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The Inhumanities

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This article proposes the inhumanities as an analytic to address the material confluences of race and environment in the epistemic construction of the humanities and social sciences. As the Anthropocene represents an explicit formation of political geology, from its inception as a means to frame a crisis of environmental conditions to the characterization of future trajectories of extinction, I argue that centering race is a way to reconceptualize and challenge the disciplinary approaches of the humanities, humanism, and the Anthropocene (e.g., the environmental humanities and geohumanities¹). Foregrounding the conjoined historic geographies of racialization and ecological transformation through the discipline of geology, within the context of colonial and settler colonial extractivism, sets the conditions for thinking materially about decolonization as a geologic process. I make three interconnected points about the Anthropocene and inhumanities. First, the Anthropocene names a new field of geologically informed power relations that focus attention on the geographies of the inhuman, geologic forces, and the politics of nonlife. Second, the framing of the inhumanities forces a reckoning with the humanist liberal subject that orders the humanities: an invisible and indivisible white subject position that curates racialized geographies of environmental concern, impact, and futurity. Third, the inhumanities makes visible the historic double life of the inhuman as both matter and as a subjective racial category of colonial geographies and its extractive afterlives. In conclusion, I consider the emergence of geopower as a political technology of racial capitalism and governance of the present. Geopower, I argue, is the product of historical geologies of race that subtend a particular form of life marked by extractivism enacted on racialized geosocial strata. *Key Words:* *Anthropocene, environmental humanities, geology, inhuman, nonlife, race.*

What was this something, I asked myself, that needed as its own condition of existence the systemic impoverishment of the darker peoples of the world? The no less systemic inferiorization of the black and of other non-white peoples of the earth?

—Wynter (2000, 200)

As environmental concern and the designation of the Anthropocene foster new interdisciplinary configurations in the environmental and geohumanities, underpinned by targeted funding and programs, the human is often taken for granted as an accomplice in the designation of a field of concern, as the planet is taken as a presumed arena of action. Although climate change and mass transformation of the planetary geochemical systems do indeed call for a new understanding of the commons beyond geopolitical configurations of nation states, such modes of existence need scrutiny for how they mobilize geophysical changes of state to make new ontological claims on behalf of the elemental, volumetric, or subterranean, while erasing the historical forms of material differentiation that constitute the livability and modes of

extinction that result in the “systemic inferiorization of black and of other non-white peoples of the earth” (Wynter 2000, 200). The human as a metaphysical–empirical concept is materially constituted through the scientific racism of paleontology in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries and the geographies of colonialism that formed its praxis, a praxis that divided the human into its subcategories of human, subhuman, and inhuman, to extract and control the surface and subsurface of the earth. Racialized populations thus became a means to justify and govern this theft of persons and land. In the rush to secure white settler futurity (see Smith and Vasudevan 2017; Erickson 2020) in the context of environmental and climate change, the emergent field of Anthropocene studies and the environmental/geohumanities often assumes rather than problematizing the human that secures the concept of humanities at both a philosophical and epistemic level, disregarding the historical colonial geographies that materially delivered humanism, its structures of thought (the human and its “others” and in parallel the discourse of nature and its “others”), its

organization of value (philosophy of natural philosophy, ethics, and racial capitalism), and its scientific and industrial institutions (that were funded, and thereby grounded, in the financial spoils of imperial enterprise).² As data from the UCL Legacies of British Slave-ownership³ project has made abundantly clear, the financial payout to slave owners during abolition underpinned the Industrial Revolution in Britain and facilitated the development of its modes of capitalist production,⁴ carbon economies, and scientific and educational institutions. Slavery thereby realized both the material transformation of the United Kingdom and its colonies and secured the establishment of its knowledge production and dissemination within global geographies.

Although pressure has been put on the figure of the human, its historicity, racialized, gendered, and sexualized forms (Wynter 2003; Walcott 2014; Jackson 2020), it is not just a hermeneutics of the human that is needed (e.g., from colonial man to Anthropocene man, master-subject “Man” to matter-subject “Anthropos”) but, alongside, an unearthing of the very ground that materially constitutes the figure of the human through an examination of what might be termed the geologies of race. Geologies of race is a way to understand the conjoined material praxis of colonial terra- and subject-forming, its geosocial relation (Clark and Yusoff 2017), and its legacies in the present. The material incorporation of the European subject (and its settler colonial kin) in terms of value, accumulation, and subjective forms was defined against what was classified as fossil nature (indigeneity) and fossil energy (the enslaved) to transform the ecological and energetic organization of the world as a global geography. As the Anthropocene empirically describes a new field of geologically informed power relations that focuses attention on the geographies of the inhuman, geologic forces, and the politics of nonlife, it also represents an explicit formation of political geology that is racialized from its onset in the geologies of colonialism since 1492 (Lewis and Maslin 2015; Yusoff 2018c). My argument is not just about the recognition of geographies of colonialization as a spatial apparatus but as a set of interlocking affectual architectures and geophysical relations that constitute an antiblack and colonial earth in the present tense.

The Inhuman and the Anthropocene

In Césaire’s (2000 [1972]) *Discourse on Colonialism*, he suggested that “at the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has

never been further from being able to live a true humanism—a humanism made to the measure of the world” (73). As the human is being measured in the world as a planetary geologic agent, Césaire’s question remains pertinent to how the measure of this altering world is made, the organization of its disciplinary formations and institutions, and the natural philosophy through which an encounter with the future is staged. In another searing critique of humanism, Fanon (1961) tied the unrealized figure of a true humanism to the earth, as a wretched counterpoint, whereby the inhuman residues of the colonial project abide as discarded matter and the imposition of that subjective category on the discarded. In the context of securing natural resources and the wealth of settler societies through the colonial geoengineering of the planet, the inhumanity of the colonial subject forged a “Black and blackened” (to use Sharpe’s [2018, xvi] term) subject category in the inhuman, a designation that materially functioned as the racialized understrata to the white surfaces of capital accumulation. Those blackened colonial afterlives in “modernity’s project of unfreedom” (Walcott 2014, 94) are still very much present in the political geologies of climate change vulnerabilities, the wasting effects of racial capitalism, and neo-extractivist economies (Pulido 2016; Vergès 2017, 2019; Sealey-Huggins 2018; Gilmore 2002).

The narrative arc of humanism, Scott (2000) suggested in conversation with Wynter,

is often told as a kind of European coming-of-age story. On this account, humanism marks a certain stage in Europe’s consciousness of itself—that stage at which it leaves behind it the cramped intolerances of the damp and enclosed Middle Ages and enters, finally, into the rational spaciousness and secular luminosity of the Modern. As such, it forms a central, even defining, chapter in Europe’s liberal autobiography. But that coming-of-age story has another aspect or dimension that is often relegated to a footnote, namely the connection between humanism and dehumanization. (119)

The Anthropocene discourse follows the same coming-of-age humanist script, searching for a material origin story that would explain the newly identified trajectory of the Anthropos; as a geologic configuration that grapples with the excess and waste of modernity’s rationalities (see Hird 2012) and the material consequences of its imposition of reason in the dividuation of the earth. As Scott suggested, the birth of humanism is also the birth of Europe’s colonial project, so that “humanism and colonialism

inhabit the same cognitive-political Universe inasmuch as Europe's discovery of its Self is simultaneous with its discovery of its Others" (Scott 2000, 120). The Fanonian paradox of the invention of blackness has had much critical attention, yet the substance of othering, its geophysical properties rather than metaphysical dimensions, might also be thought to bear on the mobilization of forces of energy and minerality in the world, as well as the ongoing questions of environmental racism and injustice in material exposure to environmental events and toxic body burdens (Bullard 1990; Williams 2017, 2018; Woods 2017). That is to say that humanism has a material gravity and an anti-black and brown ground (Moten 2003; Roane 2018).

It is well noted that the Anthropocene as a concept is disrupting the binaries of nature and culture, human temporality and deep time, human history and prehistory, bio and geo, and rearranging temporal and spatial scales of analysis, but it also has unproblematically reinstated a pre- and postracial subject (Gunaratnam and Clark 2014). I want to suggest that the inhumanities is a means to reconceptualize and challenge the existing disciplinary approaches of the humanities that acknowledges rather than erases the collaborative junctures between metaphysical designations of the human and the geophysical praxis that bring subjective forms materially into being. This geologic praxis refers both to the extraction of natural and psychic resources for the maintenance of white heteropatriarchy, and how materiality regulates racist structures of extraction and subjugation. In the Anthropocene, the human often comes into view, organized as it is around the telos of a *coming catastrophe*. Although the human is a ritual object of self-flagellation for Western thought (through the Enlightenment and then its critiques of postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and posthumanism), it nonetheless remains a dominant figure that marshals the horizons of meaning with an irrepressible recurrence. Because this is where meaning has been made, as postcolonial thinkers such as Fanon, Glissant, Césaire, and Wynter understood, it is also where meaning gets unmade or remade, so it is both the target and site of possible emancipation with regard to racist structures of material engagement. Similarly, the inhuman is a site of traffic in subjective and material forms of life, so it is also a site of possibility for decolonizing the entanglement of race

and geographic processes. As the category of the inhuman is positioned as ahistorical, or that which is placed outside of the time of racial capitalisms to propel its notion of time and space, so it holds the potential for reimagining the dimensions of time and space.

Alongside Fanon's (1961) decolonizing tract, *Wretched of the Earth*, the subterranean theorizing of the black radical tradition (e.g., C. L. R. James, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Tina Campt, Tiffany Lethabo King) has shown that the ground (and grounding) of humanism is anti-black. The onto-epistemological organization of an antiblack earth matters for antiracist struggles beyond questions of territory and environmental justice, because it is an epistemic inscription that conditions structures of thought and their institutional manifestations. Race provided the imposition of material poverty with a moral justification, reallocating the burden of destitution onto a racial determinant rather than a systematic organization of material relations. Black and Indigenous studies have been theorizing a nonnormative materiality for years, precisely because the black and Indigenous subject is historically irreducible to the normative (humanist) subject. Furthermore, this antiblack and brownness is materially and theoretically made concurrently with the inscription of the earth through the grammars of geology within colonial praxis and its afterlives (Yusoff 2018c). The natality of this emergence can be said to constitute an ontological inscription of black, Indigenous, and earth as the ground for the "natural" right of whiteness to consolidate the planet for the generation of value (also see Bonds and Inwood 2016; Baldwin and Erickson 2020). The historic and geographical differences across which the questions of geology and race travel are specific and varied, and by no means exclusive, but across the plateaus of colonialism, race provided the political redemption for the white supremacy of matter. The discourse of "improvement" brought raced subjects and indigenous land theft into the economic terraforming project of natural resources.

This is to say that knowledge of the earth is also interned in a perspectivism and praxis of the supremacy of whiteness, which marks the capricious geography of the human; what Wynter (2000) referred to as "racially dominant white elite stratum" (126) that propagated the development of natural resources as a "secular telos of materiality

redemption” (Wynter 1996, 300). Alongside, in different ways, scholars in Indigenous studies have argued and practiced for different ontological arrangements of the earth against settler colonial modes of extraction (Simpson 2017; Whyte 2018).

In the epochal imaginary of the Anthropocene there is a reconstitution of the subject as planetary, understood not through the conquest of space (as in the Enlightenment) but through the mobilization of an empire of geologic forces, what might be designated as the capitalization on modes of geopower (Grosz, Yusoff, and Clark 2017). Disrupting the homogenizing spatial identity of colonialism as primarily being about the traversing and settlement of territory, as if it were a relatively nonresistant earth for social and political relations to play out on, the mobility of geologic forces suggests anything but a nonresponsive ground. Thus, geographical concern with the horizontality of space and more recently with its verticality, subterranean spaces, and volumetrics does not yet attend to the change of geophysics, where *state* is a temporal geophysical condition rather than exclusively a spatial demarcation (i.e., the settler colonial state as a modality of ongoing colonial relations to materiality, time, and space). The geosocial formations of the Anthropocene are about the *tense* of geographic spaces in time rather than their expansiveness in space. If the ground on which the humanist subject is presumed to stand is shaken, it is not just providing a disruption to the spatialities that locate the preferred human as distinct from the violence of the wretched earth, but it is exposing that subject as a hermeneutic shell that neglects its material constitution (as one that only holds its elevated position because of the accumulated energy from systems of settler colonial violence and antiblackness). It is time, then, to imagine another subject capable of apprehending the differentiated and differentiating geoforces it is historically embedded within. That is, to ask can “we” stay in that state—in the *tense of geophysics*—without the fantasy of a materially autonomous subject that does not need the earth and the racialized forms of its extractive economies? As current material conditions are disrupting the ontology that imagines a subject that is not constituted by the earth, this normative subjectivity was not available nor desired for the many black and brown populations who are most closely involved in the actual fabrication of the world, in the mine, on

the plantation, offshore, or underground. In the ongoing brutal apparatus of extraction, the contradictions of ethically hailing a humanist subject that is the praxis of the extinction of many worlds suggests that the psychic life of geology has yet to be fully examined in the Anthropocene.

Geologic forces constitute socialized worlds, yet they are often bracketed out because they introduce intricate and often contradictory spatial relations into the mix that problematize long-held spatial propositions about social relations and the organization of power and its anthropogenic origins. Geologic sovereignty requires an analysis of the relations of geopower, as they are differentiated through subjects and regulated by racial capitalism, which is in turn historically constituted by its colonial afterlives (see Pulido 2016, 2017; Pulido and Lara 2018; Tuana 2019). The Anthropocene seems to present a new geosocial formation of the human condition, but it has a much longer historical geography established in the wake of geology, made through the material classification of the inhuman, and its extractive grammars since 1492, where race became a modality that enabled material extraction and slavery instigated the collapse of the inhuman into the body politic of blackness. As geologic classification of earth minerals made matter as value, it also captured enslaved subjects in the brutal calculative enclosure of the inhuman as chattel. Extending work on the division of the world according to the technologies of race, race might equally be viewed as an ontological division of matter that established historically situated conditions of proximity to violent material forces without accumulation of value. Thus, technologies of race are equally geologies of race, whereby metaphysical designations have geophysical effects, establishing antiblack and brown gravities as the affective architecture of extraction.

The Inhumanities

The inhumanities forces a reckoning with the materialities of the humanist liberal subject that orders the humanities; an invisible and indivisible (white) liberal subject position that curates racialized geographies of environmental concern, practice, and futurity, from the material conditions of science policy to metaphoric assertions of environmental poetics. Although there has been attention to the crossings between the nonhuman and race (see

Jackson 2013; Luciano and Chen 2015; Muñoz 2015) and the dehumanizing effects of racial sciences, the relation between the inhuman and race—the inhumanities—is undertheorized.

The inhumanities refers to the classificatory systems and natural philosophies of thought that are desubjectifying (targeting particular populations into things, property, or properties of energy) and structurally subjugating (to black and brown life in the afterlives of slavery and imperialism). The dual effect of this subjection is to underground agency, in a body of matter rather than rights, under slavery and settler colonialism. Blackness was seen as a source of energy that was cultivated as a signifier and a carceral category to produce value through extraction in which race was implicit in the material reproduction of whiteness and settler futurity. At the heart of that racial formation was the extractive impulse, which builds capitalism into a globally functioning system that is world-altering. Race was the codification of the unequal racial distribution of geopowers, its accumulation and the placement of certain lives in material and psychic proximity to the inhuman, and therefore less conspicuous in the juridical and ethical recognition of a political subject.

As an analytic, the inhumanities puts the kinship between the extraction of bodies and the extraction of earth at the core of its concerns about the possibilities and potentialities of lives, conjoining genocide and ecocide as tenants in the colonial project (and its kin, settler colonialism and resource colonialism, or what Gomez-Barris [2019] called the “colonial Anthropocene”). This move from a biocentric paradigm to a geocentric one includes rethinking how the social and political configurations of subjectivity have been thought and experienced in relation to the earth. Extraction drives a particular formation of what and who gets constituted as a natural resource and where these activities of extraction take place in relation to the accumulation of value. Natural resources under colonialism and its afterlives in racial capitalism equal extraction plus capture, resulting in forms of epistemic and material enclosure for the production of value. We can see a parallel framing of personhood under slavery, whereby extraction (from Africa and precolonial relations) plus capture (through the technology of race) results in forms of material (spatial extraction and containment) and subjective (slave/native) enclosures. Developing a broader understanding of

colonialism in relation to the integration between its knowledge and extraction networks, the emergence of geopower can be seen as a political and racial technology of governance of the present and as a set of forces that subtend the potentialities and exhaustion of life.

The political importance of reconceptualizing the inhuman in its material, epistemic, and conceptual forms is part of understanding the material transformation of the planet (Clark 2010) and how geologic grammars do geopolitical and geophysical work (Yusoff 2018c). This is also to understand how and where matter relations organize and arrange particular enduring forms of oppression, as extraction economies traverse subjective and material regimes of value. As McKittrick (2006) argued in *Demonic Grounds*, what would happen if we put black geographies at the center of our analysis? What kind of geography would that produce, and how would it shift the questions we ask? The mine and the plantation are the geosocial formations of the New World; what is important to notice is that they are both social institutions of extraction (the mine and the factory) and bio-geo engines that rearrange earth and ecologies. In other words, because of their repeatability across the Americas and empire, the material praxis of the mine and plantation completely rearrange the geochemical flows of the world, setting into place changed ecological and social relations that are racialized. The geophysics of the mine and plantation created the metaphysic conditions of the burden of being categorized as black. These geosocial arrangements are a *geophysics of power*.

What are often considered as spatial divisions in the conceptualization of political geography, and in particular the formation of planetary politics or planetary scale, are actually a question of material ontological division or “matter fix” that designates the location of agency on the side of biocentric life (which cleaves to a particular politics of life). It is the spatial arrangements of the divisions of materiality as agency (as active subject vs. fungible matter, which material enacts the master–slave relation) that organize an understanding of the arrangement of power as race (see Yusoff 2018a). This partiality of a preferred form of life characterizes, as Povinelli (2016) argued, the provinciality of Foucault’s project in its conceptualization of a Western European genealogy. Sylvia Wynter, W.E.B. DuBois, and Achille

Mbembe all showed how that genealogy of man was underscored by the racial division of life and nonlife. Although Arendt (1944) argued that race names the connections between white settler states and European fascisms, she was unable to see colonization as anything other than a mirror to European thought and its practices in a “boomerang”⁵ to European forms of racialization (see Gines 2014; Owens 2017). In Western philosophy, race names the point of quar-terization between the inside and outside of (colonial) life. This schism between inhuman matter and subjects cleaves apart the biological and the geological using the signifying practices of race as a discourse located within particular bodies. This enables global geography to be claimed as universal (the planet), an exclusive domain that does not have to admit those that are not represented by the preferred figure of biologism (the humanistic subject; Silva 2007). Race is organized around biocentric codes, which are in turn underpinned by geologic grammars that stratify human origins as they do the origins of the planet, so there is no turning to the planet to do away with race, no planetary commons that is not at the same time in need of decolonization. The imperative to introduce a concept of geopolitics (see Mignolo 2011) that goes beyond a biologism divorced from the earth and its interrelation to forms of life, therefore, must be a compelling project for any antiracist practice.

Politics of Nonlife

The politics of nonlife have come into view through the lens of biopolitics: first, as a form of “thanatopolitics” in Foucault’s thought, whereby governance is established over and through the “species body”; then as bare life in Agamben’s (1998) designation of a productive relation to life that recognized the constitutive exclusions of states of exception as founding the “City of Men”; in “necropolitics” in Mbembe’s formation of black life (“To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment of manifestations of power”; Mbembe 2003, 12); and in the governance of the life–nonlife caesura in Povinelli’s (2016, 5) account of “geonotopolitics” in the late liberal governance of settler colonial societies. These approaches variously engage Foucault’s distinction of biopower forged in the transition from sovereign power to state power that constituted the

new political subject, a subject constituted by the population and vicissitudes of biological life from the molecular to the pathologized, which assumes a normative biocentric human at its center. This biocentric human (Wynter 2003; Povinelli 2016) is complicated and constituted by race.

Although Agamben disagrees with a Foucauldian model in its succession and relation (Agamben arguing that sovereign power originates with the biopolitical body and that bare life constitutes political life), both establish a dialectical relation between the human as properly constituted as a political subject and its aberration. In its simplest iteration, there are forms of life on one side and nonlife on the other; nonlife that is constituted through death, and more recently in Mbembe and Povinelli’s writing through forms of social death, exhaustion, and extinguishment, wherein nonlife emerges as a zone of governance. The gravitational pull that centers these divisions between life and nonlife is the human subject as it is conceived through a Western normative frame (as Mbembe and Povinelli aptly demonstrated in relation to black and indigenous life). This explains why Agamben’s “bare life” can only take place in the concentration camps rather than on the plantation or in the hold of the slave ship: because the aberration can only be visited on a human body that is already coded human and whose recognition of such a status has slipped or is in abeyance, wherein biopolitical regimes act as an injunction or resolution of the potentiality of inclusion rather than its impossibility.

As Wynter has deftly shown, that human was constituted through its geographical outsides and racialized others from the onset, between what she called *Man 1* (the rationalized political subject of the state, who escapes its prior ordering between heaven and earth in the chain of being to emerge as a political animal in the context of the state) and *Man 2* (the secular successor to the political being, a biocentric being who is brought into view through evolutionary theory and eugenic codes of differentiation). Wynter argued that in the shift from the feudal to the bourgeois there is the lack of a claim to a nobility of blood, so the sociogenic mutation becomes a bioevolutionary claim (after Darwin) to a select eugenic line of descent (through genealogical account), what Wynter (2000) called the “governing sociogenetic principle ... the master code of symbolic life and death ... that is constitutive of the

multiple and varying *genres* of the human in terms of which we can *experience ourselves as human*" (182–83, italics in original). Wynter's description of the modalities of "scientific humanism" outlines an epistemology of dispossession and conquest through the sciences and its imposition of monohumanism that are nonetheless defined by a particular version of overrepresented Western European man.

Wynter's critique assaults the presumptive "Referent-we" that necessitates the formation of the other who does not belong to that master class of species to organize the logos of its belonging. As McKittrick commented, "Particular (presently biocentric) macro-origin stories are overrepresented as the singular narrative through which the stakes of human freedom are articulated and marked. Our contemporary moment thus demands a normalized origin narrative of survival-through-ever-increasing-processes-of-consumption-and-accumulation" (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 11). The human relies on a dialectic relation to the inhuman; that is, the racialized subject. Another way to imagine this is to historically situate the human in colonial geographies of extraction that produced what Fanon (2008 [1952]) called a "zone of nonbeing" (2), whereby the violent positioning of certain lives in relation to the biocentric norm of the human that frames the humanities is not a modifier of the human but the very action of its erasure. As McKittrick (2015) commented:

These governing codes produced racialized/non-Europeans/nonwhite/New World/Indigenous/African peoples as first, fallen untrue Christians (in the fifteenth and sixteenth century) and, later, as biologically defective and damned (in the nineteenth century). I want to highlight Wynter's assertion of the ways in which our present conception of the human—and what it means to *be* human—delineates how colonial encounters, and thus the emancipatory breaches and thus reinventions of humanness. This is to say that at the nexus of theological punishment, colonial brutality, and imperial greed, underpinning the new sciences that recast how we perceive our physiology and our sociocultural systems—physics, astronomy, cartography, biology, and so forth—are the fallen and defective who put immense pressure on European ways of knowing the world. (143)

Alongside McKittrick's identification of the "emancipatory breaches" as a spacing in the human, Fanon's conceptualization reminds us of the spatial and subjective conflation of colonial understanding of vast populations of people and areas of earth

designated as matter awaiting extraction. Yet, if the biopolitical frame is understood as always already constituted through an inhuman ground (or racialized subjects), even as it is prized apart by liberatory inventions that refute that designation, the inhuman is what secures the nonlife differentiation to produce the human as such (Foucault 2009, 2010). The inhuman, however, can never ever be incorporated into the political subject or being as such because of the material differentiation between figure (the political subject of juridical rights) and ground (the matter of resource to enable the becoming of the political subject, philosophically and materially). Thus, the politics and practices of making nonlife within a discourse of biopolitics, its sites of concern in terms of bodies (the alienated human subject; the subject without rights) and places (camps, zones of exception) remain exclusive within the domain of the human as it is designated by its partial humanism. According to Wynter (2000), this "partial humanism" organizes "*history* for Man, therefore, narrated and existentially lived as if it were the *history-for* the human itself" (198). Man thus represents himself as if he were the full scale and sense of the human and reproduces those epistemic modes of life as life (excluding the differential of the inhuman on which that life is built).

Adjacent to this theorizing of a praxis of the human sits a set of experiences and discourses articulated by black theory (black feminisms and Afropessimisms) that name black natality and its genealogical afterlives in the void rather than in the caesura between life and nonlife (i.e., born into slavery as property rather than person; see Hartman 1997; Moten 2003; Spillers 2003; Wilderson 2003; Weheliye 2014; Warren 2018). Black radical thought has highlighted the difference between populations targeted for erasure and those already erased; what Philip (2017) refers to as *Bla_k*, as the blank-black dynamic of erasure that marks black life from Middle Passage geographies to the present space of death-worlds characterized by carceral enclosures and terrorizing architectures (Mbembe 2003; Wilderson 2003).

The antiblack ground that secures the human's proposition is expropriating through the material differentiation of the life–nonlife boundary that splits the agentic and mute through a *matter fix*, which is also at the same time designated as a subjective boundary that enables further material subjugation.

This racialized grounding presses the violence of inhumane conditions into populations designated as structurally inhuman (through the exposure to the violence of environmental formations, wastes, and the “quasi-events” of their inundation and epigenetic instantiation). Another way to say this is that the partial biopolitical body also presupposes “white spatial formations” (Kwate and Threadcraft 2017, 535) that organize black space in a similar mode of devaluation and negative accumulation. For example, Kwate and Threadcraft (2017, 535) showed how the necropolitical rather than biopolitical functioning of black space conditions relations to medical care in black space, pathogenic environments, and environments that produce “excess death,” policing, and the expansionist operations of the carceral state (see also Wright 2011).

The Anthropocene and its designation of an operative sphere of geopower signals the possibility of a potential breach in this division between nonlife governed as nature (“natural fruits” of slavery; the “natural” history of indigenous and “other” peoples that we find in the colonial museum alongside flora and fauna) or life governed as social (through the sociogenetic coding of overrepresented European man). To extend Wynter’s formulation, the Anthropocene might see the introduction of *Man 3*, a geologically informed subject whose life forms are coded through the inhuman, whose constituting powers are realized through the mobilization and governance of geologic materials (minerals, geochemicals, water, air, fossil fuels, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous, etc.) and the accrual of geopowers as a form of securing settler futurity (Trump’s “freedom molecules”).

The Double Life of the Inhuman

The inhumanities is a field in which the historic double life of the inhuman as both matter and as a racial category of liberal humanism are made visible as coconstituting discourses of modernity and the extractive geosocial relations that form the Anthropocene. Inhumanity is a state or quality of being inhuman or inhumane, or an inhuman or inhumane act. In short, this is a savage form of subjectivity that is organized as a category and thus subjugation for phenotypically designated populations through the operation of race⁶ within the historical geographies of colonialism. As new forms of racialized beings were articulated through sixteenth- through nineteenth-century paleontology in

the context of colonialism, geology was also articulating new origins of the earth, as well as forming the material praxis of their rearrangement (through mining, ecological rearrangements and extractions, and forms of geologic displacements such as plantations, dams, fertilizers, crops, and introduction of “alien” animals). In Western philosophy, Adorno (1978 [1951], as discussed in the epigraph) introduced the idea of the inhuman society in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, citing that “life does not live” in the society of industrial war, whereby intimate acts of life should be thought of in relation to the catastrophes of the twentieth century. Although Adorno, along with many contemporary critiques, saw the descent into the inhumanity as located in his immediate historical context in World War II, the fall already anticipates its redemption, “to project negatively an image of utopia.”

Whether catastrophe or utopia, the organization of worldly ethics around a Eurocentric subject continues to erase any responsibility for the prior catastrophes that were waged on behalf of and materially constituted the European ethical subject since 1492 and continue in ongoing settler colonialism and neoextraction. Although catastrophe is located in the realm of the imaginary in as much as the earth does not have catastrophes, it just has changed conditions, catastrophic displacements have nonetheless constituted the material and psychological lives of colonial subjects and the subjected (which is not to say that within those scenes of subjection, heroic endurances and poetics were not imaginatively formed that materially and physically refuted and resisted those colonial enclosures). Only by unsettling the normative frames of the human as an episteme of universality (that thereby continues to claim an expansionist [colonial] geography and refuses to acknowledge its history of inhumane acts through which such a figure was constituted) can the inhuman be encountered in the full sense of its existence, both as a historical geography of subjugation and as earth.

The inhuman is not simply an alienated form of the human, as it is most often encountered as a nonhuman referent that stands in for the animal form as a reminder of the animal root or pathologizing slur, but understood in its historic materially and situated occurrence, it is a form of differentiation in both matter and time, whereby the divisions and spacing of the genomic or organic principle of life are set in contrast to the inorganic. New modes of biologism attempted to declassify man as an animal and

reclassify him as a cultural-ethno being through operative ontologies that produced hierarchies and ordering systems. The denotation of a nature–culture split that is organized through the institutionalization of reason (since Kant) was used to separate man from organic forms of life as both an overcoming of internal passions that constituted human experience and of external obstacles to an expansionist geography across territory and forms of life. Historically, this normative sphere of humanism was racist and specifically anti-black, and without challenging that history, it remains so, every time the universal or human is invoked. Some of the greatest challenges, of course, came from anticolonial thinkers struggling to make sense of their painful histories in their fullest terms, such as Fanon (1959, 1961), Césaire, Glissant, C. L. R. James and Wynter. As Wynter (2000) commented, “The degradation of concrete humans, that was/is the price of empire, of the kind of humanism that underlies it” (154).

For Wynter (2000), “what is called the West, rather than Latin-Christian Europe, *begins* with the founding of post-1492 Caribbean” (152). Wynter challenged the geographical imaginary that the Americas and Caribbean are somehow an epistemological *outside* to Western knowledge, in which people wrote

not realizing that the condition of *their* being what they are today, and the condition of *we* being what we are today are totally interlinked. That you can’t separate the strands of that very same historical process which has, by and large, enriched their lives and, at the same time, largely impoverished the lives of the majority of our [Caribbean] people. (Wynter 2000, 152)

There is a before to colonialism (and its spatiotemporalities), but there is no *going back before* colonialism, so in this sense, the need to battle humanism is a reckoning with the historic situatedness of Europe’s imperial geographies, even as those “other” places were rendered as mere mirrors for Europe’s soul. In conversation with Wynter, Scott referred to this as her admiration for “embattled humanism” (Scott 2000, 153).

You know that you cannot turn your back on that which the West has brought in since the fifteenth century. It’s transformed the world, and central to that has been humanism. But it’s also that humanism against which Fanon writes [in *The Wretched of the Earth*] when he says, they talk about man and yet murder him everywhere on street corners. Okay. So it

is that embattled [humanism], one which challenges itself at the same time that you’re using it to think with. (Wynter 2000, 154)

After Wynter, we might ask: What is the context that produces this geologic subject and brings it into being as a unified subject position? What geography allows this conception and materially sustains it as a geophysical state of stratified relations? This is another way of asking after the ground, or, how the concept of the inhuman grounding is a concrete material reality for black and brown subjects through the epistemic praxis of geographic and geologic institutions. Rather than taking white natural philosophers of reason as the site of the transformation of the human, if we begin in the colonial slave mine and plantation, the ground that sustains this production is the geologic of the inhuman (as nature, matter, and race). Without the geologic of the inhuman (as object and subject), the entire mechanism that produced the relation between Europe and the New World and the humanist subject falls away. Thus, the inhuman, as well as a source of subjection, is also a site of possibility, because that category of regression was always being transgressed, and other relations were being instigated that spoke to the possibility of other relations to the earth. For example, Wynter (2000, 165) discussed how the slave plot, where the enslaved grew food and cultivated other relations of temporality and belonging, existed as a threat because it spoke to other imaginations of geographies (see also McKittrick 2016). Everywhere that the inhumane is imposed, it is resisted by a humanness that highlights the dark contours of the humanist subject in its partiality. It is against this partiality that Césaire (2000 [1972]) imagined a fullness made to the “measure of the world” (73). Thus, the anticolonial critique is not simply a critique of the inadequacies of the human or a better humanism but a counterimaginary that opens up a fullness in the register of the world (Wynter 1984).

The inhuman names the paradigm of extraction that dominates the form of existence in the Anthropocene, but it is a limited one, as far as existing on a planet with one another in any mode of justice or natural jurisprudence. If the Anthropocene heralds a recognition of an ontological form of subjectivity hitherto excluded—a geologically informed and forming subject—then how might it be properly situated in steps to decolonize the humanist subject that informs its partial perspectivism? What becomes

of this relation to the inhuman is the corrosive potential of the Anthropocene and its proper critical mode of address. Rather than the environmental and geohumanities (and its offspring, livable futures), “we” might better be organized around the institutes of the inhumanities. The inhumanities registers a commitment to dismantling the humanist subject and the white supremacy that characterized its geographic project of the differentiation of subjects and earth. Reshaping the institution of being is also a call to reimagine subjectivity and relation (Glissant 1990) in the context of the ground that sustains it (or the earth). Thus, the ontology of the humanist ground is disrupted by the Anthropocene thesis as (1) a stable ground on which social relations play out and (2) a neutral ground that is not constituted by subjugating relations. It is important to target the legitimating frame of the human as it becomes materially manifest in the environmental or geohumanities because of how it is being organized around the problem of the future of the world. The human as a biologically and culturally operative ontology denotes a preferred phenotypical subject and an institutionalized mode of life (namely, racial capitalism; see Saldanha 2020). If we take on the spatializing function of signification as a distancing between terms, we can see this subjectification as a means for geographic dispossession. Considering the inhumanities raises three important questions for Anthropocene research:

1. The reconstructing of the dual root of race and materiality in the geographies of environmental change and the doubling of race as metaphysical and geophysical claim in historical geographies of colonialism. The rigid racial hierarchies of humanism were cooked in the crucible of colonialism and functioned simultaneously as an expression of epidermal codes and geographies of dispossession. The grammar of geology in colonial projects—the inhuman—established the stability of the object of property for extraction, as subject and matter.
2. The locating of inherently racist structures and histories of materialism that go beyond the identification of territorial theft and material acquisition and reside in epistemes of geologic classification and valuation. To dismantle the grammar of geology first requires an understanding of how it functions as a mode of social and environmental ascription in an epistemic mode, alongside the planetary practice of extraction.
3. The primacy of a material (environmental) rather than ideological structuring of race—which in turn changes the spaces and structures of thought that are

marshaled for antiracist action. As such, race is organized around biocentric codes that are historically underpinned by geologic foundations about the story of life and earth, operationalized to effect ongoing regimes of geographic dispossession. There is no turning to the planet to do away with race, no planetary commons that is not at the same time in need of decolonization (Gabrys 2018). The inhuman is a starting point from which to rethink material redistribution of geopower and its racialized carceral modes. The inhumanities is a counterconceptualization of the environmental and geohumanities that foregrounds the role of the politics of nonlife and the figure of the inhuman as the political figure of an earthbound commons, that undoes an extractive account of matter because it must always ask if it is the global epistemic production of the privileging of an extractive account of matter that racializes and depletes subjective-environment relations.

A politics of nonlife that is not predicated on necropolitics or on a biopolitical mode of address is a way to think about the emergence of subjective modes and the earth; a way that is not already conditioned by the subjugation of biopolitical exclusion and the promise of inclusion held beyond the abysmal ground of dispossession and the material life of racial inequality. As there is no humanist subject without the intramural question of the materiality of race, there is no environmental or geohumanities without the question of racial justice. The inhuman is an epistemological site for the undoing of geographies of colonial materialities in the present tense across both subjective and earth relations.

Notes

1. Making claims about and against the environmental humanities obviously raises the question of what exactly is this entity, and a more interesting question, why has it emerged now, alongside the Anthropocene and in deference to the decisive politics of climate change? When new neologisms come along there is a tendency to gather everything under them and say this is what we have been doing all along. The Anthropocene is a case in point. It is climate change, extinction, and global environmental change all wrapped up into one. The rebirth of the humanist subject, or what I call *Anthropogenesis*, conjoins the environmental humanities and the Anthropocene. These disciplinary organizations are not particularly interesting in a genealogical sense but rather in terms of how they challenge thinking or become an exercise in “point and erase” in a political field of inquiry; that is, what is depoliticized and what is drawn attention to and how this focus both points

to concerns and erases painful histories. We should remember that the very same modern subject was birthed in the Lisbon Earthquake (1755) at that other seismic rearrangement of disciplines, wherein Kant fashioned his natural philosophy. Although Benjamin called Kant the first geographer because he first introduced lecture courses on geography as a natural science, replacing God and grounding rational thought in the earth, he had a moment of hesitancy of human supremacy before the void (Clark 2010). Kant could not quite let go of the vision of redemption through ascendancy. Within that ascendancy of reason, the preferred status of the subject of the Enlightenment was bound to a discourse of racialized hierarchies. Kant's legacy (see *History and Physiography of the Most Remarkable Cases of the Earthquake Which Towards the End of the Year 1755 Shook a Great Part of the Earth* (Kant 1994 [1756]) set in place a new judgment, predicated on the universal ... but; that is, the imagination of a universal subject, universal just not ... black. This adjudication is the ongoing negative dialectics of white supremacy that proliferates environments from nature scripts of colonial museums to freedom in the black outdoors. What perhaps is distinctive about environmental humanities, as opposed to cultures of climate change, is that science and policy are not at the center of the frame, thereby recentering the arts and humanities. Broadly, environmental humanities is an interdisciplinary field, most represented, like the Anthropocene, in Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America, with the exception of the African Environmental Humanities Network (Agbonifo 2014). In black studies, the term *ecology* is used instead of environment, perhaps to foreground the imbrication of social-environmental relations, but no terminology is neutral. It is useful to recall DeLoughrey's (2019, 70) work on the origins of ecology as centered around the Odum brothers' fieldwork in the Pacific, as part of the U.S. program that included human subject trials on the Marshallese Islanders. Environmental humanities includes a range of programs, fixed term research clusters, funded centers, and pedagogical programs and several journals. Most statements of purpose agree that the environmental humanities are a diverse and emergent field that is interdisciplinary and converges around the human and environment, in the context of environmental issues and concern. (For a comprehensive list, see Emergence of the EH commissioned by MISTRA [Sweden] in Nye et al. [2013]).

2. There are many emergent strands in black and Indigenous scholarship that address the "Black Outdoors" (series at Duke University Press, edited by Carter and Cervenak); "Black Ecologies" at Black Perspectives (<https://www.aaihs.org/introducing-the-black-ecologies-series/>; see also Roane and Hosbey, <https://crdh.rchnm.org/essays/v02-05-mapping-black-ecologies/>); and work critical to the whiteness of the environmental and geohumanities such as DeLoughrey, Neimanis, and Rose, for example.

3. See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>.

4. For those who would rebrand the Anthropocene the Capitalocene, Wynter's rebuke to the a priori conditions of production is well made:

It is not primarily the mode of production—capitalism—that controls us, although it controls us at the overtly empirical level through the institution of the free market system, and the everyday practices of its economic system. But you see, for those to function, the processes of their functioning must be *discursively* instituted, regulated *and* at the same time normalized, legitimated. So what I am going to suggest is that what institutes, regulates, normalizes and legitimates, what then controls us, is instead the *economic* conception of the human—Man—that is produced by the disciplinary discourses of our now planetary system of academia as the first purely secular and operational public identity in human history. ... In order to be unified in *economic* terms we have to first produce an *economic* conception of being human. ... This is why, however much abundance we can produce, we cannot solve the problem of poverty and hunger. Since the goal of our mode of production is *not* to produce for human beings in general, it's to provide the material conditions of existence for the production and reproduction of our present conception of being human: to secure the well-being, therefore, of those of us, the global middle classes, who have managed to attain to its ethno-class criterion. (Wynter 2000, 160)

That is to say, there is no fossil capitalism without the engine of race.

5. Arendt argued that nonlife in the camps comes back from the colonial encounter, as a consequence, rather than a modality that is exported there through an expansionist geographic logic that secures its freedom through practices of unfreedom of others.
6. Wynter (2000) argued that the

bio-climatically phenotypically differentiated Color Line, one drawn in W.E.B. DuBois's terms "the lighter and darker races" of humankind, and at its most extreme between White and Black. This is, as a line made both conceptually and institutionally unbreachable, with this thereby giving rise to an issue, which as Aimé Césaire of the Francophone Caribbean island of Martinique pointed out in his letter of resignation from the French Communist Party, in 1956, was one whose historically instituted singularity, that to which we gave the name of *race*, could not be made into a subset of *any other issue*, but had instead to be theoretically identified and fought on its own terms. (3)

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