Edward Said and Jacques Derrida:
Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid
Edward Said and Jacques Derrida: Reconstellating Humanism and the Global Hybrid

Edited by

Mina Karavanta and Nina Morgan

Cambridge Scholars Publishing
To our loving husbands, Peter Morgan and Dimitris Angelopoulos, and children, Nicholas Morgan, Amarantha and Marilia Angelopoulos, who bore witness to our absence and presence and traveled with us, and who have taught us and continue to teach us to think in a loving and caring way.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We hope that the readers of this volume will recognize the passionate commitment of its writers—an international group of individuals whose wide-ranging experiences and learned accomplishments inform their unique and formidable thoughts. As the editors, we would first like to thank them for their intellectual generosity and the many personal kindnesses they showed us. This collection developed out of an invitation by Cambridge Scholars Press; we owe its editors a debt of gratitude for their interest in our work. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Research at Kennesaw State University offered financial support for the research of this project, as did the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kennesaw State University, the Department of English, and the KSU Foundation. Additionally, the School of Philosophy, Faculty of English Studies, and the Special Research Fund of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Ειδικός Λογαριασμός Έρευνας ΕΚΠΑ) supported our lectures and research meetings. We are thankful for their attention and support. Giovanna Covi and the graduate students of her doctoral course Intercultural Studies (Studi Interculturalli) at the University of Trento in Italy who read parts of this project and who gave us their thoughts were an inspiration and reminder of the energy and excitement that is much alive in the halls of Humanities programs around the world. Peter Morgan’s photograph “Street Scene, Oaxaca” and Nicholas Morgan’s design together created the cover art for this book; we much appreciate their collaborative contribution to this project. We would also like to thank our many family members, friends and readers whose care and support we value very much. We are grateful to William V. Spanos and Kathleen Kornell of the University of Illinois Press for allowing us to print a version of Spanos’ first chapter “Edward Said and the Poststructuralists: Introduction” from The Legacy of Edward W. Said (University of Illinois Press, 2008); we also warmly thank R. Radhakrishnan and Cultural Critique for allowing us to reprint his essay “Edward Said’s Literary Humanism” (Cultural Critique 67, Fall 2007: 13-42).
INTRODUCTION: HUMANISM, HYBRIDITY AND DEMOCRATIC PRAxis

MINA KARAVANTA & NINA MORGAN

Every philosophical colloquium...has a political significance.
—Derrida, 1968

[C]ultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure, and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality.
—Said, 1993

Why humanism now? Why invoke a term, which, since its conception, has always been in crisis, complicit, as it has been, with the project of modernity, the expansion of colonialism, the growth of imperialism and now the domination of global capital? We invoke humanism neither to resuscitate its metaphysical tradition in absence of a redeeming ideology nor to redefine it as the response to the technocratic age of global capital; instead, we propose to delve into its ruins in order to rethink the question of the human despite the reductive and destructive consequences of humanism. By sustaining the question of what it is to be human within the matrix of global powers, this collection of essays attempts the creation of a previously un-thought and untried affiliation between Edward Said and Jacques Derrida, two thinkers who dominated the scene of literary criticism, theory and philosophy of the 20th century and who passionately engaged, in their respective works and in their variegated ways, the question of the human and her/his abode. Our collection does not offer a systematic comparative analysis of their works, a task that we think is crucial and yet to be taken up. It is only the opening of an address to the question of the human and the politics of humanism in the global age from the multiple perspectives that this temporary affiliation between Said and Derrida has afforded the contributors to this collection.

Under the auspices of globalization, wherein the transformation of democratic nation-states, multinational corporations, and transnational
currencies operates simultaneous to the proliferation of paperless peoples, technologies of communication, and fundamentalisms, the possibility of a shared sense of the human is without doubt under extreme pressure. Humanism’s history alongside the event of today’s globalization has produced the concept of the human subject as the witness to and the body of a history of oppression, a condition of “unevenness,”1 and a messianic project of a yet-to-come of being. Such contingency informs what we call the “condition of concurrency” that names the overlapping histories, alliances, conflicts; defines the network of affinities and disjunctures; and indicates, for us, the necessary dynamic of the processes of hybridization. Our understanding of global hybridity challenges the idea of hybridity as a shared, assimilating process of change and transformation, as acts that are willed or chosen or autonomously performed evenly throughout the world.

To critically interrogate humanism in view of the “global hybrid” as a condition and metanarrative, we invoke Said and Derrida’s intellectually rigorous examination of humanism in their works; yet by wrenching Said and Derrida out of their contexts—by dis-engaging them from their respective habitats of systematic interpretation and use, which have schematically equated them to the areas of postcolonial studies and deconstruction respectively—and by thrusting them into each other’s company, we propose to create a persistent albeit temporary reconstellation of those traces of their works in which they sustain the practice of critique and open the question of the political. Rather than a structuralist reading of their works and a drawing of the possible parallels, the reconstellation that we propose attends to the fissures, margins, and breaks that their respective commitment to critique has created. Instead of reading their works as therapeutic tools through which to understand the one through the other, the essays of this collection pursue the traces of their works in theoretical, philosophical, historical and literary contexts in which the presence and/or cohabitation of Said and Derrida’s signatures have not been openly (or at all) engaged.

Despite their different and often opposing practices of critique, Derrida and Said are characterized by some shared intellectual and scholarly graces: they are both attentive to the text, always already pursuing close readings that symptomatically reveal multiple contingencies; they are both enamored by the power of the literary text to imagine the impossible, to create the site where the yet-to-come is always already here in presenting the communities of co-existence or convivencia3 as events whose history and politics have yet to be recorded and fashioned appropriately and in consistency with the multiple and confluent needs of the people who inhabit them. Still, both Said and Derrida oppose a facile celebration of the
beginning of a new era in which hybrid identities will overcome national and restrictive agendas.

Both thinkers engage critique not to praise any specific concept of tradition but instead to enact their philological and literary analysis in the name of the political; thus in attending to the multiple positions of the text, in analyzing the ways they constitute and are constituted by historical, political and social reality, both Said and Derrida affirm the need for a kind of critical praxis that contends with the political. In their different modes and tones, they keep the question open to engage the political and philosophical condition of exile and dis-belonging, and the political and philosophical imperatives of hospitality and friendship.

One more point of common departure that facilitates their invigorating critical praxes is their disobedience to the principles and axioms of an epistemology and/or a methodology. In other words, their works remain a-systemic even when identified as part of a method or system. We believe that both Said’s secular criticism—or what Aamir Mufti has called “critical secularism” in inverting Said’s terms to better interpret and empower them—and Derrida’s deconstructive praxis lack the programmatic and syntactic nature of a theoretical methodology that can be applied consistently and towards an a priori visible goal. Said’s work, especially Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, may very well be identified, studied and taught as the texts that inaugurate the field of postcolonial studies, but Said’s style and commitment to a wide array of “canonical” and “western” texts and love for other genres (music and opera, for example) resist such an easy categorization. And Derrida, despite his many followers and detractors, resists the distillation of deconstruction to a grammatological practice that remains bound to the text and hence caters to its insularity; instead, he opens it to the question of the political to contemplate the issues of justice and friendship and the praxis of cosmopolitanism in the age of globalization. By disobeying a more systemic and orderly critical praxis, Said and Derrida may have, in other eyes, erred, but in the process they have offered attentive and caring readings of the silence and voices of those who are still more oppressed, more excluded, more marginalized in and against the global and its rhetoric of flow and liberation.

Finally, another point of affiliation between Said and Derrida is their profound awareness of the hybrid nature of their experience, both going so far as to use the word “hybrid” by way of describing themselves; Said declared, “I am…a sort of hybrid” (qtd. in Rushdie 182) and Derrida noted that he considered himself to be “a sort of over-acculturated, overcolonized European hybrid” (Derrida 7). Except for their obvious
hybrid origins however, (Derrida of Algerian-French and Jewish origins, and Said, an Arab-Christian of Palestinian origin) Said and Derrida’s attachment to hybridity was of a more performative nature. Moving between histories, cultures, languages and geographies, their works resist allegiance to a genre or capture by a historical period or a particular author; and just as they are attuned to voices always already other or especially when addressing canonical materials (texts too often tamed by limited and blindfolded analyses), their questions reconstellate issues of interpretation, meaning, and truth. The paradoxes of Said and Derrida’s multiple attachments to and engagements with both the world of unconstituted constituencies and the world of the metropolitan West have often exposed them to criticism yet few would dispute the fact that Said and Derrida paved ways for the intellectual world to think about the exilic condition in a postcolonial and global age. The complexity of their politically, historically and aesthetically engaging readings of the world as both a “shared experience” in which “there is no way of having an experience by yourself” (Said)⁹ and as a site where “there is no world, only islands” (Derrida qtd. in Miller 48)⁷ only accentuates the urgency at the heart of our opening of the question of humanism. We are in league with Said and Derrida when we say that we are in search of a different kind of critique—one that has a future, but no specific formula or procedure. As W.J.T. Mitchell notes, both Said and Derrida advocated “the possibility of a radical mutation of human thought” (59). In this way, Derrida’s undecidability in fact affords the possibility for an ethical criticism, one that isn’t performed or designated by politics, power, or the latest trends (even retro ones) in literary studies; likewise, Said’s call for a secular humanism as the means for an emancipatory humanism that is a working humanism, a daily humanism, a changing humanism opens the political through the practices of the literary.

In light of these nodes that sustain this temporary affiliation between Said and Derrida, we propose to ask the question of humanism yet again. In our pursuit of this question of humanism and the human and her/his abode, we follow Said’s definition of humanism in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* as “the practice of participatory citizenship” whose “purpose is to make more things available to critical scrutiny” and thus disclose its “human misreading and misinterpretations of a collective past and present” (22). This disclosure cannot be fully realizable without the insistent critique of the term humanism and its investments that Derrida’s work never ceases to pursue. As impossible as a coherent yoking of these two strategies of critical affirmation and deconstructive praxis appears to be, especially in the academic terrain where the works of these two
thinkers have yet to be closely and seriously studied together in the name of what theory is to be or do now, in the age of the end narratives, in the age of globality, we propose that responsible critique cannot be done otherwise—for to do so otherwise would be merely to reproduce the blind spots of both strategies and their tethered discourses.

We reconstellate the terms “humanism” and the “global hybrid” under the “condition of concurrency” to set alight a conflagration of oppositions in order to release potential critical insights and actions that together share the question of the Human anew—and from this newness challenge the problem of its representations and the politics of its manifestations. This volume performs reconstellation as an act that places in critical affiliation and in productive opposition the strategies of deconstruction and secular criticism—both intrinsically pertinent to the act of reconstellation as we intend to perform it—as they are articulated within but also apart from the critical terrain of Derrida and Said’s works. Our methodology of reconstellation operates in a complex way as it formulates a network of affiliations both between Said and Derrida as well as between readings of their concepts through other thinkers who have also challenged and pursued the question of the human and the role of critique in the age of the global. We therefore define reconstellation as a strategy of risk that cannot predetermine the outcome of the encounter and calculate the procured connections and affiliations; instead, it ventures to create an unimagined community, to welcome a “messianicity without messianism,” and to rely on the incalculability of l’avenir. In the temporality of the reconstellated site, this community formed by a critical alliance of voices, strategies and narratives emerges as an epistemological and historical break. Taken out of their sequence and contexts, these voices, strategies and narratives vertically disrupt the continuum of the grand narrative of history to reconfigure the history of the present by telling the stories and writing the histories of those constituencies often left out or kept in the margins. Our volume attempts a gathering of such a community, formed by intellectuals who represent a world of discrepant experiences, languages, histories, and cultures that challenge the common language and shared critical practices which keep them connected in the western academic world, here temporarily and critically allied in this volume.

The temporal but also vertical nature of this critical praxis is contingent upon the contemporary condition of globalization, a complex unevenness which requires a meticulous analysis of the present and a detailed study of the everyday in all the differences such temporalities disseminate, to invoke here Martin Heidegger’s attentiveness to the question of Being. All efforts to explain the complex phenomenon of globalization—whether
as defense or critique, whether defining globalization as a site of new articulations and liberatory movements or as a site of poverty and exploitation regulated by the deregulating practices of transnational capitalism—these efforts share a fundamental question: the question of the human subject. This question has been elided by the very network of narratives that originated from the event and discourses of the Enlightenment from which point the importance, impact and meaning of what it is to be human has been monitored and promulgated by the institutions of the humanities through the discourses of nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism that are the forerunners of today’s globalization.

As different linguistic, cultural, and political realities leak into each other and the rapid flows of capital and labor force produce new social, economic, and political conditions of co-existence, the reinvention of the public sphere and the active participation in what Etienne Balibar calls the “constitution of citizenship” (156) as a process in-the-making have become the imperatives of our age. Yet rethinking humanism alongside these accelerated strategies of being in the world is a challenge made more complex by a wide array of political, technological and aesthetic forms of representation and new arguments about what “hybridity” might mean in the emerging public realm of the global sphere.

Nestor Garcia Canclini, in his Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity (2005), offers an extended discussion on—and defense of—the term “hybridity,” arguing that the “processes of hybridization” should be the focus of an advanced and more theoretically informed analysis of the conditions of hybridity. Warning us against falling into an identitarian politics that seeks only to describe the hybrid in all of its countless manifestations, Canclini posits that while “studies about hybridization are usually limited to describing cross-cultural mixing,” the goal of his study should be understood as “giving the concept hermeneutical capacity: making it useful for interpreting relations of meaning that are reconstructed through mixing” (xxix). To sustain this trajectory away from merely describing toward hermeneutic theorizing, Canclini effectively hierarchizes hybridization above the panoply of its antecedents—“mestizaje, syncretism, and creolization”—by suggesting a historical view: hybridization is “specifically modern…generated by the forms of integration conducted by nation-states, political populisms and the culture industries” whereas the other terms refer to the premodern surviving into the early modern period, hence Canclini’s subtitle which directs us to conceive of hybridization as a specifically modern condition where the postmodern seems to have been elided by the onslaught of
Canclini’s articulation of hybridization as a process of conversion immediately suggests its liberating and emancipatory potential and invokes a world where all constituencies are global actors who opt to exit and enter—to their advantage—those hybridization processes that global capitalism has disseminated in modernity. This reading, optimistically assigning agency to previously isolated localities that due to conversion find creative outlets for their previously contained potential, seems to be oblivious to what R. Radhakrishnan has very aptly called the unevenness of globality, an unevenness that “remains structured in dominance” (93) while a certain rhetoric of globalization “has been able to conceal the fact that globalization is intended as a utopian resolution of the problems of the world: utopia sans politics, sans ethics, and sans ideological content” (99). Not only does the celebratory language of globalization hide its own origins, but Canclini’s way of configuring the practices of hybridity also seems to elide the origins of those dispossessed others who “need” to hybridize in order to convert what society doesn’t require into what it demands. Bearing in mind that the development is uneven and that globality is often invoked in the name and language of domination and power, the name and language of transnational capitalism,10 we invoke the term “global hybrid” not to refer to a process accommodating fusion but to place alongside the homogenizing discourse of the global, the diversifying dynamic of the hybrid where the multiple crossings, affiliations, and alliances but also conflicts, oppositions, and encounters of violence work like a Derridean deconstruction to avail new realities and different narratives. Derrida therefore suggests the necessity in fact of making cohabit in a same text or of grafting codes, motifs, registers, voices that are heterogeneous…not…simply in order to do it or in order to force incompatible things into cohabitation or in order to create confusions—but to do it while trying to articulate these different registers to compose in some way the text so that the articulation of the heterogeneous voices among themselves both causes one to think and causes the language to think (Derrida, “Passages” 375).

In opposition to an understanding of hybridity that operates as what Pheng Cheah has called “a closet idealism” (302),11 the global hybrid calls for a
critical praxis that is attentive to the details of the everyday processes of hybridization and the regulating policies of homogenization as they are realized in the “scattered hegemonies” of transnational capital. Being a name that suggests the “destabilization of all ontopologies” that may create the “possibility of another history” (Moreiras qtd. in Canclini xxxii), we define the global hybrid as the name of the “condition of concurrency” that marks the incalculable simultaneity of unevenness and difference; such concurrency affords both a challenge to gestures of erasure or as William V. Spanos calls them, the “amnesiac initiatives” of political and discursive power,12 while it also imparts the promise of “infinite variety and mystery” out of which no one can predict what may come—Derrida’s l’avenir.13

The first part of our collection entitled “Deconstructing Humanism in the Name of the Human as Not One” opens with William V. Spanos’ critique of Said’s defiant gesture toward theory in Humanism and Democratic Criticism. Spanos’ essay performs an engaging deconstructive analysis of Edward Said’s works, arguing that at the heart of the much-heralded Humanism and Democratic Criticism, Said, “having decided not to proffer a history of the meaning of the word” humanism, and “nowhere in his book...[addressing]...earlier figures in such a way as to clearly indicate that they collectively constitute a humanist tradition,” does not actually fully meet the high standards of careful reading and critique for which his own secular criticism calls. Spanos finds Said’s recuperative project in Humanism and Democratic Criticism problematic in its indiscriminate dismissal of a generation of poststructuralist theorists that has systematically and, in Spanos’ mind, persuasively shown Western humanism to be informed by the will to power over alterity and thus to be complicitous with classicism, sexism, racism, and imperialism. Spanos wonders whether Said’s long-standing criticism of poststructuralist theory as threatening human agency, albeit at times justifiable, and his persistent distinction between his humanist critique of Western imperialism and the ontological and/or linguistic critique of Western thinking of the poststructuralist theorists that he condemns does not lead to the reduction of a potentially powerful collaborative critical momentum and to a disabling binary opposition between these approaches. Highlighting the gaps in that post 9/11 work, Spanos then returns to Culture and Imperialism to reconstellate Said’s analyses contrapuntally to the history and practice of American exceptionalism, the Bush administration’s policies, and contemporary sites of socio-politics suggesting that Culture and Imperialism rather than Humanism and Democratic Criticism has much to tell us about “the human, humanism, and the humanities.”
In her essay “‘Like a Sibylline Creature’: The Woman Migrant as a Humanist Subject in Jacob Lawrence’s Early Work,” Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen pursues a reading of Jacob Lawrence’s Migration Series (1941), a visual narrative representing the Great Migration of African Americans from the agrarian South to the industrialized cities in the North and West of the U.S. What Gsoels-Lorensen finds striking is Lawrence’s representation of the “humanist subject” and his specific focus on the woman migrant’s experience of the Great Migration; Said’s engagement in 20th century migratory movements and his technique of counter-reading afford an entry into Gsoels-Lorensen’s reading of Lawrence’s specificity as a “painter of historical experience” rather than as he has been treated, that is, depoliticized, as a “historical painter.” For Gsoels-Lorensen, the work of Lawrence “will not bow to a definition of ‘man’ that remains devoid of the question of justice.” Gsoels-Lorensen thus employs Said’s definition of humanism as a democratic praxis to pursue a close reading of the figuration of the black female singularity in the work of Lawrence. She approaches Jacob Lawrence’s conceptualization and subsequent representation of the African-American community-in-the-making through an analysis of this series of panels that narrates the travels, hardships, family-life, and community-building of the black female figures. Through a parallel reading of his interviews and the reception of his work by contemporary critics who attended more to the aesthetic and less to the historical, social, and political origins of his work, Gsoels-Lorensen demonstrates how Jacob Lawrence’s work is a reconstellation of the African-American community-in-the-making with the existing community, hegemonic practices, and official policies of white America. Lawrence’s work appears to be motivated by the persistent question of the human, which now arises in the name of those constituencies whose humanity has been put under erasure.

Starting with a critical appraisal of Edward Said’s posthumously published book Humanism and Democratic Criticism, Radhakrishnan’s “Edward Said’s Literary Humanism” works through a series of challenging questions, interrogating Said’s relation to the work of Freud (whom he says Said “defends”), Conrad (for whom Said shows “appreciation”) and Fanon (toward whom Said is “unfair”), thus reconstellating Said’s relation to Eurocentrism, essentialism, language, poststructuralism and the future in order to offer an understanding of Said’s “heroic” effort at finding the in-between of being human without abandoning the passion of the unique human being Radhakrishnan knew Said to be. Said’s thinking takes the risk of such contradictions and deviations. One such moment is definitive in Humanism and Democratic
Criticism, when he announces the need to again engage a humanist praxis “in the name of humanism.” Radhakrishnan’s essay turns to that moment of contradiction in Said’s last response to this persistent question of humanism in his work and argues that such an invocation of humanism is a call that is trapped in a kind of essentialism unless it is consistently accompanied by a critique that questions the higher order of the human that this call harbors. By way of Frantz Fanon’s thoroughgoing problematization of colonial humanism and his consequent gesture towards a “new humanism,” Radhakrishnan argues that Said’s compliance with humanism in the name of “critical intentional choice,” exculpates humanism a little too easily, a little too untheoretically.

In her essay, “In that Precarious Exilic Realm: Edward Said’s Andalusian Journeys,” Tabea Alexa Linhard reads Said’s analysis of Andalusia as the site that calls for a theorization of the democratic praxis required by the cohabitation and synergy of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian cultures in Andalusia. As the global hybrid connotes the travelling constituencies’ inevitable and multiple crossings of territorial, conceptual, cultural and identity borders, Linhard takes Said’s suggestion that “the point of theory is to travel” quite literally; reading his writing on his time-travel to Andalusia, Linhard observes the impulse toward nostalgia for convivencia that not even Said’s text can avoid as he imagines Andalusia’s past as a space of tolerance but experiences it as a world of ghosts, specters that haunt the promise of “home.” Linhard’s essay provides a historical and literary analysis of a locality the historical transfiguration of which is determined by global flows, migrations and the living-with of the Arab, Jewish, and Christian constituencies, a particular “living-with” that we are taught to think of as impossible today. This idea of convivencia, not only through a predetermined settlement of differences but often through conflict and friction, is also a historically and politically realistic response to the metaphysical and universal implications of a Western humanism rooted however in the identity politics of the white man. Linhard proposes that this condition of convivencia has formulated not only the past but also the present conditions of living-with both in Spain and Europe.

The second part of our collection entitled “Affirming Humanism: Secular Criticism and Democratic Praxis” opens with Bruce Robbins’ “Said and Secularism” that further complicates the discussion of home in Said by emphasizing Said’s sense that “the homeless intellectual [serves] as a model for the normative subject” for whom exile is the state of secularism that the humanist embodies. Robbins is not so comfortable with these correspondences, offering instead an emphasis on Said’s real-life
actions that constitute his “effort”; he claims, “Said’s appeals to effort are ways of mediating between humanism and poststructuralism, opening each up to the other.” Robbins’ focus on Said’s effort as an intellectual who speaks truth to power (attending to his multiple commitments as an intellectual, an academic, a teacher and a man of Palestinian origins never ceasing to speak out about the conditions of his people) suggests that the exilic consciousness is not a *modus operandi* but an existential and political condition that demarcates Said as an intellectual. Robbins thus confronts the criticism that is blind to Said’s complex commitment to thinking and which accuses Said’s secular criticism of being too much at home in the world. Robbins claims that it is Said’s refusal to systematically theorize his own practice of critique that exposes him to such unfair criticism. But it is probably because of its a-systemic (and not unsystematic) order that consciously and persistently resists abiding by a methodology (and refuses to offer one) that Said’s work extends rhizomatically, to invoke Deleuze and Guattari, and in an interdisciplinary way. Said’s critical praxis is after all systematic in its reading of texts and its excavation and articulation of the networks of power in which the connection between the aesthetic and the political is constituted. But it is also a-systemic as it disengages itself from the principles of a methodology that is so disciplined that it cannot ever betray itself or at least take the risk of deviating from its own center. Hence, what appears as a contradiction in his critical praxis, i.e. writing against imperialism while writing about Conrad, advocating humanism in the name of a new democratic praxis without erasing the tradition of humanism, writing against American imperialism while seeing the making of community in America as the possible site of this new democracy—and the list can go on—is not an irresolvable conflict nor the fallacies of an incomplete or untheorized methodology. These are here approached as errors—that is, deviations, fissures—of an order that itself testifies to play rather than to the sustaining of the presence of a center, of an axiom, or a principle. The order of his critical praxis is intentionally a-systemic, dis-abiding, dis-affiliating, or as Said would have it, exilic.

If indeed critique requires that we question again and again, Vassilis Lambropoulos’ essay, which asks, “What if, instead of rehearsing resistance and deferring democracy, we looked into the polity we want, the laws and institutions that may be more conducive to humanism than the present ones?” also requires that we rethink the political role of interpretation. Lambropoulos’ essay weaves a connection between Said’s appeal for a democratic praxis that will emerge from the politics of secular criticism and the question of democracy, or the question of the *polis*, as it
is articulated in the works of Bertolt Brecht and Günter Grass. His analysis of their works in and against Said’s philology and Derridean futures interrogates whether—at what stage and on what stage—the act of literary interpretation can ever be truly political. One of the important questions Lambropoulos raises concerns the relationship between the politics of interpretation and the question of the political, as the question that relates to the invention and reinvention of civic life. His analysis of Brecht and Grass demonstrates how critical praxis, albeit passionate and committed like the one that Said employs in his writings or Brecht practices in his theatre, may actually be stagnant if not oppositional to the actual social and political practices that make the political claim or even revolutionize democracy (as his analysis of the historical context of Brecht’s production of *Coriolanus* demonstrates). Through Brecht and Grass, Lambropoulos interrogates the ways tragedy can play out this relationship between affirmation and rupture, aesthetics and politics, interpretation and political praxis in the name of a humanism between as he puts it “hubris and heroism” that can still remember the human after the fall, bereft of power or even abandoned to inhabit the ruins of the *polis* left behind. This is a critical point that argues against Said’s faith in a philological praxis and instead shows how it is possible to be engaged with a militant politics of interpretation that lapses into another metaphysical or “totalizing circle,” as Lambropoulos calls it, thus demonstrating how this kind of politics of interpretation is not adequate without a deconstructive praxis that will strive against the affirmation of metaphysical discourse.

Stathis Gourgouris opens his essay “Rethinking Humanism” with the claim that the question of humanism invokes the necessary, though paradoxical, relationship between the universal and the particular and requires that the fear to speak not only about but also in the name of the universal be overcome. Gourgouris recognizes the risk and responsibility that such a claim entails but finds any interrogation of the term humanism impossible, especially now in a continuously growing global world, unless it engages the problematic history and multivalent presence of the term on both the particular and universal plateaus. It is through this complex history of this term that Gourgouris turns to Said’s critique and definition of humanist praxis. For Gourgouris, Said’s gesture to humanism in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* is not inconsistent with his earlier work, not even *Orientalism*, for in his last text Said once again makes the effort to engage the term in its complexity. Taking a rather different route from both Spanos and Radhakrishnan’s essays, Gourgouris’ reading formulates the position that Said’s reading of humanism, as a real example of “late style,” is neither a complete rejection of theory nor an uninterrogated
celebration of a facile and even neo-liberal humanism, like the kind Said relentlessly critiqued throughout his work. Faithful to the need to rethink the universal from within the particular (and vice versa) and simultaneously to oppose the universalist rhetoric that absents difference, Said returns to humanism, according to Gourgouris, as a site of complexity, a site that unavoidably intertwinesthe particular with the universal, the “utopian with the political,” and the “skeptical” with a viable democratic praxis. Gourgouris suggests that Said maintains this sensitive balance by being always already aware of the contradictions and the paradoxes that it involves and always already attentive to exploring the question of the human through the praxis of what Said defines as “secular criticism” and what Gourgouris calls an “antinomian humanism.” This “non-humanist humanism” that Said’s work offers as an example of intellectual effort—to invoke Bruce Robbins’ analysis of the concept of effort—and ethics does indeed invite a workable affiliation with a renewed deconstructive reading of the term, like the one Derrida proposes in his later work. Gourgouris pursues this workable affiliation through three propositions about humanism made by Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, whose different positions—temporarily reconstellated in this essay—unconceal the three-dimensional and historically entrenched interpretation of the concepts of the human, humanism, and humanity with which the question of the human is laden. Gourgouris contemplates the connectedness of these terms and explores the realm of the major difference by which they are marked and which distinguishes the human from its radical other, the animal. Gourgouris closes his essay by offering three propositions about “human animality,” a condition that destabilizes the traditional binaries between human and animal and complicates the question of the human as the question not only of being, logos, reason, and politics but also the question of life, body, desire and being-with, not only with itself but also with its others.

The response to humanism in the 20th century is given historical footing in Efterpi Mitsi’s study of the model of Renaissance humanism and her etymological and literary analysis of the idea of the humanist as represented in Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Her essay, “The Utopian Humanist,” argues that the concerns—political, social, and intellectual—of the Renaissance humanist are mirrored in Said’s “secular humanism” as *Utopia* provides a form of critique that works deconstructively to subvert “the affirmations and certainties voiced by the interlocutors in the text.” Hence, More “inaugurates a humanist aesthetics founded on the questioning and questing mind.” In response to Said’s call for a humanist praxis that can open the possibilities for a democratic critique not
restrained by its contemporary social and political reality, Mitsi marks a bond between the political humanisms of both the Renaissance and the 20th century: the refusal to forget the human. By grounding this refusal in a close reading of the contradictions and fissures of More’s text, Mitsi does not propose a nostalgic and uncritical return to humanism; in fact, More’s *Utopia* emerges as the critical site where the question of the human and the praxis of the political as a human-made and human-ordered praxis are reconstellated to be re-conceptualized and engaged with risk. By being attentive to More’s refusal to offer any comforting responses to these questions, Mitsi proposes a “turn” to this critically engaged Renaissance humanism as a “turn” that should be reconstellated in the present with all of its complexities and paradoxes laid bare to critique.

Samir Dayal’s “Ethical Antihumanism” opens the third and final part entitled “The Global Hybrid and the Call for Critique: Rethinking the Human and Her/His Abode” and offers an attentive reading of Frantz Fanon’s “proleptic deconstruction”—or even destruction—of the term humanism that gives its place to the praxis of an ethical anti-humanism that can address the needs, dreams and visions of Fanon’s “New Man.” Fanon proposes a strategic anti-humanism knowledgeable of the history of humanism that will focus on the promise of an anti-humanist ontology. Dayal’s reading of Fanon’s proposed ontology of a New Man that is yet-to-come not as a reply to the inherited tradition of humanism, an aporetic subject that remains behind after the project of deconstruction is over, but as the embodiment of the promise of and hope for a new condition of being is an immediate and alternative reply to the questions that the temporary reconstellation of Said and Derrida’s use and analysis of humanism opens. Dayal’s reading of Fanon articulates an “other” ontology that, incomplete as it may be due to Fanon’s tragic and early death, is fundamental to the question of humanism inscribed in the long history of western metaphysics and its discourses that have attempted to dehumanize the black body. Dayal’s elaboration of Fanon’s ontological project as an “ethical antihumanism” or an “ethics of antihumanism” or “ethics of subjectivation” that binds together the three dimensions of the human subject, namely, the psychic, the political and the collective and which is manifested as a counter-ontological and political project that does not simply interrupt the status quo but really constitutes a new statement and deconstructs the inherent binary dynamics of the set up between a faith in humanism yet-to-come and a rejection of the term and its practices tout court. By focusing on the need for an epistemic violence that will destroy the binary between the black and the white constituency, Fanon, as Dayal proposes, makes the effort of “fusing the ethics of psychoanalysis with the
ethics of the political” in order to articulate a new ontology past but not oblivious to the binary politics and policies of the western humanism that has condemned to the black man to a condition of inhumanity and injustice.

In “Towards a Western Humanism Made to the Measure of Those Recently Recognized as Human,” Joan Anim-Addo attends to Sylvia Wynter’s claim for a reconfiguration of humanism “now made to the measure of the world.” Taking a similar path to Fanon’s proposition for the envisioning of a new human but also breaking away from it to articulate the question not only of human as man but human as woman, Wynter’s work operates as an epistemological break that posits a new standpoint, one often neglected or cast into historical oblivion by the grand narratives or anti-narratives of history often written by men. Anim-Addo rethinks the question of the human from the perspective of what it is to be human on the edge of the recognition of the complexity of her/his humanity and in the era of global capitalism. Following Wynter, Anim-Addo argues that this recent recognition produces new discourses and epistemologies that do not simply challenge the philosophy of western humanism and narrate what bell hooks has called “the narratives of struggle” but also operate as a “minority discourse” that resists its marginalized and peripheral role and instead undercuts the master narratives of history, blurring the borders between texts, agents, voices, and identities. Instead of simply resisting or opposing, this minority discourse affirms the conditions and claims of those humans “whose humanity was only recently recognized” and reconfigures the question of the human now made to the measure of the heterogeneous, albeit still greatly uneven, world. The questions of course remain, as Anim-Addo aptly observes, as to which constituencies are “listening across the gap” and when the condition of a real dialogue will truly engage the question of the human in the name of a humanity of all humans.

Giovanna Covi’s “La Dividua—a Gendered Figuration for a Planetary Humanism” considers the question of gendered agency within the matrix of global powers. It foregrounds “figurations” (Donna Haraway) drawn from feminist literary and philosophical sources and proposes “la dividua” as a figure of resistance to patriarchal, imperial-capitalistic globalization. The purpose of this essay is to contribute to developing a discourse that resists the association of the individual as a human subject with a singular masculine self and proposes instead a representation of subjectivity that struggles to counter the separation of Self from Other. With this aim, the essay coins the term la dividua—a feminine (embodied) noun which is offered as referring to that which can be divided, is relational, multiple,
fractioned. *La dividua* is Covi’s new concept through which a resistance to the normative human is enacted, it is the “figuration of resistance to sexist, racist, and imperialistic globalization,” and it is also the sign of another kind of being in the world. Asserting herself amidst the “worldiness” of Said and “différance” of Derrida, Covi claims a space for the feminist questioning of humanism by suggesting a need for another definition of the human than the discourses of philosophy (“the philosophical human”) and politics (“the political human right”) have thus far provided; in doing so, Covi’s essay offers analyses both of literary texts and of political associations that represent dynamics in which humanity acts as that which does not exclude—beyond the limits of identity and individualism, beyond the exclusion of the animal and earth—as collective life is lived in conversation and dialogue, the shared communication that, even between an animal and a person, is a gift. Thinking through poetry is more promising of transformation for us than thinking along the lines that power and history have drawn and enforced. Like Said and other critics, Covi depends upon the literary as a human production that may, as Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* attests, give us the site of seeing another way of being and thus creating the potential for an ethical relation to the other as does Anim-Addo’s revision of Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* provide us with *Imoinda* an operatic *aporia*, but one that is also the site of another way of being and ending. In reconstellating these texts, characters, and theorists (including Ronell, hooks, Sedgwick, and Butler, among others), Covi makes a strong argument for her “impossible possible” dream of conversations with the world.

In his essay, “Said, Derrida, and the Undecidable Human: In the Name of Inhabitancy,” Robert P. Marzec provides a critical analysis of a “philosophy of geography” as a narrative that is attentive to the issue and event of inhabitancy, which is Marzec’s provocative reply to this “undecidability,” as he puts it, that demarcates the indissoluble and problematic relationship between Said’s humanism as a political praxis and Derrida’s antihumanism as an ethical praxis. Marzec’s analysis of inhabitancy brings the political and the ethical together and rethinks the question of the human in the name of her/his right to and for inhabitancy. Marzec reads “ontopology” as emerging from the “uneven development” and the impossible and yet possible living off the land beyond and within the structure of the nation at a time when that structure is being destabilized and transformed under the weight of global capital. Here, Derrida’s approach to the ontological and Said’s critique that grounds philosophy in the geographical both are related to inhabitancy as a condition of being, living, transforming, occupying, claiming and
belonging to land. Marzec restores the connection between “humanism, undecidability and geography,” a connection, he argues, which has been denied.

The collection ends with Mina Karavanta and Nina Morgan’s “‘Another Insistence’: Humanism and the Aporia of Community” in which Karavanta and Morgan examine how today’s humanism, bound as it is to new questions of community that arise out of an accelerated condition of global mobilities, is overdue for a radical rethinking. Such a rethinking would entail a commitment from those in the Humanities to consider how their own research, course offerings and reading practices participate in promulgating rather than alleviating the pressures and problems of nationalisms and identities and thus ironically forget the human and its futures. In reconstellating Said’s “democratic criticism” with Derrida’s imaginative grammar in relation to a humanism-to-come, this essay interrogates the impasse of justice and identity, sovereignty and rights under the auspices of globalization and articulates the problematic of community, hybridity, and belonging, ending with the hope that the site of critique will sustain the question of the human and that its abode will “be interpreted and imagined as radically heterogeneous and hybrid—as it is lived.” In this essay, Derrida and Said appear less as idealists and more as visionaries whose sense of the self-critical community open to the other (and thus recognizing the other already within itself) will lead us to a more conscientious—more viable—other kind of being in community with each other.

The essays in this collection address the need to rethink together Said and Derrida’s oeuvres through the fields of theory, philosophy, art, and literature as the predominant and self-critical forces that both produce and provoke the institutions of humanistic practice. Such reconstellating might thus invoke discomfort where cross-cultural and inter-cultural contacts thrive in harmony and bliss but also suffer or survive rupture and violence. Through the temporal and yet challenging affiliations created between these two thinkers and the critical analyses of the contributors to this collection, we suggest that the critical approach of reconstellation and the condition of the global hybrid are not to be seen as availing us of cohesive or umbrella terms that group together all kinds of discrepant experiences thus regulating and evening out their unevenness. For us, hybridity is not the name of a process that happily and soothingly integrates and fuses different cultures thus undoing the dominating force of the universal and erasing processes of homogenization. It rather names the complexities that arise from the simple fact that this world is inhabited by incommensurable differences represented by constituencies whose disjunctive histories and
temporalities persist despite predictable and political attempts to conceive and analyze them as simple constituent elements of a globality that itself reports a readable narrative, a logically traceable identity, and a coherent meaning. Thus our goal for this collection is to rethink Humanism through a hybrid practice of analysis that refuses and refutes the methodology of subscribing to one unified and thereby insulated critical perspective as this moment of globalization, this condition of concurrency, incites a heterogeneity of voices that may excite new and always already “uneven” insights through the creative reconstellating of supposedly incompatible concepts—and thinkers.

Notes

1 See R. Radhakrishnan’s Theory in an Uneven World for an interesting and politically engaging analysis of this term.

2 Here we draw on Theodor W. Adorno’s analysis of the concept of constellation in the second part of his Negative Dialectics. Adorno argues that concepts bear the traces of processes of meaning, even before they enter other contexts, to add, change or challenge meaning. Being the outcome of complex processes of meaning construction, concepts thus engage objects to “illuminate” (Adorno 162) them, to unconceal, to follow Heidegger, those yet unseen aspects of the objects. This engagement is always already double: it is engagement both with the complex process of meaning inherent in the concept and the unseen aspects “stored in” the object (163). Constellation is thus the act that entwines the concept with the object on the premise that “[t]he history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in its relation to other objects—by the actualization and concentration of something which is already known and is transformed by that knowledge” (163). Hence for Adorno, who is attentive to Walter Benjamin’s theorization of constellation in The Origin of German Tragedy as the act that “take[s] the very concept of truth for a constellation” (Adorno 164), “constellation” is a theoretical act that “circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box” (163). Following Adorno, we conceptualize reconstellation as the act that does not simply recognize the imperative need for a double engagement with the history of meaning inherent in the concept but wrenches both concept and object from their contexts to temporarily and persistently disrupt those relations of attachment and affiliation that have regulated their respective meanings and functions. This temporary inoperativeness of both object and concept calls for a new act of interpretation and repetition conditioned by the field that the object and concept now temporarily share after being wrenched from their previous contexts and being thrust into each other’s company. Reconstellation is this new act of interpretation and repetition: it both engages previously untried affiliations and relations and unavoidably returns to the
previously set contexts from which concepts and objects are wrenched. It thus destabilizes and critically interprets the relations that bind the concepts to the objects, yet again and from the beginning.

3 See Tabea Alexa Linhard’s analysis of this term in her essay that appears in this collection (Chapter Four).

4 See Aamir Mufti’s “Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times” and William V. Spanos’ analysis of Mufti’s inversion of Said’s terms in his essay that appears in this collection (Chapter One).

5 Said, in an interview with Salman Rushdie in 1986, makes this observation of himself, while Derrida makes this claim in *The Other Heading*.

6 In an interview with Michael Phillips of “Social Thought,” Said says “…we really are living in a tiny world in which the principle idea, and this is really where I think my work as an intellectual has led me, the principle idea is the notion of interdependence, that there’s no way of having an experience by yourself, that all experiences are shared experiences”. http://www.well.com/~mp/t20.html.

7 See J. Hillis Miller’s “Derrida Enisled” (in *The Late Derrida*) for this phrase, which Miller offers from one of Derrida’s (previously unpublished) seminars.

8 See Joseph A. Buttigieg’s “Teaching English and Developing a Critical Knowledge of the Global,” where he states the need for small readings that attend to the complexity of the global and thus counteract the global as another metaphysical and thus dangerously homogeneous term. Also, see Radhakrishnan on globality in his *Theory in an Uneven World*, where he proposes that an understanding of globality/globalization requires a systematic critical analysis that remains anti-systemic, which is what this praxis of reconstellation that we propose promises and, we hope, achieves.

9 It is difficult if not impossible to list the long line of conflicting discourses that undertake the theoretical task of critically engaging the event and phenomenon of globalization. Amir Samin’s *Obsolescent Capitalism: Contemporary Politics and Global Disorder* (2003); Saskia Sassen’s *Globalization and its Discontents* (1995); Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi’s (eds.) *The Cultures of Globalization* (1998); Walter D. Mignolo’s *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000); R. Radhakrishnan’s *Theory in an Uneven World* (2003); and Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri’s *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004) are a few of the different and conflicting analyses of globality and its narratives.

10 See Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan’s “Global Identities. Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality” for a powerful analysis of the concept of “transnational” as a pivotal term that can “address the asymmetries of the globalization process” (664).


12 See his essay in this collection (Chapter 1).
In “Collectivities” in *Death of a Discipline*, Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak, following Derrida’s turn to the “law of the social as such” (Spivak 28) in his *Politics of Friendship*, proposes that Derrida’s concept of a “yet-to-come” is not a “future anterior, where one promises no future present but attends upon what will have happened as a result of one’s work” (29) but (and here she quotes from Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship*) a new kind of “‘perhaps,’ ‘the possibilization of [an] impossible possible [that] must remain at one and the same time as undecidable—and therefore indecisive—as the future itself’” (Derrida qtd in Spivak 29). In agreement with Spivak’s proposition that Derrida’s positions should not be dismissed as “rhetorical extravagances” (29), we offer an analysis of the relationship between what we call Derrida’s “imaginative grammar” and the political possibility of a community-yet-to-come through the praxis of critique in our last chapter of this volume.

**Works Cited**


