class investors' military and economic goals; it is not, Hall says, 'as if the politics of race fell out of the sky'.[31]

Might we do well, then, to dwell with the multiple histories and facets of 'the politics of race' before we jettison a potentially powerful analytical and political tool? Don't our social movements and relations often break down precisely when we start to avoid, instead of having open conversations about, how race has shaped all of us? Could our discomfort talking about race signal its necessity? Might race be most influential precisely in the moments when we think it is least obvious, when we think it no longer bears on us?[32] Wouldn't it be worthwhile to talk about (to perhaps *begin* to understand) how race and war – as well as structures of labour, mobility and fatigue – inform each other *before* we say that thinking through race is a capitulation? Couldn't these conversations be enlivening and enlightening, as theorising together so often is – not, as Hall cautions, out of some 'moral intellectual duty', but because such difficult conversations help us place ourselves, because 'the issue of race provides one of the most important ways of understanding how this society actually works and how it has arrived where it is'?[33] 'What better way of beginning to come to terms with each other', Said adds, 'than to open one community to the other's history, actuality, and aspirations?'[34] Perhaps in this

one instance, *contra* Marx, we do need to interpret the world before we try to change it.

These were my thoughts as I sipped tea with my colleague as the hotel's Black staff waited on us.

* * *

One lesson from Négritude is that philosophy 'placed in the service of black peoples' is always already pro-human philosophy.[35] 'I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism', the poet and philosopher Aimé Césaire wrote in his 1956 letter resigning from the Communist Party.[36] 'My conception of the universal', he went on, 'is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars.'[37] More recently, the Black Studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott has echoed Césaire: 'Black freedom is not just freedom for Black subjects; it is a freedom that inaugurates an entirely new human experience for everyone.'[38] But the reverse does not hold. Claims to humanity and cosmopolitanism and global citizenship and love and universality do not necessarily suggest a position that is not anti-Black, which is also to say that they do not necessarily address historical and ongoing dispossession. As Césaire put it, '[I]t does not go without saying.'[39]

How can we with Northern passports speak of global citizenship without addressing our countries' policies that make it very difficult for African or Muslim scholars to travel to our countries? Might the nationalism or identity politics be found less in the racialised scholar who starts from race and more in our lack of interrogating and challenging the lack of reciprocity demonstrated by my own country's closed borders? As Said stressed over and over, dispossession remains the test case for claims to universality.[40] There can be (and often is) intellectual but not material reflexivity.[41]

One implication of my above analysis is that the onus should not be on the Black scholar to prove their ultimate humanism in making their 'nationalist' or 'biologically reductive' or 'un-deconstructed' argument that starts from Black strivings; the onus lies with theorists of humanity and cosmopolitanism and global citizenship and human rights (myself included) to first and sufficiently demonstrate our accountability to the dispossessed (those we are dispossessing). Then the conversation about humanity can proceed. To the extent that this book insufficiently owns up to this responsibility in painting its portrait of another humanity, it remains theoretically and practically limited.

Critiques of 'The Human'

Critiques of the concept of 'the human' remain important and necessary precisely because the history of pseudo-humanistic thought is ongoing. The *locus classicus* is the Dominican theologian Bartolomé de las Casas's advocacy for the humanity of Indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century while arguing for enslaved Africans to replace Indigenous people as labourers.[42] Las Casas would be included in Du Bois's observation that, in the modern historiography of white European Christians, Africa and its diasporas have been 'read almost out of the bounds of humanity'.[43] With past and present examples in mind, much contemporary critical theory has remained resolutely critical of using the concept of 'the human' for emancipatory political work. Indeed, my argument in this book runs against the contemporary grain in critical theory. A brief survey of recent literature shows an effort to jettison 'the human' across various disciplines and approaches.

Writing in 2009 from a position that has come to be known as decolonial theory, the decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo argues that:

[f]rom the sixteenth century to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, He who speaks for the human is an actor embodying the Western ideal of being Christian, being man and being human. In other words, 'human' in human rights is an invention of Western imperial knowledge rather than the name of an existing entity to which everyone will have access.[44]

In his influential 2016 book that was translated and published as *Necropolitics* in 2019, the historian Achille Mbembe calls for going beyond the 'internal' critique of Western humanism (made by Césaire, Fanon, Glissant, Wynter, Gilroy – the archive of this book) and draws our attention to 'the external critique', describing Afropessimism as 'a war that would be waged against the very concept of humanity since this concept is indeed the Trojan horse that has trapped the Negro in a permanent state of death, social or otherwise'.[45] Intervening in questions of human rights and international law, in her 2017 article 'Thinking against Humanity', the anthropologist Ayça Çubukçu reads Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon to argue that 'violence is central, and hierarchy is intrinsic to the political and ethical operations of "humanity"'.[46] Bringing together Continental metaphysics and Afropessimism, the literary theorist Calvin Warren takes 'a world of antiblack brutality' as a point of departure in his 2018 book *Ontological Terror* and articulates the titular concept as 'the terror that ontological security is gone, the terror that ethical claims no longer have an anchor, and the terror of inhabiting existence outside the precincts of humanity and its humanism'.[47] In her category-challenging 2020 book *Becoming Human*, the literary scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackson reads African, African American and Caribbean texts as working to 'critique and dispose prevailing conceptions of "the human" found in Western science and philosophy'.[48] Jackson finds in these texts resources 'to generate new possibilities for rethinking ontology: our being, fleshy

materiality, and the nature of what exists and what we can claim to know about existence'.[49] Commenting on Afropessimism, the critical theorist Alberto Moreiras noted in 2022 that '[t]he space of humanism has defined the space of modern politics, and it still does', and he has gone as far as to argue against '[h]uman narrative' because '[n]arrative subjects, particularly those in a political narrative, are always parasitic on Black suffering'.[50] 'The human and its subcategory, the inhuman', the geographer Kathryn Yussof notes about geology and the racial erasures of the term 'Anthropocene', 'are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction', such that one contribution of Black and Indigenous studies is to articulate and challenge 'intimate confinements and ongoing containments of humanist thought'.[51] As the theologian Norman Wirzba observes, 'The current question is whether the category of humanity itself should be retained.'[52] In sum, numerous prominent scholars from various disciplines engaged in critical theory – and often following one particularly theoretical line of Black Studies – currently maintain that the category of 'the human' is part of the white supremacist colonial problem, not a solution to it.[53] These modes of theory are part of what the philosopher Lewis Gordon, in *Existentia Africana*, had already diagnosed at the turn of the millennium as 'a pervasive ethos *against* humanistic solutions'.[54]

The aforementioned critics (and their work) have become influential enough to exemplify a wider trend in critical theory: to criticise and avoid appeals to 'the human' and 'humanity'. While I disagree with this theoretical strategy, it is nevertheless important here to give it more of its due. For this criticism, like all criticisms, emerges from a particular place and in response to specific needs. Indeed, it is worth noting, as Ajari does, that the success of Afropessimism in shaping discourse 'stems from its resonance with the lived experience

of young Black people in the twenty-first century', and this lived experience always justifiably deserves theoretical attention.[55] Moreover, much of the aforementioned criticism of 'the human' is accurate in important ways.

As the literary theorist Rei Terada has recently commented, 'the humanism of liberals' has a way of 'tak[ing] the place of analysis' and allowing one 'to be confirmed in one's political reality'.[56] For many critics of humanism, appeals to humanity have become inseparably bound with the most minimal appeals to institutional reform, which lack imagination and courage. More personally, in practice we humanists too often work first to maintain or improve our own institutional and economic position, an effort that requires an abandonment of thinking, a replacement of analysis with respectability, complacency and selfishness. In regard to what will be the guiding example in this book, in no place has the liberal humanist's lack of analysis and courage been more striking than in regard to the question of Palestine. While many critics of 'the human', including Mignolo and Çubukçu, have long been vocal about Palestine and theorised Palestine together with other contexts of racialisation and colonialism, I am sure that every reader of this book could name a colleague who identifies themselves as a liberal and a humanist but who has remained resoundingly silent in their teaching, research, writing, editing and programming on campus long before and especially since 7 October 2023.[57] This silence has extended to even the most basic appeals to first-amendment free speech and academic freedom on campus as well as to even the most minimal, fact-based teaching of the history of Palestine and Israel.

All of this to say, my sense is that part of the frustration behind criticisms of 'the human' today, perhaps a significant part, is motivated through this experiential (instead of theoretical) site of disagreement. When humanists whose publications and conference presentations most loudly call for universalism

and humanity in the abstract remain most silent when the question of the scope of human rights is actually on the table, appeals to universalism and humanity severely lose their credibility.[58] The legacy of Du Bois and Césaire we trade on becomes suspect, or at least hackneyed. Our peers and students see this very easily, and at some level surely we know it ourselves.

Although my above point remains anecdotal, it will soon be more publicly and widely proven. Even some scholars who remained silent in the wake of this most recent battle of the hundred years' war on Palestine will feel the need to comment and focus their respectable scholarly agendas on the campus protests, thus ironically becoming shapers of the discourse around a question they didn't have the courage to talk about or take action on when it mattered most.[59] This anecdotal point nevertheless remains important regarding my argument in this book: it suggests that contemporary debates around 'the human' arise not simply out of disagreements about how we read Césaire or Fanon but also through daily performances of protest or silence on our campuses. It remains true, as Said wrote in introducing *The Politics of Dispossession* in the early 1990s, that 'to defend Palestinian self-determination, and even to pronounce the word *Palestine* has been more difficult than any other political cause today'.[60]

Talking about Palestine wakes us from our respectable scholarly slumber in another way. As Said taught, and as I will argue throughout this book, to pronounce the word *Palestine* is also to invoke an idea, 'a vision of the future – the Palestinian idea – based not on exclusivism and rejection, but upon coexistence, mutuality, sharing'.[61] In that way, to say 'Palestine' is to talk about Indigenous land, reparations to communities of African descent, and where our endowment funds get invested. In other words, the idea of Palestine has become about much more than a particular place; it has also started conversations about human rights and repair. It is 'a long-standing corrective'.[62]

This is why Said says, 'It would be wrong to consider the struggle for Palestine only as a local struggle for land; it is that, of course, but equally, it is a far-reaching struggle for democratic rights and principles.'[63] Thought this way, supporting Palestine means that 'we must together formulate the modes of coexistence, of mutuality and sharing, those modes that can take us beyond fear and suffering into the future, and an extraordinarily interesting and impressive future at that'.[64] It means that the struggle for Palestine is 'the struggle for a new world order on the side plainly of freedom, knowledge, human rights – that is, on the side of everything that enhances life and humanly productive values'.[65] And here Said already begins a response to critics of 'the human'.

Indeed, the position the rest of this book develops will follow that of Said, who maintained a humanism until his passing, asserting in his late work, such as in the Introduction to *Reflections on Exile*, a clear path forward: 'If Western humanism was discredited by its practices and hypocrisy, these needed to be exposed, and a more universal humanism enacted and taught.'[66]

Defences of 'The Human'

Pace the above criticisms of 'the human', a few voices within critical theory nevertheless stand out for maintaining a commitment to a humanistic vocabulary. Lewis Gordon's work has been accurately characterised as offering a 'decolonial humanism'.[67] Gordon has gone as far as to define philosophy itself as 'humanity reaching beyond itself' coupled with a deep reflection on 'human responsibility not only to each other but also to other aspects of reality'.[68] Gordon's attention to human life as it is lived in food, music, dance, conversation and joy, as well as his emphasis on an ethics of responsibility, has deeply shaped this book.

Stuart Hall's student and cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy has developed a concept of 'planetary humanism' that also works against the contemporary critical grain.[69] In his 2019 Holberg Lecture, 'Never Again: refusing race and salvaging the human', Gilroy says, 'I think we should be sceptical about the seductions of the ontological turn recently promoted in the study of race politics'.[70] While he does not identify the purveyors of this 'ontological turn' in that lecture, the anti-humanist work of the aforementioned critical theorists, especially those advancing what has come to be called Afropessimism, provides points of contrast with both Gilroy's humanism and what the performance studies scholar Tavia Nyong'o calls Gilroy's 'critical sympathy' for active pursuits of human rights and humanitarian politics.[71] Importantly, Gilroy's criticism of ontological approaches is not a critique of all methods that focus on or start from race. As I read it, his own work often starts from questions of race, and the Black Atlantic sources and archives he works within (and named) remain foundational for thinking race and humanism together.

Returning to Hall in 2021, Gilroy was clear in arguing that '[r]acism is not another layer of misery to be logged and added to the dismal effects of other social processes. It has a constitutive power. It shapes and determines economic and political relations.'[72] This line complicates readings of Gilroy that see him as dismissing race, a reading his work admittedly invited explicitly in and following his 2000 *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. In that book, he lamented that '[n]obody ever speaks of a human identity' and that instead many people rely on more particular identity claims (such as race, gender and generation) that function 'to delineate and subdivide humankind'.[73] But his early work and his recent return to Hall's work nevertheless allow us to read Gilroy's corpus as overall starting from that first aspect of

Erasmus's 'double politics', namely, the acknowledgement of 'the ways in which race continues to matter'.

Drawing out questions of history and politics instead of proceeding through ontological claims also allows Gilroy to highlight the relevance of past struggles, including coalitions across born-into lines. For instance, he uses photos of protest signs saying 'Jews and Arabs Unite! Against British Imperialism' to suggest that his planetary humanism involves recycling what was fruitful about previous anti-imperial projects – 'I thought recycling was good, obviously it's not to everyone's taste here', he said to an audience in 2008 with characteristic good humour regarding criticism of his work.[74] Overall, Gilroy draws on a Black Atlantic archive of abolition focused more on risk than respectability, writing in his 2004 *Postcolonial Melancholia* that the kind of anti-racism he has in mind 'came via a disreputable abolitionism and translocal, multicultural, and anti-imperial activism that was allied with the insurrectionary practice of those who, though legally held in bondage, were subject to the larger immoralities of a race-friendly system of domination'.[75] Criticising 'race-friendly' ways of thinking in his later work is part of his overall critique of ontologising approaches to race, which is a more specific critique than simply evading or neglecting what Hall called 'the politics of race'. Gilroy advocates instead for a specific practice, namely, 'the ability to imagine political, economic, and social systems in which "race" makes no sense', which he presents as 'an invaluable transitional exercise' to a more just world.[76] This practice, experiment or 'exercise' resonates with the second part of Erasmus's double politics regarding race ('working towards its undoing').

Thought in terms of Erasmus's double politics, Gilroy's planetary humanism starts from the historical struggles around who counts as 'human' and outlines a strategy for imagining the world anew. Such an exercise in no way refuses to recognise

the economic and political realities that race continues to shape, structure and determine; it starts from that reality and attempts to think Relation otherwise, as Gilroy notes citing Glissant's concept. Glissant's 'creative use of [Relation]', Gilroy explains, 'brings a concern with what has been relayed together with a critical interest in relative and comparative approaches to history and culture and attention to what has been related in both senses of that word: kinship and narration'.[77] 'Approaching the issue of relation in this spirit', Gilroy goes on, 'requires a sharp departure from all currently fashionable obligations to celebrate incommensurability and cheerlead for absolute identity.'[78]

In this book, I follow Gilroy in attempting to think Relation otherwise. I would not position my argument polemically as against race. Just as I have learned from Black Studies scholars' call to recognise the tremendous enduring significance of the global colour line and caution about moving naively beyond race in theory before and without first shifting how race continues to shape practice ('continues to matter'), so too have I learned from Gilroy's insistence on avoiding ontology, incommensurability and absolutism in outlining a new form of Relation, what I am calling here 'another humanity'. I will try to hold those two lessons together, in a productive tension, in the rest of this book.

* * *

Beyond the work of Gordon and Gilroy, I have more specifically learned from how Joseph Drexler-Dries and Kristien Justaert thread a decolonial emphasis through the idea of the human in their collection *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*. The essays that make up *Another Humanity* further resonate with the approach the anthropologist Gary Wilder offered in *Concrete Utopianism*. 'The task of critical analysis', Wilder begins there, 'is to delineate the challenges that must be

confronted and the possible pathways that could help emancipatory forces overcome the existing order so as to promote human flourishing on a planetary scale.'[79] The pages of this book move through a similar spirit of criticism, one with its eye on paths that lead to planetary human flourishing. I am additionally sympathetic to the task Wilder outlines for critical theory when he writes, reading Marx, that our goal is 'to awaken humanity to its obscured and forgotten dreams without which it will continue to reconcile itself to the existing world'.[80] At the same time, however, I disagree with Wilder's assertion that 'revolutionary change . . . cannot rely upon or unfold within the parameters of existing concepts and consciousness'.[81] My claim is not that we need new 'social realities' that 'exceed the existing conceptual terms and frames', but rather that we need *to truly live out* our concepts in order to bring about new social realities.[82]

While the academic purpose of this book is to make an intervention into this textual question of how we read some of decolonial philosophy's foundational sources, I have suggested above that another question, the more significant question, has less to do, for instance, with how we read 'No Humans Involved' and whether or not we can say, in turn, that Wynter is ultimately a humanist. No, the bigger question here has to do with how each of us responds when the liberal goal of extending human rights is actually on the table. Because we still live in a world in which the post-war Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks institutions limit more expansive imaginaries, we cannot avoid negotiating with this liberal agenda, including its concepts.[83]

From where I stand, we should remain critical of all nation states, indeed of the nation state itself as a political form, while strategically supporting decolonial/Indigenous claims to sovereignty, self-determination and human rights. This is a political exercise that has more to learn from the cautions

of deconstruction than decolonial methods often do. (I will return to this point below.) This is another form of 'double politics', acknowledging (and even leveraging) today's predominant political categories as we work towards their undoing, as we imagine and experiment with political forms in which the concepts of sovereignty and property no longer make any sense. This transitional exercise remains the most important political task of our time.

To make this point, let me again start with a story.

Conceptual Sufficiency and Stuart Hall's Politics without Guarantees

In the summer of 2022, I returned home to rural Minnesota to visit my parents. This was just after the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, and I was thinking hard about the kind of political responsibility that Lewis Gordon says should be 'borne by every member of society, for the actions of their government'.[84] When I would 'head into town', as we country people say, I would come across an anti-choice billboard with a photo of a foetus alongside text in all caps: 'ALL HUMANS HAVE HUMAN RIGHTS'. This billboard indicates how both 'the human' and 'human rights' are being deployed against women's rights today. Our post-*Roe* moment also recalls Stuart Hall's conclusion to his 1979 essay 'The Great Moving Right Show', where he notes that conservative politicians have 'change[d] the nature of the terrain itself on which struggles of different kinds are taking place'.[85] 'That', he says, 'is exactly the terrain on which the forces of opposition must organize, if we are to transform it.'[86] If you want to move a concept, 'to rearticulate it another way', Hall goes on, 'you are going to come across all the grooves that have articulated it already'.[87]

In line with Hall's suggestion, during that summer I found that to think from rural Minnesota meant more than simply thinking alongside anti-choice billboards. It was also to think with Indigenous-led organisations, such as Honor the Earth, which led the charge in challenging the legality of the Line 3 pipeline in Minnesota. Honor the Earth's mission states:

> We believe a sustainable world is predicated on transforming economic, social, and political relationships that have been based on systems of conquest toward systems based on just relationships with each other and with the natural world . . . [W]e are committed to restoring a paradigm that recognizes our collective humanity and our joint dependence on the Earth.[88]

For Honor the Earth, 'humanity' is a term that can explain the violations of the Line 3 pipeline and invite actors to mobilise against the pipeline, as part of restoring a different paradigm of life on a shared planet. 'Humanity' is a term that, even after oil began flowing through the pipeline, has been used to make connections between Line 3 and other anti-pipeline struggles up and down the Mississippi River, from Minneapolis to St Louis to New Orleans. Moreover, it is not necessarily an anthropocentric concept, oriented towards a single species. For Honor the Earth, the concept of humanity is a political, legal and spiritual tool that reflects a larger practice of being human, itself situated within right relations to the Earth and thus receptive to it; and in this way, the concept also speaks to new (or old) ideas of rights, gender, maternity, species and time.

In suggesting that the human is a sufficient concept for decolonial work today, I follow the work of the legal scholar Patricia Monture-Angus, who has argued that the problem for decolonial politics is often not a conceptual one, but rather an ethical and political one about whether people are willing

to live out what the concept demands. She makes this point clear regarding how citizens of so-called Canada often choose to address questions of Indigenous rights:

> It boggles my mind to think that all of this constitutional debate, the number of conferences, the amount of federal money and federal energy spent trying to figure out what Aboriginal people want is merely the struggle to accept that we want to be responsible as Peoples. At the centre of our demands is one simple thing: I want and I need and I have the right to live as a responsible person in the way that the Creator made me, as a Mohawk woman. That is the only right I need. When I have the right to live in my territory as a Mohawk woman then I will have justice.[89]

As I read Monture, she is not saying that the problem preventing her from living on her land as a Mohawk woman is that the concepts of 'people', 'responsibility', 'territory' or 'justice' are inadequate and so need to be deconstructed. She treats those concepts as sufficient. Because those concepts are not inadequate (even if they are limited, as all concepts are), the solution to recognising Indigenous rights is not really one of debates, conferences or increased grant money for non-profit organisations. The actual social problem is that settlers want to hold on to their settler states; the actual social solution is 'the significant letting go of Canadian government power over the lives of Aboriginal citizens'.[90] If the problem is not necessarily with the concepts, then one pressing political task that remains is creatively using already existing concepts.

When I make this point, some people say that I am implying that we are no longer talking about theory or philosophy, which I have deemed unhelpful. But that is not my point at all. Further, this critique only makes sense in a context where we have ceded the ground of what is philosophical to a modern understanding, because in an older sense philosophy is

not just the transmission of knowledge; it is also about the formation of habits. And those habits are formed via reading as well as in conversation and activism and silence and passivity. So when we talk about something as banal and ordinary as who has title to the land or how we invest our money, we are talking about how an idea or a thought comes to life and informs our practice and otherwise 'spaces itself out into the world', as Glissant says in opening *Poetics*.[91] What I am trying to do, then, is to shift the task of philosophy or critical theory away from totalising critique and towards the decidedly nuanced and difficult skills of recognising which concepts are sufficient in a given context and using those concepts productively in dialogue with a given (and always fractured, contradictory and changing) community or struggle. To say that such work is not philosophical relies on a recent and predominantly academic idea of philosophy as tied to logical proofs and argumentation, on the analytic side, or critique and rupture, on the Continental side. But the skill I am beginning to outline here, the skill of using concepts to shape our practice anew or to dwell with ideas and thus reorient our lives, recalls perhaps the most timeless meaning of philosophy as guided by truth and pursued in relation to others (through dialogue, politics and friendship). This is the mode of philosophy that still leverages our most ambitious ideals. This is the spirit of philosophy that follows Adorno when he writes, 'The need to allow suffering to speak is a condition of all truth' and Du Bois when he writes, 'Humanity is one and its vast variety is its glory and not its condemnation.'[92]

Before I further defend my reliance on 'humanity' in the next chapter, it would be helpful to zoom out and consider for what purposes we rely on concepts and what we expect them to do in the first place.

* * *

In February 2003, in one of his last major speeches, Edward Said reflected on his ethical obligations in a time of war: 'I feel it is my moral and intellectual duty to oppose the unjust use of [US] military, economic, and political power abroad for what is, it claims falsely, to be its national security interests.'[93] 'I have no power', he goes on, 'so I have to resort to the tools of education, to writing and speaking.'[94] Said's reflection, spoken painfully as he watched another imperial invasion and occupation advance across the Middle East, raises the question of what tools those of us who oppose war, colonialism and anti-democratic regimes have in order to work towards what he had previously called a 'noncoercive human community'.[95] As we resort to education, writing and speaking, which concepts can help us to make the political gains we so gravely need today?

What, to begin, can we expect concepts to do? After all, no one criticises a hammer as an insufficient tool for picking up green beans at the dinner table; we simply do not expect a hammer to do the work of a fork. Further, many schools of philosophy, from US Pragmatism to French deconstruction, have cautioned us against expecting that a concept, by its very being (or ontologically or per se), can bring about some predetermined outcome. Perhaps it was Arendt who made this point most poignantly in critiquing a natural-rights understanding of human rights in her book *Origins of Totalitarianism*, writing, '[T]he world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human.'[96] Following these cautions, *Another Humanity* does not proceed as if a use of a concept can do something by itself. Rather, it offers an examination of what different uses of concepts do, including how they inspire various actions. 'The challenge', the anthropologist Ann Stoler writes, 'is both to discern the work we do with concepts and the work that concepts may explicitly or inadvertently exert on us.'[97]

Even given this specification, there are further difficulties. The way to examine what concepts inspire is to draw on anecdotal, textual and historical examples. But different experiences will show up in our anecdotes and result in different conclusions. For instance, whereas Afropessimists see the argument for the humanity of Black people, and the human rights thus entailed (or demanded), as a failed political strategy, humanists continue to deploy this argument.[98] In response, my aim is not to legislate which concepts work and which do not in some time-out-of-mind way, but rather to invite my readers to consider further how concepts function *in their own contexts* – to examine what works and what does not in the situations in which we find ourselves.[99] After all, the fact that our creative uses of concepts are limited in what they can do does not mean, as Hall jokes, that we are left with a single option – 'read the *Guardian* and pray!'[100]

My implicit focus throughout this book will be on how different uses of concepts function to *explain* material conditions, *invite* actors into political struggle or *organise* towards a new vision of community. Although a clear explanation of the world does not necessarily lead an actor to try to change it, although a creative use of a concept that openly draws out political implications is an invitation that is often declined, and although work to organise communities often faces entrenched barriers to change, it remains true that explanation, invitation and organisation are part of how concepts work as (political) tools. For instance, decolonial uses of self-determination explained why independence movements were necessary in Africa following World War II, and those uses were flexible enough to invite actors in many countries to leverage the concept.[101] The Standing Rock Sioux's use of the language of human rights both explained why moving the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline closer to their treaty-bound land violated their water rights and sovereignty and invited actors to participate

in decolonial struggle.[102] And as the political theorist Christopher Paul Harris notes in his recent study of the Movement for Black Lives, in the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin, the multiracial organisation Million Hoodies Movement organised their work through claims to human rights. 'That they foregrounded "human rights" is not accidental', Harris writes, 'nor is the fact that they specifically linked anti-Blackness with systemic violence', because their work was to advance 'a broader rhetorical shift . . . toward explicitly highlighting the different ways anti-Blackness reduces Black people to subhuman status as structural rather than incidental, much like the explicit assertion of Black humanity that would later anchor the phrase "Black Lives Matter".'[103] It is also noteworthy that in pursuing Black self-determination at the level of the city, the people of Jackson, Mississippi – through ideologically different organisations such as the Jackson Human Rights Institute, Cooperation Jackson, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the Black Left Unity Network, and the Jackson branch of the NAACP – worked together to turn Jackson into a 'Human Rights City'.[104] Thus, social movements inspired by and following Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter – the movements of this century that have theorised race, class, gender and land together – have used the concepts of 'the human' and human rights to explain, invite and organise. While it is not my claim that the role of critical theory needs to be to bring about certain ends, theory nevertheless can thus inform and inspire and learn from practice, and practice can and does dialectically inform ethical and political theory. 'The big emancipatory dreams of progressive and anticolonial movements of the previous century seem to be in pieces', the writer Isabella Hammad has recently observed in connecting narrative and politics, yet 'some are trying to make something with these pieces, taking language from here and from there to keep our movements going.'[105]

My claim is also not that sufficient concepts are *external to* anti-egalitarian uses or inherently check against co-optation. No concept is *a priori* safe from state or elite capture.[106] Rather – and again, this is part of living under what Maldonado-Torres calls 'the coloniality of being'[107] – concepts are always already saturated with history and are always able to be co-opted. 'History will always find you', the poet Joy Harjo writes, 'and wrap you / In its thousand arms'.[108] That concepts are saturated with history, that history finds us, means that we would do well to acknowledge that 'the human', as many of us have come to know and practise it, is 'always already an effect of coloniality', as the theorist and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva puts it (reading Wynter).[109] But this colonial mediation is perhaps less of an obstacle to political struggles than it initially might seem, because its recognition allows us to quit searching for an unmediated or un-capturable concept. This is part of what Hall means when he teaches us that in politics there are no guarantees.

* * *

Like in *Choose Your Bearing*, in this book I take my methodological cue from Stuart Hall. I read Hall's claim '[t]here are no political guarantees' to mean that all concepts are saturated with history and that no use of a concept can prevent itself from being co-opted.[110] The contribution of this reading is that it asks critical theorists to turn down our emphasis on critiquing concepts and to turn up our emphasis on using concepts to build new coalitions, collectives and communities. If all concepts carry limitations and can be used to further domination, then we need not search for pure concepts, worry about how to prevent a concept from being captured, or spend too much time showing how concepts are contaminated or co-optable.[111] (This can become the fate of any concept.) [112] The

practical question then becomes: Which concepts – no matter their history, even if that history (as it always does) shapes their limitations and possibilities – are most helpful to achieve those goals?[113]

In the final lecture of his 1983 series of lectures on cultural studies, 'Culture, Resistance, and Struggle', Hall said about 'the rule of law' – and he would later say about the term 'black' – 'People who were being excluded, whether the working classes, the poor, women, servants, et cetera, did not need another term; they needed *that* term, the term which the bourgeoisie already understood, in order to conduct the struggle.'[114] 'The fact that these struggles were stitched into a fabric of ideas which were bourgeois in origin', he went on, 'does not guarantee that they always remained inscribed in just this way.'[115] 'This is as true of the present as of the past', he concluded.[116]

Politics without guarantees, then, goes both ways: no concepts are per se or fundamentally this or that, because all concepts can be re-articulated differently. Just as no emancipatory use of a concept can prevent itself from being co-opted to serve structures of domination, as when alt-right actors begin to talk about their 'lived experience' being white men or when Hillary Clinton mentions 'intersectionality' on the campaign trail while maintaining her commitments to prisons and pipeline-funding banks, so too are no concepts that have advanced domination safe from re-inscription by emancipatory actors, as Hall's example of 'the rule of law' shows.[117] If this is true of the present as much as of the past, then a clear conclusion emerges: our task today is neither merely to de-stabilise or to play with problematic concepts we have inherited (often the post-modern approach), nor to search for some concept 'outside' of, or free from contamination by, unjust structures (often the decolonial approach), but instead to strategically *leverage* the always already limited concepts that will nevertheless allow us to win collectively on the

terrains on which we are currently losing (we might call this 'the Du Boisian approach', upon which I will elaborate below and in Chapter 1).

In his 1997 lecture 'Race, The Floating Signifier', Hall elaborated upon his sense of politics without guarantees:

> The one thing we are not is guaranteed in the truth of what we do. Indeed, I believe that without that kind of guarantee we would need to begin again, begin again in another space, begin again from a different set of presuppositions to try to ask ourselves what might it be in human identification, in human practice, in the building of human alliances, which without the guarantee, without the certainty of religion or science or anthropology or genetics or biology or the appearance of your eyes, without any guarantees at all, might enable us to conduct an ethically responsible human discourse and practice about race in our society.[118]

Here Hall develops what we might call a 'humanism without guarantees', that is, a humanism that refuses to be based on the old 'certainties' of Western (social) science.[119] He hints at what this new humanism requires in his emphasis on not narrow or national but 'human' identification, practice and building alliances. Resonating with Said's call for theorists to focus on beginnings more than origins, Hall notes that this new beginning for 'human identification' and 'human practice' might finally allow a more honest conversation about what race is and how it functions.[120] And he stresses the importance of new beginnings not just for discourse, but also for ethical practice, for how responsibility to one another ought to play out within a society – as well as, for Hall in other places, *across* different societies.[121]

Hall's idea of 'politics without guarantees' ultimately implies the need for some methods of contemporary critical theory – those that examine a concept only to deconstruct, destabilise or abandon it without a return to the question of what we can

build together – to shift their approach.[122] Once we have studied and practised deconstruction or critique, we can always deconstruct or critique a concept.[123] With Hall, I am more interested here in considering the skill of recognising when an imaginative use of a concept can do the work we want it to do – that is, the skill of knowing when and how to wager that a term is what he calls '*that* term' needed to conduct the struggle or to build alliances. If some use of a concept (a) does extensive explanatory work and (b) does that work in a widely legible, accessible, and thereby invitational way, then, no matter the concept's history or how it has been captured, it remains a valuable political concept.[124] It is sufficient for the task at hand given what we can expect of a concept. It is from that point of recognising sufficiency that we 'begin again', and we do so strategically, with all our human-all-too-human emotions, prejudices, traditions, accomplishments, vulnerabilities and limitations.[125] In sum, while it is not at all clear to me that the concepts of 'the human' and 'humanity' (or for that matter a general sense of species-being) were Western inventions or find their origin in Europe, part of the point of recognising conceptual sufficiency is that a problematic provenance of a given concept does not disqualify it; we can re-articulate concepts no matter their origin. In the final instance, what matters is not origins but beginnings: how we begin, and begin again, with the conceptual terrain that confronts us.

* * *

What I have called 'conceptual sufficiency' – here the sufficiency of 'the human' and 'humanity' – is important not just for ethical theory but also for political theory.[126] To acknowledge the sufficiency of a certain concept entails changes to inquiry. It points critical theory in a direction different from spinning around in aporias as we begin our work. That new direction

would include (1) clarifying and making more accessible what the concept implies as well as (2) inquiring into the barriers that prevent actors from carrying out what the concept implies.

In regard to (1) clarification, we can consider the claim – in the face of a differentially borne climate emergency and amidst an ongoing global pandemic – that the earth as one 'country' that humanity shares is a better understanding of the reality of our species than divisions of planet earth and humanity into nation states and races (and thereby into different civic and ascriptive statuses).[127] If we believe this humanist understanding is correct, then there remains work to be done in order to clarify its implications. For instance, if a country currently allows its citizens to come and go as they please, then it should also allow all people to travel freely across its current borders. If a country provides health care and education for all of its citizens, then it should provide both to whoever passes through its borders. In other words, what such a planetary humanism would look like in practice would include eliminating in policy all hierarchies of personhood tied to civic status. Further, it would mean that currently predominant conceptualisations of obligation, particularly around debt – around who owes whom and why – would need to shift in order to reckon with historical and ongoing (colonial) hierarchies of humanity. A clear example of the need to reframe obligation lies in the fact that Western financial bodies are willing to forgive some of Ukraine's debt but not that of Barbados.[128] These are simple examples of the larger point: the work to be done regarding the concept of humanity includes theorists' clarifying its implications for broader publics, using it to raise political consciousness and explaining how its partial (national, gendered, racialised, etc.) use is always a false use. As Césaire taught us, any 'true' use of 'humanity' must be a universalising one.[129]

In regard to (2) inquiring into the barriers that prevent people from acting upon their understanding of a concept (and to return to Monture), there are moments when the social problem is not that we have an insufficient concept, but that we are not willing to take the risks required in living it out.[130] The example of John Brown remains striking precisely because most of us – while agreeing both that slavery still exists[131] and that it violates our most deeply held principles – do not give up our lives fighting against it. John Brown thus still serves as a touchstone that tests not just how we understand violence and what theology we hold, but also the strength of our will.[132] In other words, sometimes the social problem is not a theoretical or conceptual problem, but rather one of political commitment.

Once we recognise that the problem is not with the concept, then we are able to ask one another the questions that are crucial to transforming the structures in which we live, the kinds of critical questions that Du Bois put on the table in his reading of the life of John Brown, and that Du Bois carried forward into *Black Reconstruction*, as I will suggest in Chapter 1.[133] If we agree that a prison or a pipeline or a for-profit school violates how others around us should be treated as part of humanity, or violates their human rights, or violates our sense of dignity or justice, then what risks are we willing to take?[134] What comforts are we willing to give up?[135] From what are we willing to divest?[136] What public spaces are we willing to reclaim?[137] How will we connect these risks, refusals, divestments and reclamations to ongoing work across borders?[138] How can we remind one another that 'it may be important to pause over the awareness of dissatisfaction just where it starts to seem futile'?[139] What kinds of (queer) kin structures, and ways of taking care of one another, would allow us to take more risks, make these connections and keep going despite our dissatisfaction and

alienation?[140] What 'queer forms' and modes of friendship can serve as a bulwark against our desire to belong to an elite ethno-class and thus to abandon the struggle?[141] How can forms of resistance become 'more accessible to people with varying debilities, capacities, and disabilities'?[142] What forms of agency can we outline, given that many of us experience our situations as ones of tremendous constraint (bills to pay, debts racking up, kids to care for) and extremely limited possibility (climate change, police violence, low wages outside of the corporate world)? How can our mobilisations not only make demands on those in power, but also build power in a way that makes a world of decolonised land, as well as of universal health care and education (and so on), a more widely desired and thus a more feasible option?[143] Along the way, how can we see, and explain for wide audiences, what Wynter calls 'the performative enactment of all our roles, of our role allocations as, in our contemporary Western/Westernized case, in terms of, inter alia, gender, race, class/underclass, and, across them all, sexual orientation'?[144] If we understand that all of our roles are 'praxes . . . rather than nouns', then how, concretely, do we practise differently – how do we perform our humanity differently as an affirmation of a different future, no matter the success of each of our mobilisations and demands?[145] Could raising these questions in community and conversation *itself* be part of a larger practice of re-describing humanity and thus living in light of Wynter's task-setting lines that

> the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves?[146]

Would this not be, as Wynter reads Glissant, 'a specific mode of uprising, one which calls into question, rising up against, our present mode of being, of subjectivity, of Self'?[147] Finally, what modes of attending to each other, and to the reality of the world around us, do these questions presuppose, such that we would truly be able to ask each other Simone Weil's key ethical question: 'What are you going through?'[148]

Chapter Outline

This book starts where *Choose Your Bearing* left off, with W. E. B. Du Bois, now examining not just his 1940s writings on human rights but starting from his earlier writings that advanced a clear sense of humanity. In Chapter 1, I begin to draw out my opening claim that 'the human' and 'humanity' remain sufficient concepts for decolonial politics today. I look to Du Bois's uses of 'human', 'humanity' and 'human rights' in *Black Reconstruction*, which I suggest were informed by how he came to understand 'humanity' in *John Brown*. I then discuss Du Bois's peace activism, returning to some of his 1940s writings that I discussed in *Choose Your Bearing*, thus rendering it unnecessary for my reader to begin with that book before reading this one.

In Chapter 2, I focus on Édouard Glissant's *Treatise of the All-World*. While the two philosophers Glissant is continually in dialogue with, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, are frequently read for offering new humanisms, Glissant is not necessarily read as a humanist in the same way, in part because he does not call for a new humanism in as explicit of terms as his Martinican forerunners. Consequently, readings of Glissant's humanism vary greatly. I will suggest that, against his own claim that he offers a 'poetics' but not a 'humanism', Glissant's work maintains a profound sense of humanity such that we could call it a humanism.

Chapters 1 and 2 make up Part I of this book. They proceed through what Hall calls a 'detour through theory', which he describes as 'the necessary delay'.[149] As Hall puts it elsewhere, 'Theory is always a detour on the way to something more important.'[150] Reading the theories of Du Bois and Glissant provided me with both an understanding of the present as an ongoing time of war and a belief in a relational humanism to respond to our context of coercion. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 make up Part II of this book. They proceed through what the feminist scholar and activist AnaLouise Keating calls 'risking the personal'.[151] I start from personal contexts and conversations and then read the work of Sylvia Wynter, Edward Said and Hannah Arendt to think through the practical, lived questions that emerged from them.

In Chapter 3, I turn to Sylvia Wynter's outline for a new humanism. While Wynter poses a daunting task for ethics and politics – recognising and re-performing how we practise human life across *all* of our roles – she also gives us resources for a critical re-fashioning of human life on a collective scale. I draw out these resources by thinking with her 1984 article 'The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism', her 1992 open letter 'No Humans Involved' and her chapter that reflects on her 1984 article, published in 2015, entitled 'The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-) Cognition'. In her writing on humanism, Wynter engages Edward Said, and I follow her lead by returning to Said in my next chapter.

In Chapter 4, I examine sources from Edward Said's archive housed at Columbia University's Rare Book & Manuscript Library. I consider patterns wherein academic institutions in the Global North archive collections from or about the Global South. Thus, this chapter investigates questions of history, responsibility and coloniality in material collection, access and distribution. Beyond these structural questions, and more

centrally to the chapter, I situate myself as a participant in these relationships, patterns and questions, and by staying close to Said's archive, I also consider why it was *Orientalism*, and not *The Question of Palestine*, that became the key text of Said's that was mandatory reading for students of postcolonial theory. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on visiting Palestine.

In Chapter 5, I begin from the context of Palestine and return, perhaps surprisingly, to the work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt's ability to see through the categories (and categorial logic) of modernity, coupled with her severe limitations that were decidedly modern (especially around race), provides an example of thinking we can learn from in the present, not least because we have our own limitations as theorists. I stay with both the insights and the limitations that Arendt offers, ultimately finding a relational path forward in her correspondence with Karl Jaspers.

* * *

Overall, this book proceeds in a style somewhere between distanced academic writing and the personal essay. It is a book about how theory travels. While I focus on Du Bois, Glissant, Wynter, Said and Arendt, in no chapter do I simply treat these thinkers alone; instead, I read Du Bois with Wifredo Lam, Glissant with Gilles Deleuze, Wynter with Said, and Said through his interlocutors, including C. L. R. James, Aijaz Ahmad, Wael Hallaq and Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, as well as through the recent commentary of the political theorist Jeanne Morefield. This book has learned from and contributes to ongoing scholarship on the Black Radical tradition or a Black Atlantic tradition, and it would fit in discussions on both what Aaron Kamugisha has called 'the Caribbean intellectual tradition' and, more broadly, what Gary Wilder has called 'traditions of radical universalism

and radical humanism'.[152] But if pressed, I would put this book in the tradition that Abdelkebir Khatibi, recalling Du Bois's attention to the problems of each century and the need for planetary inquiry, called 'plural thought':

> Only the risk of a plural thought (with several poles of civilization, several languages, several technical and scientific elaborations) can, I think, assure for us the turning of this century on the planetary scene . . . We are still at the dawning of planetary thought. But we have grown up in the suffering that calls for the power of the word and revolt. If I told you, whoever you are, that this work has already begun and that you can hear me only as survivor, maybe then you will listen to the slow and progressive march of all the humiliated and all the survivors.[153]

It will not be lost on my readers that my preference – if I had to locate this very personal book within a tradition – would be to stay with Khatibi, whose 'plural thought' is a decolonial tradition that is also a deconstructive one. This is what I am after in this book, where 'strategy' is only a beginning of a longer and deeper human process. I follow this strategy/process, decolonial/deconstruction tension every time I write 'rights' or 'sovereignty' or 'nation'.[154] We are still at the dawning . . .

* * *

In between these breaks, these ellipses, let me try again to clarify this point, which is perhaps the most important point regarding the method of this book. It has to do with starting from decolonial theory and cultural studies and then running those moves through deconstruction. I agree with the theorist Geoffrey Bennington when he argues, reading Derrida, that 'we have a fundamentally passive relation to the language we speak', *and* I follow Hall in stressing our active responsibility in leveraging this inheritance.[155] I am calling Hall's active use

of tradition the decolonial moment, seen in creative uses of self-determination, sovereignty and human rights, to name three examples. That is the necessary reconstructive corrective in our hyper-critical moment; it is also often where the decolonial intervention stops. But I want then and again to return to the insight from deconstruction that 'the Sovereign one is . . . always already overrun by multiplicity, diversity, *to poikilon*, democracy, the politics of politics'.[156] This is what Bennington means in his insight that it is not just that subjects deconstruct texts but that oppositions such as theory/practice are already 'from the start, in deconstruction'.[157] This means that 'sovereignty is, as always, already failing from the start'.[158] Bennington is at pains to avoid a certain normative or moral register, so I will add that, for me, this is a very good thing. This attention to how multiplicity overruns politics gives us an accurate description of political life in this century (as Said's epigraph noted); it reminds us that the contestations and exiles and tensions and plurality that 'haunt politics' – perhaps especially nationalistic and identity politics in their current registers – also provide the most fruitful insights for moving towards another humanity beyond the modern categories we have needed to leverage strategically to conduct the immediate struggles.[159] When we add or acknowledge the deconstructive moment, recognising both the sufficiency of our concepts for strategic purposes and their insufficiency for a wider and slower process, we enter double politics.

* * *

Read one way, this book is an attempt to listen to those survivors of modernity who have advanced the plural and planetary work that, as Khatibi notes, 'has already begun'. Indeed, and before I conclude, it is worth adding that this book has been deeply guided by the methods and contributions not

only of Stuart Hall, but also of Simone Weil, Claudia Jones and Hannah Arendt. I mention these contributions here and not later because they informed *how* I read and wrote. While Weil called for discarding claims to rights, she maintained the sufficiency of 'justice' as a concept that does normative philosophical work, and that spirit of writing taught me something about maintaining some orienting terms. When I was struggling with why so much of critical theory has criticised rights claims in the spirit of Marx's 'On the Jewish Question', it was Jones's writings – internationalist and theorising labor, race and gender together – that allowed me to see how rights claims belonged in a project that seeks to talk about our species along different axes of power. (Hall too modelled how to maintain rights claims in his imaginative decolonial project, offering what the poet and Black Studies scholar Brian Meeks has recently called a 'career-long and profoundly humanist engagement with Marxism'.)[160] And Arendt, much more than Weil, had the capacity to tarry with the 'perplexities' of rights as well as other flawed concepts, even if that capacity reflected an adherence to racial and colonial norms more than her champions want to admit; I tarry with the perplexities of 'the human' similarly here.[161] For some, I will be too close to Arendt instead of Weil, Jones and Hall, not only in keeping 'the human' with all its perplexities, but also in that the following chapters proceed 'in the shadow of race', to use McKnight's phrase.[162] This is to say both that race informs every aspect of the following chapters and that after this Introduction I largely leave race behind as my focus or level of analysis. For me, this is the required second move of the 'double politics' I am after. For you, it might read as another book on humanism that runs too quickly from the racial violence contained in that term. In a way, it is both: to be able to choose the degree of my engagement with race does reflect textually what has long been part of living on my side of the Veil,

namely, to choose when and how to engage race and when to erase it; at the same time, reading across the Veil is also a textual rejection of 'White sovereignty' (McKnight again) around the question of what it means to be human.[163]

To reiterate one last time what I am suggesting in this Introduction: I could say about race or about 'the human' what Michel-Rolph Trouillot says about the nation state: that it is 'a lived fiction of modernity'.[164] The post-racial or non-racialist position emphasises the fiction, but in this book I am stressing that these modern categories are 'lived' – and so they can be lived differently. Hall reminds us that 'all practices have a discursive aspect', and by reading Du Bois, Glissant, Wynter, Said and Arendt in the following chapters, I focus on different practices – building peace, listening to the landscape, interracial ceremony, rights-based activism, and giving an account of ourselves – in order to draw out their discursive aspects, that is, to allow those practices to re-shape how we think about and thus how we live out what it means to be human and to be part of humanity.[165]

* * *

Having now shared with you the personal and intellectual paths that informed how I got to the questions in this book, I want to stress finally what the political theorist Louiza Odysseos has so helpfully underscored, namely, the need, no matter whether we agree on the sufficiency of 'the human' today in our particular contexts, 'to insist on the *question*' of decolonial ethics.[166] In that spirit, I invite you to think with and against me – with our tensions held together in what I hope will be a longer conversation – as I read five philosophers whose work outlines an answer to Glissant's own insisted-upon questions. As he looked towards a new, increasingly creolised century while watching the sea rise and the wind swirl around him,

Glissant asked: 'Do we have the right and the means to live another dimension of humanity? But how?'[167]

Notes

1. For the argument that race is a consequence of racism, see Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2014). For the argument that race is a product of state violence and structural inequality, see Norman Ajari, *Dignity or Death: Ethics and Politics of Race*, trans. Matthew B. Smith (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), p. 3. For analysis of ongoing forms of coerced labour, see Jane Gordon, *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement* (New York: Routledge, 2020). I borrow my language of war from Joy James. See e.g. her description of Angela Davis's childhood under Jim Crow as 'a war zone' and framing of the United States as 'a war zone of anti-Blackness' (Joy James, *Contextualizing Angela Davis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), pp. 10, 54). I simply did not see the present as a time of war until I started to read James's work, upon the recommendation of my friend Mukasa Mubirumusoke.
2. Binyavanga Wainaina, *How to Write about Africa* (London: Penguin, 2024), p. 132.
3. Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), p. 180.
4. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1974), p. 39.
5. Quoted in Anthony Bayani Rodriguez, 'Introduction: On Sylvia Wynter and the Urgency of a New Humanist Revolution in the Twenty-First Century', *American Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2018): p. 831.
6. My method here combines John Dewey's call to start from and refer back to experience in *Experience and Nature* with Emmanuel Levinas's priority of 'the Other' in *Totality and Infinity* and Enrique Dussel's addition, in *Philosophy of Liberation* and *Ethics of Liberation*, that this Other is excluded by the dominant system and so can offer insights about how to understand and critique that system.

7. The most influential description of this psychological status comes from Du Bois in analysing white workers who, while given a low wage for their work, also received 'a sort of public and psychological wage' that includes deference, titles, access to public services, protection by police forces, and standing in courts. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, [1935] 1992), p. 700. It is worth noting here that I employ many different and contradictory ideas of 'we' in this book, and maybe you will see yourself in some, and maybe you won't, and that tension itself would make an interesting starting point for further discussion.
8. Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 21; *Treatise on the Whole-World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), p. 11. The original French reads: 'N'avons-nous pas droit et moyen de vivre une autre dimension d'humanité ? Mais comment ?' What I will stress in the rest of this book is the verb Glissant selected here: this 'autre . . . humanité' is not just to be theorised or discussed, but to be lived.
9. Zahi Zalloua, *Solidarity and the Palestinian Cause: Indigeneity, Blackness, and the Promise of Universality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), p. 30.
10. In *Choose Your Bearing*, I started from rights in order to avoid conflating ethics with how we personally feel about others or with how we understand our own position with respect to another group of people. Starting from rights is a way of cutting through the fog of, for instance, when someone says they 'love' gay people, they are not racist, or they support Indigenous nations, but doesn't show up for queer or racialised people or continues living according to a dispossessive way of life when it allows them to increase their social and professional status. What matters more than what we say (whether an empty pronouncement or an honest misstep) is whether we work and invest ourselves, imperfectly but truthfully as limited creatures, to universalise rights to marriage and mobility, rights to stay and return, rights to land and culture, rights to water and food, rights to pray, migrate, receive health care when sick, and otherwise live as a

human being. In other words, we start from rights in order to name actual conflicts and to see the world as it really is, with all its violations and possibilities. As Edward Said noted about Palestine, 'There is a radical conflict between a view stating that Jews have more rights than non-Jews, and a view – as yet to be formulated with the cogency and power it deserves – stating that all present communities and individuals have civil rights in Palestine, equal in principle' (Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 76. See also p. 100). This point also applies to religious communities that deny rights to gay members or universities that exploit workers through extremely hierarchal ranks, to name two other example of radical conflicts that are often covered over by claims to shared principles or a shared pursuit of service and social justice. Overall, the question of human rights moves our focus to the kind of society we are, in fact, in the process of building.

11. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, p. 31. See also pp. 67–8.
12. See Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Cf. the important position in Black Male Studies that in the US there is a right to kill Black males. See e.g. Dalitso Ruwe, 'Can Black males be subjects of human rights violations?', *The International Journal of Human Rights* (2024).
13. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, pp. xiii, xv.
14. For this reading of the Western tradition, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Malden: Blackwell, 1995); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). See also how the anthropologist David Scott takes up Nehamas to read Stuart Hall in his 2023 lecture 'Universalism & Reparation', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdoPFKPoJTo&ab_channel=ERCMinorUniversality.
15. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): pp. 240–70. One result of Maldonado-Torres's thesis has been a proliferation of projects

on the coloniality of x or y. These diagnoses are important, particularly around how the coloniality of law operates. (I thank Mireille Fanon for helping me see this point.) At the same time, to accept the coloniality of being thesis (in general) is to accept the coloniality of x and y (in particular). Other helpful dissertations, articles, books, etc. would offer paths for where to go, that is, how to act, what demands to make, how to mobilise, and so on, *given* the coloniality of x and y.

16. Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Essential Essays, Vol. 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 234.
17. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 241.
18. Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), pp. xxiv; see also p. 38.
19. Ibid. p. xxiv.
20. Ibid. p. 39.
21. The political theorist Utz McKnight suggests moving away from the question 'Why do you think the practice or event has to do with race?' and instead towards 'How is it not racial?' (Utz McKnight, *The Everyday Practice of Race in America: Ambiguous Privilege* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 21). In a line that could be helpful in guiding (or starting) our ordinary conversations, McKnight goes on: '[I]t is important to provide a description of the social conditions that are used to elaborate the definition of race for *all* persons. To do otherwise is not an accurate reflection of the real practices of race in this society, but instead represents a social strategy to deflect or obfuscate the persistence of specific forms of mutual racial subjection. We identify racists so we don't have to be implicated ourselves' (ibid. p. 32).
22. Another way of putting this uncertainty is in terms of openness, following Helmuth Plessner. For Plessner, being open or exposed is part of what it means to be human – as both historical and embodied. Plessner offers a striking portrait of human life in his compelling and controversial 1931 essay on this topic, writing,

'The human must lead its life in this openness, uncertain which of its sides is prevalent: life already tells the human about its self, while the body ultimately takes away its independence and exposes it to the course of things' (Helmuth Plessner, *Political Anthropology*, trans. Nils F. Schott (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), p. 84). To stress the need for everyday conversations, as I do, acknowledges not just the need to talk about politics (frowned upon in social life in the US), but more fundamentally that politics already shapes these conversations – thinking this way works 'to counter the restriction to a so-called political sphere', as Plessner puts it (ibid. p. 55). I follow Plessner to make a more fundamental claim than the personal is political or that the private is public, which draws on the distinction as it challenges it. Plessner avoids the distinction itself in portraying politics as essential, as the ground of human life. As Plessner stresses, 'Politics then is not primarily a field but the state of human life in which it gives itself its constitution and asserts itself against the world, not just externally and juridically but from out of its ground and essence' (ibid. p. 61). To think with and against Plessner, it seems that as a species we have yet to achieve a form of relation in which this openness does not become a struggle for national/particular power, reflected in Plessner's concluding set of claims that we are always already tied to a people. In the present, then, we are already caught up in a politics (as essential), and we are left essaying our way towards a politics beyond the facticity of the nation or of being tied to a people.

23. W. E. B. Du Bois, 'My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom', *Clinical Sociology Review* 8, no. 1 (1990): p. 35. I do think these should be *conversations*, with all the stumbling, mistakes and grace that this word implies, as opposed to something more professionalised, like the current race-relations workshop marketplace, which has long struck me as absurd. I will say a little more about this in my concluding chapter on Arendt.
24. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997), p. 45. See also W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The color line belts the world', 20 October 1906. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312).

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. You can see the wonderful typescript copy of his essay with this title at the UMass Amherst digital archive's website, https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b207-i148. To make this point is to side against how Gilroy concludes *The Black Atlantic* and thus sets the terms for his subsequent work in noting that his book contributes 'towards the politics of a new century in which the central axis of conflict will no longer be the colour line but the challenge of just, sustainable development and the frontiers which will separate the overdeveloped parts of the world (at home and abroad) from the intractable poverty that already surrounds them' (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 223). In this book, I am trying to start from how the colour line shapes that development and has already defined what counts as 'developed'.

25. Steve Biko summarises these responses this way: 'We are collectively segregated against – what can be more logical than for us to respond as a group? When workers come together under the auspices of a trade union to strive for the betterment of their conditions, nobody expresses surprise in the Western world. It is the done thing. Nobody accuses them of separatist tendencies' (Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 25). Biko also poses a challenge to my argument by writing that white racism has its 'greatest ally' in 'the refusal by us to club together as blacks because we are told to do so would be racialist', adding that 'while we progressively lose ourselves in a world of colourlessness and amorphous common humanity, whites are deriving pleasure and security in entrenching white racism and further exploiting the minds and bodies of the unsuspecting black masses' (ibid. p. 50). And yet, around the same time Biko was criticising an empty sense of 'common humanity', he also emphasised that Black Consciousness seeks 'some kind of balance – a true humanity where power politics will have no place' (ibid. p. 90). He would conclude that essay by saying, 'We have set out on a quest for true humanity . . . In

time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face' (ibid. p. 98).

26. Ajari, *Dignity or Death*, p. 3.
27. Utz McKnight, *Race and the Politics of the Exception: Equality, Sovereignty, and American Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 111, 112.
28. Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', p. 239.
29. For commentary on how a CBS News senior foreign correspondent said that Ukraine 'isn't . . . like Iraq or Afghanistan' but instead is 'relatively civilised, relatively European', or for how the BBC hosted a Ukrainian prosecutor who said, 'It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair . . . being killed every day', see Moustafa Bayoumi, 'They are "civilized" and "look like us": the racist coverage of Ukraine', *The Guardian*, 2 March 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/02/civilised-european-look-like-us-racist-coverage-ukraine.
30. Hall wrote in 1980 that South Africa is 'the social formation in which the salience of racial features cannot for a moment be denied' (ibid. p. 199). Cf. Said's comments comparing South Africa and Gaza: Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, p. 194.
31. Stuart Hall, 'Teaching Race', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, eds. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 132.
32. I borrow this question from how the cultural theorist Mark C. Taylor talks about the influence of religion in *After God*, as well as how McKnight starts from an anecdote where 'nothing was obviously racial' in theorising how race continues to structure democratic life in the US. See McKnight, *Race and the Politics of the Exception*, p. 12.
33. Hall, 'Teaching Race', p. 135. As Black Consciousness activists in Brazil have stressed, one of the ways the myth of racial democracy is maintained is that race is not talked about in public discourse, the mainstream media or in private lives. See Marcia Mikulak, 'The Symbolic Power of Color: Constructions of Race, Skin-color, and Identity in Brazil', *Humanity & Society* 35, nos. 1–2 (2011): pp. 65, 77.

34. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, p. 49. He notes about Palestinian feelings and assertions something perhaps useful to keep in mind in these conversations: 'It is not only the historical truth that has been constantly denied but the very experience of the hurt, the very fact of injustice' (ibid. p. 126).
35. Aimé Césaire, 'Letter to Maurice Thorez', trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text 103* 28, no. 2 (2010): p. 150.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid. Cf. Derefe Chevannes, 'The Haitian Revolution and Afromodernity: Political Speech, Euromodernity & Black Universalism', *Theory & Event* 26, no. 2 (2023): pp. 318–44.
38. Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emancipation: Moving toward Black Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 5.
39. Césaire, 'Letter', p. 150.
40. See Edward Said, 'Memory, Inequality, and Power: Palestine and the Universality of Human Rights', https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/nora-barrows-friedman/ten-years-edward-saids-passing-listen-his-last-major-speech. For a political rather than juridical sense of universality that resonates with my emphasis on practice, see Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
41. This is what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls recitation without rehearsal – a performance of critique without raising the larger question of what we can build together.
42. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 119. In the North American context, we could read John Wesley Powell alongside Las Casas.
43. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 50.
44. Walter Mignolo, 'Who Speaks for the "Human" in Human Rights?' *Hispanic Issues On Line* (2009): p. 10.
45. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), pp. 161, 163.
46. Ayça Çubukçu, 'Thinking Against Humanity', *London Review of International Law* 5, no. 2 (2017): p. 253.

47. Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 2, 3.
48. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), p. 1.
49. Ibid.
50. Alberto Moreiras, *Uncanny Rest: For Antiphilosophy*, trans. Camila Moreiras (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), pp. 103, 101, 102.
51. Kathryn Yussof, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 2, 18. For Yussof humanism is ultimately 'a method of erasure' (ibid. p. 57).
52. Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. xiv.
53. This theoretical line exemplifies what Jonathan Fenderson has described as 'one of the major trends evident in contemporary African American Studies scholarship: the glaring underdevelopment, evasion, and, at times, omission of class analysis – and, more explicitly, political economy – as a fundamental aspect of Black Studies' (Jonathan Fenderson, 'Black Studies Post-Janus', *The Black Scholar* 48, no. 4 (2018): pp. 1–2). For a more existential angle that still attends to political economy and the importance of education, see Kersuze Simeon-Jones, *The Intellectual Roots of Contemporary Black Thought: Nascent Political Philosophies* (New York: Routledge, 2021).
54. Lewis Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 160.
55. Ajari, *Dignity or Death*, pp. 16–17.
56. Rei Terada, *Metaracial: Hegel, Antiblackness, and Political Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), p. 9.
57. See e.g. Walter Mignolo, 'The Enduring Enchantment: Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): p. 934. See Çubukçu's work in *Jadaliyya*, *The Boston Review*, and other outlets, e.g. Ayça Çubukçu, 'Many Speak for Palestine', *Boston Review*, 1 May 2024, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/many-speak-for-palestine/.

58. Said put it this way: 'What could be more disgraceful an instance of Benda's *trahison des clercs* than the displays of political fervor on the part of intellectuals for "our" side, when so often it has been our side that has been committing the violence in the name of Western virtues, humanism, morality?' (Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, p. 359).
59. For this phrase, see Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Picador, 2020). Cf. the South African case in Lebogang Seale, *One Hundred Years of Dispossession: My Family's Quest to Reclaim Our Land* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2024).
60. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, pp. xix–xx. This silence also permeates 'critical' international relations and 'global' human rights circles. For example, I attended an important human rights conference at New York University in early November 2023, during which only one of the many keynote speakers mentioned Palestine – and in that instance only extremely briefly. During the days of the conference, events in Palestine/Israel were on the front page of *The New York Times* each morning, but the silence persisted. Moreover, one of the in-person keynote speakers was supposed to be Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, but he had to offer a prerecorded reflection because he suddenly had to travel to the Middle East *because of the ongoing war in/on Palestine*. Still, the general silence remained. When I brought up this silence to one of the conference organisers via email after the conference, he told me that *I did not understand the TED-style format of the conference*.
61. Ibid. p. 143.
62. Ibid. p. 233. Said repeats this idea so many times the citations would be too numerous to recount here. See also his claim – working consistently against a 'military option' – that what Palestine offers is 'a vision' that involves 'respect of nationalities for each other, the right to live within secure and safe borders, and to coexist in a profitable way with other peoples, with differences' (ibid. pp. 312, 313). 'That', Said emphasised, 'is our main weapon' (ibid. p. 313). If you are wondering, by

the way, reader, Said did not have much good to say about Hamas: he criticised their strike strategy and political ideas while also always praising non-violent resistance and drawing our attention to how corrupted the discourse of 'terrorism' has become, not least because it tends to draw our focus away from state violence (see Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, pp. 197, 403, xlv, 349).

63. Ibid. p. 233.
64. Ibid. p. 143. This is why I consider, for instance, the following books to be about the idea of Palestine: Tiffany Lethabo King, *Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Shona N. Jackson, *Beyond Constraint: Middle/Passages of Blackness and Indigeneity in the Radical Tradition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024). I thank Rebecca Hankins for recommending the latter.
65. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*, p. 242.
66. Edward Said, 'Introduction', in *Reflections on Exile* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. xxviii. The novelist Isabella Hammad has recently summarised Said's humanism as 'a humanism that can evolve and expand beyond its exclusionary, bourgeois European and largely male origins, and that commits itself to crossing boundaries between cultures and disciplines—a humanism that holds the practice of criticism close to heart' (Isabella Hammad, *Recognizing the Stranger: On Palestine and Narrative* (New York: Black Cat, 2024), p. 5).
67. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'Lewis Gordon: Philosopher of the Human', *The CLR James Journal: The Journal of the Caribbean Philosophical Association* 14, no. 1 (2008): p. 103.
68. Lewis Gordon, *Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 5, 6.
69. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 2.
70. Paul Gilroy, 'Never Again: refusing race and salvaging the human', https://holbergprisen.no/en/news/holberg-prize/2019-holberg-lecture-laureate-paul-gilroy.

71. It is worth noting – given the complications of these traditions and the brevity of this introductory *tour d'horizon* – that some philosophers, such as Joy James, read Afropessimism and human rights together. See George Yancy, 'Reaching beyond "Black faces in high places": An Interview with Joy James', *Truthout*, 1 February 2021, https://truthout.org/articles/reaching-beyond-black-faces-in-high-places-an-interview-with-joy-james/. For Nyong'o's line, see Tavia Nyong'o, 'Black Humanitarianism', in *Retrieving the Human: Reading Paul Gilroy*, ed. Rebecka Rutledge Fisher and Jay Garcia (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), p. 187.
72. Paul Gilroy, 'Introduction: Race is the Prism', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 2.
73. Gilroy, *Against Race*, pp. 98, 2. See also p. 14.
74. Gilroy, 'A Dialogue on the Human', in *Retrieving the Human*, p. 226.
75. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 57. For further discussion of humanism in feminist philosophy today, see e.g. Ann V. Murphy, 'Corporeal Vulnerability and the New Humanism', *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (2011): pp. 575–90.
76. See Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, p. 54.
77. Gilroy, *Against Race*, pp. 6–7.
78. Ibid. Cf. Alberto Moreiras's analysis of how identity can be commodified in *The Exhaustion of Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
79. Gary Wilder, *Concrete Utopianism: The Politics of Temporality and Solidarity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), p. 4.
80. Ibid. p. 170.
81. Ibid. p. 18.
82. Ibid.
83. For an important critique of strategies that accept this bind, indeed one that influenced Wynter, see Randall Williams, *The Divided World: Human Rights and Its Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). For Wynter's citation of Williams, see *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 39.

84. Lewis Gordon, *Fear of Black Consciousness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022), p. 158.
85. Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. Sally Davison et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), p. 186.
86. Ibid.
87. Stuart Hall, 'Ideology and Ideological Struggle', in *Cultural Studies 1983*, ed. Jennifer D. Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 143.
88. Honor the Earth, 'Mission + Vision', https://www.honorearth.net/mission-vision.
89. Patricia Monture-Angus, 'Thinking about Aboriginal Justice: Myths and Revolution', in *Continuing Poundmaker and Riel's Quest: Presentations Made at a Conference on Aboriginal Peoples and Justice*, ed. Richard Gosse (Purich: Saskatoon, 1994), p. 230. Thanks to Allison Weir for directing me to Monture's work. Cf. Allison Weir, *Decolonizing Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024). Cf. bell hooks: 'The importance of verbal communication holds true for the dissemination of feminist ideas. In a door-to-door campaign to reintroduce feminist politics to a wider audience, women would have the opportunity to ask questions, clarify issues, give feedback. If, in a single year, women stopped spending thousands of dollars to organise conferences that are attended by only a select group of individuals, the goal of that year could be mass outreach in every state, with the intention of taking feminism out of the university and into the streets and homes of this society' (bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 111).
90. Monture-Angus, 'Thinking about Agoriginal Justice', p. 230. What Monture teaches resonates with what Hall diagnosed in his 1966 essay 'Political Commitment', namely, that the work of politics needs to 'connect experience with demands in a meaningful relationship' and 'connect awareness of the nature of the system to aspiration, and aspiration for change to the agencies of change' (Stuart Hall, 'Political Commitment', in *Selected Political Writings*, p. 94). Thanks to Bukky Gbadegesin for conversation on this question.

91. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 1. I thank Eric Aldieri for conversation about this definition of philosophy. Indeed, the one part of a Levinasian infinite responsibility that I still hold onto is my infinite gratitude for our conversations.
92. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), pp. 17–18, translation modified. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, p. 706.
93. Said, 'Memory, Inequality, and Power'.
94. Ibid.
95. Edward Said, 'Traveling Theory', in *The Selected Works of Edward Said: 1966–2006*, ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2019), p. 219. My insistence on describing the present as a time of war – as opposed to the more humanitarian newspeak of 'conflict' – could be read as putting me close to Afropessimists who draw on Gramsci's distinction between antagonism and conflict. I would not mind this comparison. Yes, Frank Wilderson III has reiterated what he calls 'the antagonism between Black and Human' (see e.g. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 26). While it is obvious that this book approaches the racialisation of the human differently from Wilderson, it is noteworthy that I find this return to the antagonism/conflict distinction helpful in regard to pressing the point of reality, of what is really happening in Palestine and in state surveillance of Black life, and I also find helpful the call (from Jared Sexton) to think libidinal economy alongside political economy – desire, identification, attachments, pleasure and psychic investments do matter very much to who owns land and whether repair is understood as a threat or an opportunity. Where I differ is that, with Glissant, I see this 'antagonism' as occurring within a larger, already-in-process Relation, which is an educational context in which norms, values, desires and goals are shifting and can be shifted by purposive actors. Further, with Stuart Hall (and the epigraph from Said), I would argue that increasingly in this century 'all of us are composed

of multiple social identities . . . we are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these may have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination' (Stuart Hall, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 78). As aforementioned, in my war/conflict distinction, which troubles claims to the present as a time of peace in North America, I follow Joy James. See Joy James, 'Incarceration (Un)Interrupted: Reclaiming Bodies, Lands, and Communities', talk given at Macalester College, St Paul, Minnesota, 10 October 2019.

96. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Boston: Mariner, 2001), p. 299.
97. Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 9.
98. In an example of the Afropessimist position, Frank B. Wilderson III writes, 'If, as Afropessimism argues, *Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and non-Black fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures*, then this also means that, at a higher level of abstraction, the claims of universal humanity . . . are hobbled by a meta-aporia; a contradiction that manifests whenever one looks seriously at the structure of Black suffering in comparison to the presumed universal structure of all sentient beings' (Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2020), p. 15).
99. In this book, I am thinking from but also beyond the Americas. I do not mean to speak for, and I trust that my readers will make connections to, other locations. In pursuing this method, I have in mind Akeel Bilgrami's point that it is 'not only understandable but honorable, if someone speaking and writing in America [he means the US] finds it important to *stress much more* the wrongs of the American governments and its allies and clients . . . rather than speak obsessively, as is so often done, about the wrongs done by Muslim terrorists or Islamic theocratic regimes or, for that matter, Cuba and North Korea' (Akeel Bilgrami, *Secularism,*

Identity, and Enchantment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 96). In this context, an interrogation and structural transformation of racialised dehumanisation remains critical 'in the present', Christina Sharpe explains, because of 'the ways that all black people, regardless of sex/gender, but especially the young and poor and working class have become in the United States (but not only in the United States) the symbols of the less-than-Human being condemned to death' (Christina Sharpe, 'Black Studies: In the Wake', *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): p. 62). Césaire noted that such a transformation in thinking alone, a Left theory 'in the service of black peoples', would itself be a 'Copernican revolution' (Césaire, 'Letter', p. 150).

100. Stuart Hall, 'The Empire Strikes Back', in *Selected Political Writings*, p. 206.

101. See Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

102. While my emphasis on political strategy in this book might appear as the opposite of Nikolas Kompridis's call for a more open critical theory, my overall position, beyond the specific intervention here, is very much invested in such a renewed critical theory. In that the human rights claims at Standing Rock were grounded in a larger context of situating ourselves in a way that centred land and ancestral knowledge, I understand Standing Rock as exemplary of a new critical theory that proceeds through a dialectic of strategy *and* receptivity, and thus as resonant with Kompridis's call for 'placing the capacity for receptivity and decentering in an unusually prominent and central normative position' (Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 187). I elaborate on Monture's contributions to a 'receptive' critical theory and rights discourse in Benjamin P. Davis, 'The Right to Have Rights in the Americas: Arendt, Monture, and the Problem of the State', *Arendt Studies* 6 (2022): pp. 43–57.

103. Christopher Paul Harris, *To Build a Black Future: The Radical Politics of Joy, Pain, and Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), p. 21. For an important connection between Black Lives Matter and human (political) life, see Derefe Chevannes, 'Black Lives Matter Toward Afromodernity: Political Speech, Barbarism, and the Euromodern World', *Political Research Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2024): pp. 213–25.
104. Bernard Harcourt, *Cooperation: A Political, Economic, and Social Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), p. 15.
105. Hammad, *Recognizing the Stranger*, p. 22.
106. See e.g. John Crabtree and Francisco Durand, *Peru: Elite Power and Political Capture* (Chicago: Zed Books, 2017); Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, *Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2022).
107. See Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being'.
108. Joy Harjo, 'Break My Heart', in *An American Sunrise: Poems* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019), p. 3.
109. Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'Before *Man*: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme', in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 101. In colonial contexts, those in power have leveraged race in order to naturalise hierarchical and oppressive divisions of labour, and thus divided humanity. Alexander Weheliye has explained that modernity is constitutively marked by racialisation, meaning 'sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans' (Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 3). Weheliye's concern about 'juridical humanity' and call for highlighting '[t]he problematic of humanity' both suggest that he would take some distance from my return to human rights as well as my suggestion in this book that we leverage *in addition to* problematising 'humanity', even if we are in full agreement that 'black studies . . . is engaged in engendering forms

of the human vital to understanding not only black cultures but past, present, and future humanities' (ibid. pp. 135, 136).

110. Hall, 'Old and New Identities', p. 79.

111. I see the tendency to search for pure concepts as part of the Levinasian inheritance of decolonial philosophy, which, beyond how his specific vocabulary of 'alterity' has been adopted to describe cultural difference, has also led to the impulse to seek out 'the Other' in theory. John Drabinski explains, 'Difference, for Levinas, is only genuinely radical when it is thought *outside* its distinction from, which invariably means *derivation* from, identity' such that 'transmitting Levinas beyond boundaries, borders, and old habits of scholarship *ought* to be quite natural. It is in the very orientation of work dedicated to the Other *to seek out alterity* without the prerogative of conquest' (John Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. xii, xiv, emphasis mine save on 'derivation'). On those pages, Drabinski also points us to Jacques Derrida's second essay in *Rogues*. There Derrida calls for hospitality and generosity towards 'an event' of '*exceptional singularity*' (Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 148; see also p. 149). Derrida asks his reader to think about the becoming of reason in terms of an arrival 'as other, as the absolute exception or singularity of an alterity that is not reappropriable by the ipseity of a sovereign power and a calculable knowledge' (ibid.). In advancing his philosophy and ethics of liberation, Enrique Dussel draws on Levinas, modifying 'alterity' to 'exteriority'. Alejandro Vallega summarises the trajectory this way: 'For Dussel . . . philosophical thought arises in alterity and toward the engagement with alterity . . . a thinking in radical exteriority' (Alejandro Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 6). In my view, one contribution to critical theory from Caribbean philosophers – such as Édouard Glissant (in his concept of 'entanglement') and Stuart Hall (in how he

sees the world as becoming increasingly diasporic) – is to call into question the possibility of a Levinasian 'event' or 'encounter' or 'rupture' of alterity in a globalised/colonial world where languages, norms, values and concepts are already shared, overlapping and mixed. If these philosophers are correct, then a person on the search for exteriority will never find what they seek, because it does not exist in modern/colonial conditions. Instead, we are left with what Paul Gilroy called 'another, more difficult option: the theorisation of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity', leading to a series of 'strategic choices' (Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 2, 19). The task of decolonial philosophy and decolonial ethics becomes not to find concepts *outside of* the contaminations of capitalism, colonialism and neoliberalism, but to leverage strategically the always already contaminated concepts that we have in order to make political gains. Thinking with Hall and Gilroy (as well as with Du Bois, as I suggest in the following chapter), I find this point to be not at all an admission of defeat, but rather a point that liberates us from worrying about whether we found an 'exterior' concept and whether that concept can become co-opted (we did not; and it can, because all concepts can, because politics does not come with guarantees).

112. My reading of Du Bois in this Introduction and in my first chapter is less of a contribution to Du Bois scholarship and more of a suggestion for critical theory. The method I call for here is less a new intervention and more in search of a renewal; it is an echo of the method of Caribbean critical theory, with Aimé Césaire's new humanism in *Discourse on Colonialism* being perhaps the most famous, and in my view still the standard-setting, example. This method was arguably part of not just Césaire's theory but also his practice. In his resignation from the French Communist Party, he wrote that in light of Stalin's brutalities, he expected from the Party 'not a renunciation, but a new and solemn departure' (Césaire, 'Letter', p. 146). This method (departure but not renunciation) is why Césaire can say later in that letter, without contradicting himself, that 'the time has come

to abandon all the old ways, which have led to fraud, tyranny, and murder' while still calling for a new universal, 'a universal enriched by every particular' (ibid. pp. 150, 152).

113. Several readers of this Introduction have commented that I do not sufficiently define 'we' and 'our' in this paragraph. I have in mind those of us who think of ourselves as on the Left. My lack of definition reflects, I think, the state of an unformed New Left in the present. For Hall, as he discussed in *Familiar Stranger*, the New Left hinged on the events of 1956: it needed to be democratic (because of Hungary), anti-imperialist (because of Suez), and anti-war (because of nuclear proliferation). The question of what our new Left would hinge on today remains largely unanswered, but my sense is that it would still be all of these things, with an additional focus on receptivity to our shared environment, and in this sense planetary as much as international. I thank Paget Henry for emphasising the need for a (new) New Left today in conversation.
114. Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Resistance, and Struggle', in *Cultural Studies 1983*, pp. 183–4. For the line about re-articulating 'black', see Hall, 'Old and New Identities', p. 75.
115. Hall, 'Culture, Resistance, and Struggle', p. 184.
116. Ibid.
117. See Clare Foran, 'Hillary Clinton's Intersectional Politics', *The Atlantic*, 9 March 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/hillary-clinton-intersectionality/472872/.
118. Stuart Hall, 'Race, the Floating Signifier: What More Is There to Say about "Race"?', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 372. For Hall's earlier formation of politics without guarantees, see Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology – Marxism without Guarantees', *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): pp. 28–44.
119. I thank an anonymous reviewer for *Philosophy & Global Affairs* for noting that this kind of humanism is the significance of this passage. This was not my original reading; it is really their contribution to this Introduction.

120. See Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention & Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), esp. pp. xv–xvii. See also Bedour Alagraa's wonderful attention to beginnings in Bedour Alagraa, 'The Underlife of the Dialectic: Sylvia Wynter on Autopoeisis and Epistemic Rupture', *Political Theory* 51, no. 1 (2023).
121. Hall's attention to responsibility across societies is exemplified in his famous line 'I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea' (Hall, 'Old and New Identities', p. 70).
122. Aijaz Ahmad noted that one consequence of the rise of post-structural methods has been 'greatly extending the centrality of *reading* as the appropriate form of politics, and how theoretical moorings tend themselves to become more random, in this proliferation of readings, as much in their procedures of inter-textual cross-referentiality as in their conceptual constellations' (Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 3–4).
123. More interestingly, as some leading theorists have suggested, it might be that concepts – perhaps (on my Glissantian misreading) as a way of naming shifting realities by beings who are themselves always changing – are always deconstructing themselves in the first place. Geoffrey Bennington has noted the following about deconstruction: 'In those early uses, where the term deconstruction is closely linked to Heidegger's notion of destruction, Derrida tends to present it as a task, a philosophical task, a way that we need to recognize and measure up to the tradition from which we inherit . . . In some of his later works he tends to suggest that it is perhaps a less willfully operated task than some of those early formulations might suggest, so I think he would tend to say, in slightly later work, that metaphysics is in deconstruction from the start, always already; it is not that there was metaphysics doing its ontology, doing its metaphysical thing for many centuries, and then at a certain point somebody deconstructed it – that sounds like a rather subject-object, instrumentalized version of events. So I think he would say . . . that metaphysics was always already

in deconstruction from the start' (Alberto Moreiras and Geoffrey Bennington, 'On Scatter, the Trace Structure, and the Opening of Politics', *Diacritics* 45, no. 2 (2017): p. 40). By now I trust it is rather clear that I have no problem with a subject-object approach, instrumental as it may be, as we use concepts strategically.

124. In my view, various liberation theologies provide examples of working within a given terrain – the predominant moral vocabulary of a situation – to achieve a more just society.
125. This, as we will see, is a decidedly humanist reading of Hall, a reading that, in his own terms on two paradigms in cultural studies, he would locate as much more culturalist than structuralist. See Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms', in *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 64.
126. For my first articulation of this idea, see Benjamin P. Davis, 'On Conceptual Sufficiency: Humanity in Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* and *John Brown*', *Philosophy & Global Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2023).
127. As Adolph Reed explains, 'ascriptive status' is 'status defined by what you supposedly are rather than what you do'; this status, he further argues, was foundational for 'a rigidly hierarchical social order like that of the segregationist South' (Adolph Reed, *The South: Jim Crow and Its Afterlives* (New York: Verso, 2022), p. 75).
128. '[B]y failing to fully account for how the exceptional costs of climate change affect national wealth, the I.M.F. and the World Bank have wound up driving countries in need toward profit-reaping hedge funds and banks, to borrow billions of dollars, often at credit-card-like interest rates. Throughout, the debts have been collected. They were collected as the shadow of the 2008 financial crisis lingered and as a pandemic decimated tenuous health care systems and tourist-reliant economies. They continue to be collected despite a climate crisis that is caused almost entirely by the copious fossil fuels that those

same creditor nations burned to industrialize and achieve their own wealth, the very wealth that undergirds the I.M.F. Caribbean nations are being asked, in a sense, to pay not only their own debts but the rest of the world's debts, too, for all the progress it made while leaving the Caribbean behind . . . Debt is written off in Ukraine, as it was for Germany after World War II. Other countries, though, the ones subjugated throughout history, have seen their humanitarian crises ignored . . . Perhaps the suggestions that lenders forgive debt isn't about kindness but about obligation – about seeing it as a kind of back tax that they owe to society and to frontline societies, in particular' (Abrahm Lustgarten, 'Oceans of Debt', *The New York Times Magazine* (31 July 2022): pp. 31, 49, 47).

129. See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, [1950] 2001), p. 73.
130. A related problem, and a personal pet peeve, is when we trade on the radicality of a concept or a figure without ourselves taking on even a scintilla of risk in our work (such as citing Said but not writing and speaking about Palestine or, in other contexts, citing Du Bois but not writing and speaking about race, naming white supremacy, and teaching about Black dignity, refusal and philosophy). Perhaps the most common example is when intellectuals draw on Gramsci, but it also happens when we trade on the main figures of our religious traditions, many of whom (like Gramsci) spent much of their lives in prison or exile – or facing the violence of the state. Black Studies has kept alive this sense of intellectual risk more than any other field, or perhaps alongside Indigenous Studies, though for all of us there always remains the temptation towards respectability, professionalism, and a level of abstraction that, as Glissant says opening *Poetics*, withdraws into a 'a dimensionless place'.
131. See Gordon, *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement*.
132. For commentary on Brown as a 'touchstone', see Ted Smith, *Weird John Brown: Divine Violence and the Limits of Ethics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), pp. 15–39.

133. To bring my position into further relief by way of another comparison, I am overall quite invested in how concepts, in Stoler's words, 'do work and work on us to authorize some questions, to reconfigure what questions are worth asking, and, not least, to foreclose others' (Stoler, *Duress*, p. 173). However, in this book I am suggesting that critiquing concepts can become autotelic, such that *the critical approach can itself foreclose questions about practice*, including those I list following the work of James, Salaita, Monture, Revilla, TallBear and others.
134. For a discussion of 'risk-taking commitments' in service of 'communal goals for social and cultural freedoms, economic sufficiency, and radical democracy', see Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender, and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 243. See also Steven Salaita, 'My Life as a Cautionary Tale: Probing the Limits of Academic Freedom', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 August 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/article/my-life-as-a-cautionary-tale/.
135. In regard to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples in the settler state of Canada, Patricia Monture-Angus writes, 'Self-government requires the significant letting go of Canadian government power over the lives of Aboriginal citizens. I do not doubt that the release of power is a difficult thing' (Monture-Angus, 'Thinking about Aboriginal Justice', p. 230).
136. Maybe we could connect these eventful divestments, these refusals, to more daily practices of repair, where '[r]epair, like refusal', the anthropologist and dancer Deborah Thomas writes, 'is practice-oriented and quotidian; it is non-eventful and deeply historical and relational. Like its nominal counterpart [reparation], repair urges us to interrogate the multiple scales of entanglement that have led us to where we are now. But where reparation seeks justice through the naming of names, the exposure of public secrets, and the articulation of chains of causality, repair looks for something else. It demands an active listening, a mutual recognizing, an acknowledging of complicity at all levels – behavioral evidence of profound

interior transformations that are ongoing' (Deborah Thomas, *Political Life in the Wake of the Plantation: Sovereignty, Witnessing, Repair* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 212).

137. Here, because the context I am familiar with is the Americas, I am thinking of Occupy, Idle No More, Standing Rock, and the Movement for Black Lives. My reader likely has in mind different examples based on the movements they are a part of. I also wonder here how we can build and make and perform what María Pía Lara calls a 'wider space' and a 'more complicated' space, how we might reclaim public space while acknowledging that '[t]he feminist social imaginary is a wider space than the public sphere, which, as a political institutional device, made women invisible' (María Pía Lara, *Beyond the Public Sphere: Film and the Feminist Imaginary* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021), pp. 3, 5, 170).
138. Cf. the poet No'u Revilla's concept of 'generative refusal' as tied to a practice of centring land: 'The Land is the Center', https://www.poetryfoundation.org/podcasts/158639/the-land-is-the-center.
139. Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction: Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 200.
140. See Kim TallBear, 'Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family', in *Making Kin Not Population*, ed. Adele E. Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018). See also Alexis Pauline Gumbs et al., eds, *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016).
141. See Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), especially the concluding discussion of friendship in dialogue with Arendt. Thanks to Helen Kinsella for this suggestion and for friendship.
142. Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility: Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. xiii.
143. I have in mind Walter Mignolo's continued emphasis that decolonisation is an 'option' among other options. In my view, this framing suggests the *increased* importance of theoretical

and discursive work that can explain widely why this option is both just and desirable. See Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

144. Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, 'Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?: Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations', in McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*, p. 33.
145. Ibid.
146. Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation – An Argument', *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): p. 260.
147. Sylvia Wynter, 'Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antillies', *World Literature Today* 63.4 (1989): p. 640.
148. Simone Weil, 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God', in *Waiting for God* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 115. This is why it is ethically and politically important to write by hand, avoid many forms of social media, and live a life that is not oriented by dings and notifications; these are efforts to keep alive our capacity to think and relate to one another in our time of the predatory attention economy, with its algorithmic forms of governance and ecologically destructive pursuit of 'efficiency'.
149. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 81.
150. Hall, 'Old and New Identities', p. 64.
151. AnaLouise Keating, 'Risking the Personal: An Introduction', in Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
152. See Aaron Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2019); Wilder, *Concrete Utopianism*, p. 57. See also Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

153. Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Plural Maghreb*, trans. P. Burcu Yalim (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 5.
154. Working through these tensions, especially in terms of how we relate to land and to sea, remains, in my view, the most politically important way that we are still learning to live, in Reiner Schürmann's wonderful phrase, 'under the sign of Proteus' (Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 514.
155. Geoffrey Bennington, *Scatter 2: Politics in Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), p. 2.
156. Ibid. p. 203.
157. Ibid. p. xi.
158. Ibid. p. 249.
159. Ibid. p. 259. For how deconstruction/*Destruktion* offers a three-step method of reading for positive possibilities, limits or concealments, and questions opened or provoked – a method that is part of how I strategically read 'the human' and 'humanity' in the following chapters – see Sean D. Kirkland, *Heidegger and the Destruction of Aristotle: On How to Read the Tradition* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2023), pp. 27–8. 'Rather than simply generating arbitrary neologisms in order to think in excess of the inherited metaphysical tradition', Kirkland continues in outlining a method I follow, 'Heidegger feels compelled to take on the traditional vocabulary and press it into service, radicalizing it and amplifying some of its underdeveloped tendencies' (ibid. pp. 44–5). The key methodological difference between what I am advancing and deconstruction, it seems to me, is that I am (obviously) very instrumental in how I want to use concepts, seen in my sense of the first (strategic) move in double politics, which is very different from Heidegger's goal: what Kirkland describes as 'a nonconceptual mode of thinking' (ibid. p. 33). But again: learning to do both – to leverage concepts that inevitably 'grasp' the world in our necessary struggles (we might need 'sovereignty' to stop a pipeline), while remaining receptive to the disclosures of the world – remains of critical importance for an ethical/political attunement equal to the challenges of this century.

160. Brian Meeks, *After the Postcolonial Caribbean: Memory, Imagination, Hope* (London: Pluto Press, 2023), p. 114.
161. See e.g. Simone Weil, 'Human Personality'; Claudia Jones, 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!'; Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*; Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*.
162. McKnight, *Race and the Politics of the Exception*, p. 93.
163. See e.g. ibid. p. 109.
164. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 85.
165. Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 155.
166. Louiza Odysseos, 'Prolegomena to Any Future Decolonial Ethics: Coloniality, Poetics and "Being Human as Praxis"', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 3 (2017).
167. Glissant, *Traité/Treatise*, p. 21/11.