Université de Montréal

Galactic Ecofeminism and Posthuman Transcendence:

The Tentative Utopias of Octavia E. Butler's *Lilith's Brood*

par Alyssa Favreau

Département de littératures et de langues du monde

Faculté des arts et des sciences

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des arts et des sciences

en vue de l'obtention du grade de maîtrise

en Études anglaises

option avec mémoire

Avril 2018

Résumé

Dans la trilogie *Lilith's Brood* d'Octavia E. Butler, des extraterrestres pacifiques connus sous le nom d'Oankali arrivent sur une terre ravagée par une guerre nucléaire. Leur objectif est de sauver la planète et les êtres humains qui ont survecu en mettant en place un programme d'hybridation génétique qui créera une nouvelle forme de vie en combinant les deux espèces. Dans ce but, les Oankalis recrutent Lilith Iyapo, une femme qui, ils espèrent, facilitera l'unification des deux espèces. La violence qui a mené à la dévastation de la terre est absente de la vie offerte aux survivants, et le projet porte les marques de l'utopie écoféministe et posthumaniste. Cette thèse examine le potentiel utopique du projet des Oankalis, en utilisant l'analyse critique des écoféministes telles que Carol J. Adams et Vandana Shiva, ainsi que les posthumanistes telles que Donna Haraway et Rosi Braidotti. Cependant, le paradis promis reste hors de portée, et la lutte contre les plans intransigeants des Oankalis est essentielle. Deux des enfants mi-humains et mi-extraterrestres de Lilith endossent cette responsabilité, incarnant une résistance politique comme le souligne le travail de Susan Bordo et de Judith Butler. Bien que le programme des Oankalis exploitent l'humanité, rappelant la traite transatlantique des esclaves, la lutte des enfants de Lilith contre l'ordre Oankali montre clairement que la réconciliation entre les humains et les Oankali et le potentiel utopique de cette relation peuvent être atteints.

Mots clés: Octavia E. Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, *Xenogenesis*, posthumanisme, écoféminisme, cyborg, science fiction, symbiogenèse.

Abstract

In Octavia E. Butler's alien invasion trilogy *Lilith's Brood*, peaceable aliens known as the Oankali arrive on an earth recently ravaged by nuclear warfare. Their aim is to save the planet and its surviving humans, eventually putting into place a breeding program that will combine both species into one hybridized life form. In the pursuit of this goal they enlist the help of a human woman, Lilith Iyapo, who they hope will facilitate their plans for species merging. The life they offer the human survivors is one free of the hatred and violence that led to earth's devastation, and their proposed venture bears the hallmarks of ecofeminist and posthuman utopia. This thesis examines the utopian potential of the Oankali's plans, using the critical analysis of ecofeminists Carol J. Adams and Vandana Shiva, and posthuman scholars Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. The Oankali's promised paradise, however, remains out of reach as long as the surviving humans are robbed of their agency; struggle against the Oankali's uncompromising plans is essential. Two of Lilith's half-alien children take up this responsibility, mounting an embodied political resistance as outlined by gender and sexuality theorists Susan Bordo and Judith Butler. Though in many ways the Oankali's plans are exploitative, recalling even a space-age reimagining of the transatlantic slave trade, the children's struggle against the Oankali order gives hope that reconciliation between humans and Oankali, and the utopian potential of this interspecies relationship, can be achieved.

Key words: Octavia E. Butler, *Lilith's Brood*, *Xenogenesis*, posthumanism, ecofeminism, cyborg, science fiction, symbiogenesis.

Table of Contents

To C and CH

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Caroline Brown for her kind words and helpful suggestions. Gratitude and love to my friend, proofreader, and demonstrative undangler Kelly McDevitt. Thanks to my uncles for allowing me to use their beautiful home as a writer's retreat, and to my family and loved ones for their thoughtfulness and support.

Introduction

Octavia E. Butler, a twentieth-century American author widely hailed as one of the "undeniable stalwarts of Black science fiction" (A. Carrington 4), provides "a blueprint for how women, particularly women of color, could operate" in the skewed realities and distant worlds she creates (Womack 110). According to Ytasha L. Womack, within a "hypermale sci-fi space," it is Butler who sets the "stage for multidimensional black women in complex worlds both past and present, women who are vulnerable in their victories and valiant in their risky charge to enlighten humanity" (110). As an indispensible figure in the artistic and cultural movement known as afrofuturism, Butler's work prioritizes narratives in which "people of color are integrally involved—a demonstration that counters pop culture's relative failure to do so" (24). Butler's novels and short stories, whether dystopian climate fiction or reformulations of the vampire story, never fail to privilege the voices of women of colour, explicitly centering them in narratives exploring oppression, power, survival, and humanity. With her *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Butler adds an alien invasion narrative to her subversive, genre-defying body of work. The trilogy, known collectively as *Lilith's Brood*, consists of three novels: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). In *Dawn*, Lilith, an African American woman in her twenties, wakes up on a spaceship with little memory of how she has come to be there. Her world has plunged itself into a nuclear war from which few have survived, and her only recent memories are of being confined and questioned by an unseen jailer. This part of her imprisonment,

however, has now come to an end, and Lilith is introduced to the Oankali, an alien species of gifted genetic engineers who have come to earth in search of new life with which to hybridize themselves.

In what they term their "trade," the Oankali engage in a form of conscious evolution, seeking out new life forms with whom they will create a hybridized species for the next stage in their evolutionary process. Their ever-present urge to travel through space—altering, improving, and appropriating the organic life they come across—is a biological necessity as strong as any of humanity's survival impulses. They are "powerfully acquisitive," carrying the drive for species mixing in a "tiny organelle within every cell in [their] bodies" (Butler 41). This conscious hybridization is the predominant driving force for the Oankali, who tell Lilith that they "must do it. It renews [them], enables [them] to survive as an evolving species instead of specializing [them]selves into extinction or stagnation" (40). They could no less stop breathing than choose not to engage in their trade.

Bipedal and vaguely humanoid, the Oankali are nevertheless truly unhuman in appearance. Pale grey, fluid in movement, and with too many fingers, the aliens are covered with sensory tentacles that allow them a much greater range of perception than humans have at their disposal. By connecting their tentacles with other organic life forms, they are able to perceive on a genetic level, combining physiological changes, genetic information, and verbalized messages into an intimate and complex form of communication far beyond the capabilities of human senses (22). The Oankali are a destabilizing presence for the surviving humans in

many more ways than their inexorable push toward genetic change. With their three sexes—males, females, and an ooloi sex that uses "it" as a pronoun—the Oankali exist far outside the gender binary assumed by most humans. They begin their lives as unsexed children, eventually going through a period of metamorphosis before entering adulthood. Procreation is a process shared by all three sexes, with genetic material taken from the male and female, assembled into a zygote by the ooloi in a special organ inside its body, and then implanted in the female for gestation. In their plans for species mixing, the Oankali hope to add humans to this process, creating hybridized, "construct" children.

Such a trade is not without risks, however, and the chief concern the Oankali have is with what they term the "Human Contradiction" (442), that is, the human impulse toward hierarchy combined with high intelligence. For the Oankali, the contradiction is the root of all human evils, and an incontrovertible genetic fact; they are convinced that humans would eventually have destroyed themselves even if they had avoided launching a cataclysmic nuclear assault on their planet. It is this genetic flaw that the Oankali hope to breed out of humanity, and they see the trade as offering "a oneness" that humans "strive for, dream of, but can't truly attain alone" (189). In the face of these plans, the surviving humans have little recourse. The Oankali were already overdue for a trade when encountering earth, and humanity offers them a chance at something they have long sought: cancerous cell production. In the hands of natural genetic engineers, the transformative potential of human cancer proves too appealing an opportunity to turn down. Cancer offers

"regenerative abilities [the Oankali have] never been able to trade for before," making humanity a "treasure" to be salvaged at all costs (551).

Lilith's role in the hybridization project will be to awaken groups of humans kept sleeping in suspended animation, building the beginnings of community and teaching them about the Oankali in preparation for a return to earth. As an ambassador of sorts, the Oankali hope that Lilith's participation will help with the acclimatization process. Though far from convinced by the Oankali's plans, Lilith complies with their wishes out of pragmatism. Aware that the human survivors will only be allowed off the ship if they accept the Oankali, Lilith's adopts "learn and run" as a strategy (144), with the ultimate goal of teaching the humans the skills necessary to survive on a much-changed earth without the Oankali. Despite her complicity, Lilith knows well that the Oankali are "manipulative as hell" (72), and her loyalty remains with the humans. The survivors, however, never view her as anything but a collaborator, blaming Lilith for the Oankali's presence and plans for humanity. *Dawn* ends with Lilith removed from a group of humans who have become dangerous to her, pregnant with the first construct child.

The following novels, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*, follow two of Lilith's children: Akin, the first construct male born to a human woman, and Jodahs, the first construct ooloi. In *Adulthood Rites*, an infant Akin is kidnapped by humans who continue to resist the Oankali, choosing to live apart, infertile and in human-only villages. Akin lives among these resisters for much of his childhood, developing a sense of responsibility for their plight and eventually working toward securing them a human colony on Mars. Finally, *Imago* tells the story of Jodahs.

Due to the ooloi sex's increased genetic engineering abilities, the Oankali have deemed production of ooloi constructs too risky, a next step they are unprepared to make until they can be assured that the resulting children will be stable in their hybridity. It is in this context that Jodahs enters into its metamorphosis, becoming the first half-human ooloi despite the Oankali's edict. Forced to leave its home for fear of being sent away from earth, Jodahs finds a village of humans who have escaped the Oankali's notice. Having retained their fertility, these resisters have engaged in generations of inbreeding that have left them ill and unhappy. As Jodahs begins to heal the villagers and bring them back into the Oankali fold, it masters its new construct ooloi capabilities, including a cancer-based ability to shape shift at will—often to better appeal to potential mates. Able to harness rapid cell production in order to radically change form, Jodahs finds that it feels most comfortable existing in this permanent state of transformation, doing "as water does" when taking on the shape of its container (612). The progression of the trilogy is such that a situation beginning with deeply broken interspecies relationships—the Oankali exploiting humanity for their genetic resources, and the humans resisting in violent and often counter-productive ways—is gradually healed. The constructs, equal parts human and Oankali, are needed to reconcile the Oankali's acquisitive nature with the human need for self-determination, a rapprochement emphasized in Jodahs' discussion of a local river. Clouded with sediment, the water is considered "rich" by the Oankali, and "muddy" by the humans. For the constructs, however, who have "never known any[thing] other," it is "just water" (524). The constructs and their

new, transformative existence are very much a part of their two parents species, while occupying a distinct space apart.

Throughout the trilogy, Butler posits ecofeminist and posthuman utopias that never fully materialize, due in large part to the Oankali's methods: their project is at best coercive, at worst a space-age replication of the transatlantic slave trade that willfully ignores the bodily agency and sexual consent of the surviving humans. Nevertheless, the ideals of both ecofeminist thought and posthuman futurity are evident in the Oankali's treatment of earth and its inhabitants. In their intimate relationships with other life forms, their vegetarian diets, their care for any ecosystem in which they find themselves, and their intolerance for any form of race- or gender-based violence, the Oankali in many ways embody the ultimate ecofeminist subject. The first chapter of this analysis uses the ecocriticism and environmental feminism of Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, Stacy Alaimo, and Carol J. Adams to examine the nuances of Oankali ecological stewardship. The ecofeminism of these scholars acknowledges the non-essentialist relationship between women and the natural world, while still identifying the root cause of women's oppression and environmental devastation as Western, patriarchal power. They discuss humanity's place within global ecosystems and the intimate relationships in which humans are always already taking part—a transit between the human and more-than-human world in the food we eat, the microbes we house in our bodies, and the pollution we produce. These porous and intermingled interspecies relationships lead naturally to Lynn Margulis's theory of symbiogenesis, in which she hypothesizes the symbiosis and eventual merging of

discrete organisms as the main vehicle for evolutionary change. Womack writes that the "liberation edict" present in afrofuturist science fiction "provides a prism for evolution" (38), and this reconceptualization of human history is made literal in the Oankali's continuous genetic manipulations, as they constantly evolve and mutate all life with which they come into contact.

The second chapter explores the posthuman and cyborg futures promised by the Oankali, particularly through their half-alien, half-human construct children. Donna Haraway's exploration of the cyborg, as well as Rosi Braidotti's and Pramod K. Nayar's posthuman discussions offer another lens through which to view the Oankali's hybridization project. Given the Oankali's penchant for genetic engineering, their carefully fashioned children become the ideal posthuman cyborgs, beings equally organic and artificial, born and constructed. For Braidotti, posthumanism gives rise to subjects "constituted in and by multiplicity [working] across differences" but still "grounded and accountable" to their origins (*Posthuman* 49). These cyborg subjects, whom Haraway proclaims to be "less riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality" (*Simians, Cyborgs and Women* 2), make literal Judith Butler's belief that "there is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human" as a more inclusive ontological category (*Undoing Gender* 3-4). Butler's novels put forward a world in which ecofeminist and posthuman ideals must be enacted to ensure human survival. Both the Oankali and their construct children remain certain that without intervention the human species is doomed to self-destruction. From this perspective, only those humans who accept their roles as

progenitors of a cyborg race, and understand their interconnectedness with that race—indeed, with all of the natural world—will thrive. Butler offers no easy answers, exploring both the dystopian danger and utopian promise of the Oankali's hybridization venture.

Despite the ecofeminist and posthuman potential of the Oankali's undertaking, utopia is never achieved; the total lack of agency experienced by the humans requires resistance. In the third chapter, gender and sexuality theorists such as Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, and Elizabeth Grosz offer useful critiques, particularly regarding oppression as an embodied experience—relevant to the myriad ways in which the Oankali surveil and restrict the human body. In this alien invasion context, the human survivors become an oppressed people regardless of gender, sexuality, or race. It is therefore useful to examine the Oankali's treatment of humanity through various lenses, including critical race theory. For Womack, the parallels found "between sci-fi themes and alien abduction and the transatlantic slave trade" are "both haunting and fascinating," functioning as "metaphors for the experience of blacks in the Americas" (17). In this view W.E.B Du Bois's writings on an African American double consciousness becomes increasingly relevant to the plight of the surviving humans, whose self-conception is threatened by an alien presence convinced that they are fatally flawed. Theorists such as Jeffrey A. Tucker, Gregory Jerome Hampton, Michele Osherow, and Lisa Dowdall further explore the parallels between the transatlantic slave trade—as well as the continuing biocolonial oppression of bodies of colour that reaches into the twenty-first century—and the Oankali's coercive exploitation of humanity's genetic resources. Finally, the third

chapter includes discussion on the interplays between utopia and dystopia in Butler's novels, particularly by Claire P. Curtis, Hoda M. Zaki, Jim Miller, and Jessie Stickgold-Sarah. The political struggles of Lilith's two children, who take up the mantle of resistance in their respective novels, gradually move the trilogy from the dystopia of nuclear devastation and exploitative alien imperialism to a more hopeful space in which utopia may in fact be reached. It is a difficult journey, one that Butler gives no assurances will be completed, but one that begins with Lilith emerging from an artificial womb to become the de facto mother of a new hybrid race.

Chapter One: "One in This Village"

Ecofeminism, Interspecies Mingling, and the Porosity of Self

"They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together—
not by competition, but by united action."
—Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy begins with the arrival of the Oankali, the tentacled extraterrestrial species searching for new life with which to combine themselves genetically. They arrive in our solar system just as humanity has erupted in global nuclear warfare, watching in horror at what they see as a species-wide suicide attempt. Despite reservations, they prepare to "trade" genetically with the human survivors rescued from the cataclysm. Master genetic engineers, the Oankali spend centuries cleaning the Earth of nuclear waste, encouraging new life to flourish, and learning about humanity, with the eventual goal of merging into one hybrid species and returning to live on the planet. Non-violent and egalitarian, the Oankali view humanity's tendency toward hierarchy as an unfortunate genetic flaw—often referred to as the "Human Contradiction" (Butler 442)—that must be bred out through careful DNA mixing lest it result in inevitable species death. Not only taking the next step in their own evolution, the Oankali firmly believe that their actions are in humanity's best interest. In their view, they have both saved the remnants of humanity from nuclear fallout, and ensured a future for the species, a future free of a genetic flaw that would surely

lead to extinction. It is a dual rescue attempt, a saving grace that will, the Oankali hope, render humanity fit for a better, more peaceable life.

In many ways, the Oankali's world is an ecofeminist paradise. The new arrivals live in harmony with all other life, their heightened perception—a "smell-taste-feel" achieved through sensory tentacles (678)—allowing them a much more intimate relationship with the plants and animals around them. The Oankali themselves, as individuals and as a species, represent a balanced existence within a unified ecosystem, something humanity has rarely, if ever, accomplished. The nuclear devastation wrought shortly before the Oankali's arrival is seen as an act of self-destruction with far-reaching implications: it has taken them 250 years to rebuild an utterly "unlivable" world (15). In fact, the humans are told in no uncertain terms that, left on Earth, "you would have been blinded, you would have been burned—if you hadn't already been killed by other expanding effects of the war—and you would have died a terrible death" (290-291). Most of the animal and plant life have long since perished, as well as some of the Oankali involved in the rehabilitation process, despite their general hardiness. Humans had left their world "utterly hostile to life," and Earth's reclamation would, according to the Oankali, have taken much longer than two and a half centuries had they not interfered (291). The Oankali's arrival is in many ways an ecological saving grace.

Ecofeminism, the political and philosophical mode of thought that finds the roots of both environmental destruction, and the subjugation of women, in patriarchal oppression, is an immediately relevant lens through which to view the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant writes of the "age-

old association" between women and nature, an "affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history" (xv). For eco-cultural theorist Stacy Alaimo, central to this relationship is "feminism's many invocations of nature as an undomesticated, literally nondomestic, space" (*Bodily Natures* 14). The same walls that would enclose women into culturally appropriate domestic roles also "separate human from nature" (14), setting up communion and identification with the natural world as an alternative to traditional, and traditionally gendered, life. To underscore this relationship, Merchant examines both the ecology movement and women's liberation as social justice movements linked by a common egalitarian perspective (xv). By comparing women's struggle against patriarchal control and the fight against environmental exploitation—two movements joined in their propensity for being "sharply critical of the costs of competition, aggression, and domination" (xvi)—Merchant suggests that "new values and social structures, based not on the domination of women and nature as resources but on the full expression of both male and female talent and on the maintenance of environmental integrity" can be uncovered (xv). In the absence of an Oankali-like species arriving on earth and radically subverting human society, both environmental and feminist struggles, with their appeals for recognition of the agency and subjecthood of the woman and the nonhuman, become necessary.

For the Oankali however, this resepct for all life is an inherent part of their identity. In *Adulthood Rites*, Lilith's hybrid child Akin is all too aware of his place in his environment, always cognizant of "when he [has] passed the border of [his village] Lo" (Butler 303-304). Even the smell of the air is different, the

vegetation at first making him cringe by virtue of it being "abruptly not-home" (304). That Akin must monitor Tino, his mother's new human lover, warning him when he is about to trample another villager's gardens, baffles Akin. For the young construct, Tino's lack of connection to the natural world is such that it is "as though he [can]not see at all" (303). Not enjoying the intimate perception of all life is, in an Oankali and construct world, tantamount to an inconvenient disability. Thus entrenched in the worlds in which they exist, the Oankali and their half-human children cannot help but value all life around them. Akin learns early on that he will share any pain he causes another. Still young enough to be breastfed, he concludes that it is "best, then, to be careful and not cause pain" (257), an infant's version of the Oankali ethos. Another of Lilith's children, Jodahs, sums it up thusly:

> Humans said violence was against Oankali beliefs. Actually it was against their flesh and bone, against every cell of them. …Oankali had evolved from acquisitive life, collecting and combining with other life. To kill was not simply wasteful to the Oankali. It was as unacceptable as slicing off their own healthy limbs. …They could be utterly deadly, but they paid for it later. It cost them so dearly that they had no history at all of striking out in anger, frustration, jealousy, or any other emotion, no matter how keenly they felt it. When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves. (Butler 564)

An ideology that manifests as biological need, the only equivalent to religious belief the Oankali have is of their place in a life-giving universe. One Oankali speaks of

dying on a lifeless world, and the organelles in each of her cells surviving and evolving long after her death. “In perhaps a thousand million years,” she says, “that world would be as full of life as this one. …Nothing is more tenacious than the life we are made of. A world of life from apparent death, from dissolution. That’s what we believe in” (662-663). It is a far-reaching conception of one’s place in the world, and one that has served them well.

The Oankali are, at their most fundamental, a life form committed to the health and balance of any life they encounter. Not merely ideological, their desire to exist in harmony has very real purposes, as Lilith finds out once she strays too far from the Oankali family she lives with temporarily. Having been told to bury any uneaten food she does not want, to “feed it to the ship” in Oankali parlance (64), Lilith does so in another neighbourhood. She believes that the usual digestive process, with the food broken down “by tendrils of the ship’s own living matter,” will take place (67). Instead, a spreading orange infection grows around her discarded food. Once it reaches a portion of the ship Lilith refers to as a “tentacle pseudoplant,” the infection causes the tendril to darken and writhe “as though in agony” (68). Seeing its reaction, Lilith forgets “that it was not an individual organism” focusing instead “on the fact that it was alive and she had probably caused it pain. She had not merely caused an interesting effect, she had caused harm” (68). That this is the moment Lilith recognizes herself as being part of a larger system is significant, but so to is the discovery that even so small a change to the established ecosystem will cause dramatic harm. The Oankali, constantly monitoring themselves, each other, and the organic world around them on a genetic

level, live in deeply symbiotic, though at times precariously balanced, webs of interconnections.

The hostility Jodahs encounters once it becomes clear that it will metamorphose into the first construct ooloi clearly delineates this precarity. With their increased ability to manipulate DNA, members of the ooloi sex must exercise much greater control in order not to unconsciously damage the world around them. Jodahs begins developing before the Oankali have decided to risk half-human ooloi, and the Oankali are inevitably aghast at the oversight. Faced with strict disapproval, Jodahs contemplates its options. As a "flawed natural genetic engineer—one who could distort or destroy with a touch," the choices are self-imposed exile in the wilderness, or confinement on the ship. The dangers are great, and it is entirely conceivable that once on the ship, Jodahs will be permanently altered to prevent it from functioning as an ooloi, or consigned to an existence spent in suspended animation (542). As it is, Jodahs spends much of its early subadult life around older ooloi, who must constantly monitor its activities and undo the genetic damage it causes involuntarily. That the Oankali consider such severe actions demonstrates how precious life, and the balance of life, are to them. Earlier on, when Lilith loses her first lover Joseph, she turns to her ooloi mate Nikanj for both support and to better understand its grief. Afraid of overwhelming Lilith, Nikanj initially hesitates to pass along its feelings via sensory tentacles but does eventually acquiesce. Lilith then experiences "a new color. A totally alien, unique, nameless thing, half seen, half felt or…tasted. A blaze of something frightening, yet overwhelming, compelling. Extinguished. A half known mystery beautiful and complex. A deep,

impossibly sensuous promise. Broken. Gone. Dead" (226). This is the value of Joseph's life as Nikanj perceives it. All the potential, the promise, of life held in one being, and the unutterable sorrow of having it ended. What the Oankali feel for all organic life transcends respect, and it is fitting that the trilogy ends with the planting of a new town, with new life taking root. Planted "deep in the rich soil" of a world restored and nourished by such devoted love (746), a new life form begins its existence, the next chapter in a world brimming with ecofeminist potential.

Without the Oankali's presence, however, that potential remains exceedingly unfulfilled. For animal rights activist Carol J. Adams, the patriarchal process of turning women and the natural world into resources, the twinned attack with which ecofeminist theory is most concerned, begins with a "cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption" (*Sexual Politics* 58). In Adams's view, by permitting an oppressor to view another being as an object, objectification is the primary method through which violation is allowed to take place—the better to enact domination of animals and women by a global patriarchal force. This violence brings about fragmentation and consumption: a reality for butchered, dismembered, and eaten animals, and metaphor for women subjected to the omnipresence of the male gaze and the sexual violence that gaze both implies and precipitates (58). Here, Adams's analysis is useful less as a literal parallel drawn between the two experiences, and more as an ideological understanding of the ways in which patriarchal culture enacts violence. Her discussion of both the butchering of animals and the gendered violence experienced by women suggests that though women can and do perform violence against each other, internalized misogyny, and

therefore patriarchal oppression, can arguably be seen as the root cause—an explanation that can then similarly be used for (the many) women who eat meat.

Though Adams limits her discussion of fragmentation and consumption to the individual animals we strip of subjecthood in order to eat, on a global scale the process remains much the same. In her text *Staying Alive*, ecofeminist scholar and activist Vandana Shiva writes:

> Somewhere along the way, the unbridled pursuit of progress, guided by science and development, began to destroy life without any assessment of how fast and how much of the diversity of life on this planet is disappearing. The act of living and of celebrating and conserving life in all its diversity—in people and in nature—seems to have been sacrificed to progress, and the sanctity of life been substituted by the sanctity of science and development. (Shiva xiv)

For Shiva, this progress-driven economic model is explicitly a colonial invention, the result of the scientific revolution in Europe transforming nature "from *terra mater* into a machine and a source of raw material" (xvii). This transformation removes all ethical and cognitive constraints against the violation and exploitation of nature (xvii), and it is Shiva's belief that the continued phenomenon of treating science and development as sacrosanct has led to the "dominant paradigm of knowledge [becoming] a threat to life itself" (224). It is certainly unfashionable, if not unheard of, to question the ability for scientific and technological progress to do harm, something against which Shiva clearly struggles. Merchant agrees, writing that the erstwhile image of nature as nurturing mother in fact served as a sort of

protection, as "cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings" (3). "One does not readily slay a mother," she writes, "dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body" (3). But industrial mining and deforestation projects would soon necessitate just that, coming into conflict with the image of the natural world as a beneficent mother to whom protection is owed. A cultural shift was necessary, and the new images of mastery and domination then "functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature" (2), and no longer was the destruction of the natural world considered a breach of human ethical behaviour (3).

Standing in sharp contrast to this discourse of domination and control, the Oankali's enduring need to live and survive symbiotically is obvious even in the spaceship on which they arrive. When Lilith first asks whether the ship is a plant or an animal—it quickly becomes clear that the Oankali conception of "building" bears more resemblance to "growing" than anything mechanistic humanity has developed—she is told that it is "both, and more" (Butler 35). Intelligent enough to run most of its processes without monitoring, there is a biological affinity between the ship and the Oankali it transports. "We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours," Lilith is told. "It would die without us and we would be planetbound without it. For us, that would mean eventual death" (35). To suit their own needs, the Oankali have grown, molded, engineered the life forms on which they now depend. Everything the Oankali use is developed in much the same way, from the once-carnivorous plants they use as stasis chambers for the still-sleeping humans, to Lo, a larval version of the ship life form that Lilith's family will eventually use as a village on Earth (283). Whether cohabitants or creators, the

Oankali are never functionally or ideologically separate from their environment.

Shiva's criticism of a Western push toward progress that ignores the need for environmental health and diversity is a struggle against what she terms the "Cartesian concept of nature as 'environment' or a 'resource'" (Shiva 40)—a conceptualization diametrically opposed to the Oankali's tightly connected interspecies relationships. A mode of thought in which "the environment is seen as separate from man…his surrounding, not his substance" (40-41), this dualism between nature and the human has, for Shiva, given rise to a world-view in which nature is "(a) inert and passive; (b) uniform and mechanistic; (c) separable and fragmented within itself; (d) separate from man; and (e) inferior, to be dominated and exploited by man" (41). This inert, static, and profoundly lifeless conception of nature is precisely what both the Oankali and Alaimo fear, and she writes of an environment "drained of its blood, its lively creatures, its interactions and relations—in short, all that is recognizable as 'nature'—in order that it become a mere empty space, an 'uncontested ground' for human 'development'" (*Bodily Natures* 1-2). The ecofeminism of both Shiva and Alaimo manifests as a desire to reconceptualize nature, to give it back its diversity, its life, its relationship with humanity, and to move away from a natural world that is empty and bereft of subjecthood, that exists only to serve human needs.

The necessary reconceptualization of nature will seek to undo the "rupture" between humanity and the natural world (Shiva 41), a natural/cultural divide that is among Timothy Morton's more important preoccupations in his text *Humankind*. He—somewhat dramatically—terms this "philosophical foreclosure of

the human-nonhuman symbiotic real" the "Severing" (13), describing it as a "foundational, traumatic fissure between…reality (the human-correlated world) and the real (ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman parts of the biosphere)" (13). In its fierce commitment to the Severing, humanity is, for Morton, "one of [its own] principle enemies" (3), and much like Shiva and Alaimo, Morton seeks to reinscribe nature as more than the mere counterpart of humanity—that "vanilla essence consisting of white maleness" (3)—acknowledging instead its "artificial constructedness and explosive wholeness" (3). It is humanity's fault that nature has been reduced, diminished in its diversity, its health, and its place as crucial force in this world. It is humanity's fault that nature has been robbed of its potential. As Morton puts it, "by burning millions of years of the past of the symbiotic real in a few decades, humankind has deleted the futurality of the future" (153). In other words, many of the potential futures a thriving, integrated natural world once promised are no longer accessible, and much more than fossil fuel has already been lost. The western economic model, criticized by Shiva and responsible for the industrial conception of nature that has allowed that same nature to be ravaged, has undeniably caused suffering.

Though some ecofeminist thought implies a traditional notion of women and the natural world as being particularly synchronized, essentialist charges are insufficient reason to ignore the fact that assaults on nature generate

tangible, and significant, consequences for women worldwide.[1] Shiva, who focuses on the role of rural women in Indian environmental movements, discusses the "holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes" possessed by these women who, operating in sustenance economies, produce and reproduce wealth "in partnership with nature" (Shiva 24). These alternative modes of knowing, often "oriented to social benefits and sustenance needs" are rarely recognized or valued by the "reductionist" paradigm (24)—the western economic belief in progress above all else and nature as only having value when viewed as economic resource. Much more in keeping with the training the human survivors receive from the Oankali in Butler's text, Shiva's alternative modes of knowing privilege intimate and sustained relationships between nature and the women responsible for the stewardship of that nature. Reductionist thinking, for Shiva, "fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth" (24) and leads to a violent marginalization of "women, tribals, [and] peasants as the knowing subject…violated socially through the expert/non-expert divide which converts them into non-knowers even in those areas of living in which through daily participation, they are the real experts" (26). Development, then, becomes an "extension of the project of wealth creation in modern western patriarchy's economic vision," a vision that acts as the continuation of colonization (2). By eroding the knowledge base of rural Indian women, and removing the

[1] Though it is important to address the essentialist concerns present within environmental and ecocritical feminism, that debate remains outside the scope of this work. More useful for the purpose of this analysis is to apply ecofeminist theory where relevant, always acknowledging the dangers of assuming an essential

people who live on, and off of, the land as authorities of that land, Shiva writes that development "could not but entail destruction of women, nature and subjugated cultures" (2). This violence, rooted both in traditional colonialism and its latest economic manifestation, falls disproportionately to rural, colonized women who, according to Shiva, struggle for "liberation from 'development' just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism" (2).

In her several discussions of India's grassroots environmental movements, Shiva echoes Merchant's claim that ecology functions as a "subversive science in its criticism of the consequences of [the] uncontrolled growth associated with capitalism, technology, and progress—concepts that over the last two hundred years have been treated with reverence in western culture" (Merchant xvi). Though the Oankali arrival represents a perhaps extreme shift into more egalitarian ecofeminist politics, the result is nevertheless a new social order free of the reductionism discussed by Shiva. The aliens' existence is explicitly interconnected with the welfare and sustenance of the natural world surrounding them, their relationship with nature every bit as intimate as the pre-industrial mother-child dynamic Merchant puts forward. That the Oankali choose Lilith as the symbolic mother to their new hybrid species—a woman with her own experiences of motherhood who never attempted to harm her captors and went so far as to share food with them (Butler 29)—seems clearly motivated. In her actions Lilith places herself as an individual committed to respect, care, and nurturing, all tenets of ecofeminist thought.

The Oankali's desire to preserve and cherish all organic life further

manifests as strict vegetarianism. The Oankali and their construct children eat no animal flesh, and the mere smell of fish cooking is disgusting to them (626). In fact, they refuse to provide hunting and fishing equipment to any human who would like to eat meat—though they do not stop humans from making their own. Though kinship with animals is perhaps more explicitly present in Butler's other texts—Lauren Olamina's empathetic powers extending to dogs in *Parable of the Sower*, or shape-shifting Anyanwu transforming into animals as a form of liberation throughout *Wild Seed*, for instance—there is nevertheless ample evidence in *Lilith's Brood* to support the notion that the Oankali decision not to eat meat places their plans for the earth in the realm of ecofeminist utopia. Adams, for her part, believes plant-based economies to be "more likely to be egalitarian" (*Sexual Politics* 45). She points to a tendency, in cultures where protein is collected from non-meat sources, for women to enjoy increased self-sufficiency and respect from the community. These plant-based cultures often allow women access to "essential economic and social role[s]" (46),[2] making vegetarianism, for Adams, an essential quality of ecofeminist praxis, along with "antimilitarism, sustainable agriculture, holistic health practices, and maintaining diversity" (*Neither Man Nor Beast* 89)—all of which typify the Oankali modus operandi.

The resister humans, once away from Oankali control, live in human-only villages, hunt animals, and engage in many forms of violence, particularly at

---

[2] As evidence, Adams looks to the work of anthropologist Peggy Sunday, who surveyed information on nontechnological cultures, notably the Mundurucu of Brazil, and found strong correlations between plant-based economies and women's power (*Sexual Politics* 45).

the expense of women. Though their omnivorous diet can certainly be seen to function as a method of reclaiming humanity, it is more so, in conjunction with the casual use of violence against women, a "re-inscription of male power at every meal" (*Sexual Politics* 199). Adams writes that eating animals "acts as mirror and representation of patriarchal values" (199), and to remove meat from one's diet is "to threaten the structure of the larger patriarchal structure" (47), one committed to the continued subjugation of women and nonhuman beings. For Adams, it is impossible to overthrow patriarchal power while continuing to eat its symbol, and "autonomous, antipartriarchal being" can only be achieved by destabilizing patriarchal consumption, literally through the disruption of its meals (200).

When discussing women authors who explicitly incorporate vegetarianism in their work, Adams invokes the idea of a feminist utopia that imagines a "world without violence" through diet (146). Vegetarianism in novels is then an "act of the imagination," one that reflects on the "alternatives to the texts of meat" (191) and represents "a complex layering of respect" (116). Narratively, this change in perspective, the "gestalt shift by which vegetarianism can be heard" (148) occurs through what Adams terms an "interruption" or event that allows for the introduction of vegetarianism into the novel (133). Such a disruption provides the space needed to take the novel into "new topical territory" (149), and the Oankali's arrival to Earth is evidently one such interruption—and quite a literal one at that. Adams continues on to note that when such an interruption occurs, four main themes arise: a "rejection of male acts of violence, identification with animals, repudiation of men's control of women, and the positing of an ideal world

composed of vegetarianism, pacifism, and feminism as opposed to a fallen world composed in part of women's oppression, war, and meat eating" (133). The Oankali's new world order, in which vegetarian diets are provided by a nurturing, village-shaped life form, and no violence or subjugation between humans is tolerated, bears this out. If the world prior to the Oankali's arrival can by described as a dystopia—a fair conclusion given the rapidly declining human and nonhuman populations in the face of nuclear destruction—then the aliens' presence, with all its attendant pacifism, can be interpreted as a necessary step in moving between dystopia and utopia. As Jim Miller posits, perhaps the "conventional 'women's' values of healing, teaching, and sharing are worth upholding, in a non-essentialist manner, as tools to help us work through dystopia" (344). Adams's "interruption," in this instance arriving in the form of peaceable extraterrestrials intent on stamping out humanity's violent tendencies, seems the perfect catalyst for this transition.

The distinction Miller makes, however, that of embracing "women's values" in a "non-essentialist manner," is important, and a point that Adams makes explicit when she writes of her "androgynous vision" for the end of war and animal slaughter (*Sexual Politics* 133). If humanity is to survive, both in our world and in Butler's fantastical creation, what is needed is less a governing principle that exclusively privileges women, and more one that takes the best of the values considered to be feminine (Miller's "healing, teaching, and sharing," as a start), crafting these otherwise marginalized ways of being into a cohesive ontology. For her part, Shiva writes of the "feminine principle from which all life arises" (xviii), which she likens to the Hindu concept of Prakriti. The "living force that supports

life" (xvii), Prakriti is a breathing and creative process (xviii), an active, "powerful, productive force in the dialectic of creation, renewal and substance of all life" (38). A way of conceptualizing the environment that challenges western notions of nature as object of exploitation (xvii), Prakriti transcends the "dichotomy or duality between man and woman, and person and nature" (40). According to Shiva, Indian cosmology allows for person and nature to act as duality in unity, "inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man. Every form of creation bears the sign of this dialectical unity, of diversity within a unifying principle" (40). Harkening back to Adams's "androgynous vision," Prakriti ensures the presence of a nurturing, productive feminine principle in all life. Shiva believes that the "everyday struggles of women for the protection of nature take place in [this] cognitive and ethical context," the ecological movements to which they give rise seeking to recover the feminine principle in a "non-gender based ideology of liberation" (xviii). This liberation, operating as it is in unifying, living Prakriti, benefits nature, women, and "men who, in dominating nature and women, have sacrificed their own human-ness" (53). The reclamation of the feminine principle in this context brings balance to a deeply unstable system, in which men are separated from a historical and spiritual connection to the nonhuman world, displaced by the twinned forces of patriarchal oppression and a colonialism that forces many of them away from their rural homes—and the knowledge repositories to which they previously laid claim—in favour of seeking employment in cities (Slicer 55).

It is important to emphasize that Shiva's conception of the feminine principle stems from a particular geographic, historical, and cultural milieu. The

women Shiva discusses as experts of and gatekeepers to the natural world, do not "essentially or exclusively embody" Prakriti by virtue of being women (55). In her discussion of Shiva's text, Deborah Slicer stresses that these women function as "resisters," able to work "cooperatively with the land to sustain ecological, including human, health" due to their positionality as people "economically, socially, and politically victimized by Western attempts to displace them as agricultural experts" (55).[3] Operating on the margins of patriarchal and colonial power allows for greater intimacy with the nonhuman world, as well as acknowledgement of one's place in it. Though wary of the possibility of romanticizing such an existence from her own western position, Slicer nevertheless remarks upon the singular point of view conferred on those "involved as outsiders and as critics in a struggle against institutions that threaten their traditional social and economic status" (55-56). In a more general sense, Slicer's argument is such that because women "are assigned work that serves and is immersed in material life, women's self-identities and ontological orientations are more continuous with nature and thus serve as helpful starting point in rethinking certain predominant ontological and social assumptions" (54). It is the work, location, and social standing of women that confers the ecofeminist connection to nature, rather than an

[3] Among the many grassroots ecological movements Shiva discusses, she pays particular attention to the 1970s Chipko movement, in which residents of the Garhwal Himalayas protested the deforestation and forest mismanagement that had caused massive landslides and flooding in the region (Shiva 69-73). Shiva notes the particular leadership of the Garhwali women, who bore the brunt of the economic deprivation brought about by ecological instability, and had particular reason to use the "ethics…of producing and conserving life [as] the countervailing force to the masculinist morality of the market" (72).

essential quality inherent to them.

For her part, Hoda M. Zaki makes the distinction between essentialist and materialist interpretations of ecofeminism. While essentialist feminism will argue for "the primacy of female anatomy as the central and determining factor in shaping the female unconscious and conscious mind" (240), the materialist interpretation—swiftly bypassing the misguided conflation of sex and gender—prefers to "explain the oppression of women by focusing on the social and historical construction of gender and self" (240). Within this framework, multiple experiences, formed from multiple historical and social contexts, necessarily preclude the possibility of a unitary or unified voice for women. This more intersectional approach is one that characterizes Adams's ecofeminism, when she writes, "we are not talking about a unity with other women that would erase differences among us, nor enable us to flatten the various experiences against an 'othering' that motivates and justifies oppression" (*Neither Man Nor Beast* 81). Adams's ecofeminism is one in which "interlocking systems of domination, privilege and oppression co-exist" (81), where "women" as a group do not experience the world as a monolith, but rather as individuals governed by their geography, historical context, age, race, sexuality, and so on. Zaki writes that Butler's novels contain "an implicit and internal critique of and rebuke to one aspect of liberal feminist ideology: its claim to speak for all women, regardless of class or color" (246), and this is clear in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy's many women characters who react to, and interact with, the new Oankali order in vastly different ways. Subverting the "assumption of [a] transhistorical and transcultural, engendered unity

of all women" (246), many of the women survivors, chief among them Lilith's friend Tate, categorically refuse to enter into the Oankali's hybridization project. An essentialist understanding of the novels would presume to imbue all women with Lilith's pragmatism. Though she is at times overcome by bitterness, Lilith nevertheless facilitates the merger of the two species, a stark contrast to the many resisters who, without restored fertility, focus their efforts on building towns in an effort to repair civilization, preferring even the bleak prospect of "sit[ting] in their handsome houses and pray[ing] in their nice church and watch[ing] everybody not get old" to helping the Oankali end the human race as it currently exists (Butler 280). In Butler's world, even in the absence of better options everyone is free to make their own way without a unifying womanhood as guide.

Within this ecological context, in which an essential relationship between women and nature is not assumed, the recuperation of a feminine principle is nevertheless crucial to reestablishing relationships between the human and nonhuman worlds. Merchant emphasizes the need to live within the cycles of nature as an explicit counter to the "exploitative, linear mentality of forward progress" (xvii). This cyclical mode of existence concerns itself with the costs of progress, limits of growth, and deficiencies of decisions based solely of technological and economic advancement (xvii). For Shiva, who concerns herself as much with the day-to-day existence of subsistence farmers as she does macro-level agricultural planning, the cyclical properties of a life spent interconnected with nature are clear:

> Women transfer fertility from the forests to the field and to animals. They transfer animal waste as fertilizer for crops and crop by-

> products to animals as fodder. They work with the forest to bring water to their fields and families. This partnership between women's and nature's work ensures the sustainability of sustenance, and it is this critical partnership that is torn asunder when the project of 'development' becomes a patriarchal project, threatening both nature and women. (Shiva 45)

This transfer of fertility—from forest to food source to human and back again—far from technological backwardness, underscores a sophisticated balance with nature's "essential ecological processes" (36). It is, for Shiva, a return to the "appropriate path after having gone astray for a while on the reductionist road," a path that understands the plurality and diversity of the natural world (35), and that steadiness and stability are not stagnation (36). In fact, Shiva goes as far as to say that at a time when a "quarter of the world's population is threatened by starvation due to erosion of soil, water, and genetic diversity of living resources, chasing the mirage of unending growth…becomes a major source of genocide" (36). Firmly believing murder by "murder of nature" to be our biggest threat to justice and peace (36), Shiva makes clear that the costs of ignoring humanity's place in the biosphere, its utter dependence on nature, are high. When Akin asks the resisters why prewar humans continued to manufacture plastics despite the material's known poisonous properties, he is provided with a surprisingly candid answer:

> Most of them didn't know how dangerous it was…and some of the ones who did know were making too damn much money selling the stuff to worry about fire and contamination that might or might not

> happen…That's what Humans are too, don't forget. People who poison each other, then disclaim all responsibility. In a way, that's how the war happened. (Butler 389)

Even the resisters, those humans so committed to their own people and history that they refuse to enter into the Oankali's trade, are aware of their legacy, their species' utter disregard for the consequences of pollution and harm in its search for profit. That these are the humans who are honest with Akin speaks to Shiva's concerns: despite their loyalty to a pre-war humanity untainted by the Oankali, their current post-apocalyptic predicament makes recognizing the effects of economic and technological "progress" inescapable.

It is imperative to acknowledge the existing connections between human and natural world, and the inextricable nature of those bonds. Pramod K. Nayar writes of a human life "traversed by and embedded in flows of life that cut across species, life forms and inanimate things" (79), a mode of interspecies being that views people as integral components of a larger ecosystem. In fact, contemporary ecological movements can be defined by their attempts to break down the existing dualism between the human and nonhuman, challenging what Merchant calls the "idea of human superiority and independence from nature" (95). She characterizes the ecological crisis as a manifestation of human arrogance (95), a rupture of the "co-operative unity of masculine and feminine" that "places man, shorn of the feminine principle, above nature and women, and separated from both" (Shiva 6). For Donna Haraway, the solution lies in recognizing that the "actors are not all 'us'" ("The Promises of Monsters" 317), and that if the "world exists for us

as ‘nature,’ this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic” (317). Put differently, it is in acknowledging humanity—and human masculinity—as only one of the many subjectivities within an interconnected system the we have any hope of recontextualizing, and combatting, our current ecological crisis.

In Alaimo’s brief mention of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, she acknowledges the Oankali as the embodiment of an “environmental ethos in which the nature/culture divide is unthinkable” (*Bodily Natures* 148), a perfect example of what she terms “trans-corporeality” (2). Underlining the extent to which the human is “always intermeshed with the more-than-human world,” trans-corporeality allows for “potent ethical and political possibilities” to emerge (2). In this “precarious sense of kinship between dirt and flesh” (12), it becomes possible to see the “extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2). This closeness can be interpreted two ways: one “exceedingly local,” a transit between body and environment in the food we eat, the bacteria we house, and the pathogens by which we are besieged; the other global, a complex network of social injustice, lax regulations, and environmental degradation in which no “expanse of land or sea [is] beyond the reach of humanly-induced harm” (15). In Alaimo’s “ethical and political possibilities” (2), a new subjectivity emerges: a humanity capable of entering, and indeed becoming, “the spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies” for which Haraway hopes (*When Species Meet* 10-11). In *When Species Meet*, Haraway discusses “co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing” as a new human subjectivity, a “truth” that speaks of a species whose

regard is "open to those who look back reciprocally" (27). It is a truth rife with the potential for a "multispecies future" (27) and a "profound sense of entanglement, intra-activity, and perpetual emergence" (*Bodily Natures* 158). In these networks and entanglements—in which species engage in the reciprocal relationships of equals, flowing around and into each other—there is more than dependence, there is accountability.

Within the permeable, deeply felt, sensory tentacle communication of the Oankali and their construct offspring, it is impossible to lie or misrepresent one's feelings. Though Lilith had previously noticed the tendency for Oankali to withhold the truth rather than outright lie, it is Akin who confirms this. At one moment, though he knows that by making his feelings of revulsion toward his paired sibling clear he would be hurting its feelings, he nevertheless tells the truth, aware that "no lie could be told successfully in this intimate form of communication. The only way to avoid unpleasant truths was to avoid communication—to say nothing" (Butler 436). In this new Oankali world, one is not only deeply connected to all other life, but beholden to it. Openness becomes a mandatory function of daily life, and the effect one has on one's environment is always immediately evident. Alaimo's wish for the human to be "accountable to a material world that is never merely an external place but always the very substance of our selves and others" (*Bodily Natures* 158) points to this crucial aspect of ecofeminist belonging: porosity. It is the acknowledgement of one's place in a greater ecosystem, the understanding that human subjectivity, far from belonging to one cohesive life form, exists rather as the sum total of many beings—whether a

sibling who has been hurt, or the millions of mostly-microscopic beings that make up our bodies, all beholden to each other and to us. It is the knowledge that our environment passes through us in much the same way as we pass through it. It is the "rather biophysical, yet also commonsensical realization that we are permeable, emergent beings, reliant upon others within and outside our porous borders" (156). In her discussion of this interspecies "in-habitation"—in which "what is supposed to be outside the delineation of the human is always already inside"—Alaimo's conception of the natural world is of matter that is "both the stuff of (human) corporeality and the stuff that eviscerates the very notion of 'human'" (143). The material realities of our existence within an ecological system have already precluded any chance of the "human" existing as a cohesive, separate whole.

In Butler's novels, the culmination of the Oankali hybridization project arrives in the form—indeed, the many forms—of Jodahs. As the first construct ooloi, Jodahs has, more than any other hybrid being, fully merged the potential of both its parent species: blending the Oankali sense of connectedness with the world with the shape-shifting potential of human cancer. Able to regrow missing limbs and to easily move between fundamentally different shapes through rapid—and now controlled—cell growth, Jodahs embodies a flexible, interconnected mode of being whose primary goal is to fully integrate itself into a larger system. In *Dawn*, Nikanj is able to regrow its missing limb by connecting its tentacles to Lilith and harnessing the cancerous potential of her cells in a difficult process that renders them both catatonic for an extended period of time. But by *Imago*, what Nikanj can only accomplish with great risk and difficulty becomes

second nature for its ooloi child Jodahs. Both new ooloi children, our narrator Jodahs and its sibling Aaor, exist at different times with fur, scales, and skin like tree bark, even at one point resembling a "kind of near mollusk" (Butler 674). The physiological changes that the Oankali can bring about from one generation to the next, Jodahs and Aaor can do to themselves in only a few moments, and both feel most comfortable when transforming into a shape pleasing to potential mates (598).

The apex of Oankali/human evolution, Jodahs and Aaor are the perfect ecofeminist subjects, able and eager to seamlessly merge into and out of other life forms. And in this ability, the two siblings come to best embody evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis's theory of symbiogenesis. In her text *Acquiring Genomes*, written with Dorion Sagan, Margulis makes a case for mergers between species, "long-term biological fusions beginning as symbiosis," functioning as the engine of species evolution (Margulis 12).[4] Margulis, the preeminent proponent of symbiosis as an evolutionary force, believes that, whether a million-year symbiosis between coral and algae or the milk cow's relationship to its digestive microbes, "members of different species…even of different kingdoms, under identifiable stresses" will form "tightly knit communities" that eventually become "individuals by merger" (56). A partnership between two distinct organisms will, in Margulis's view, become a mutually beneficial symbiosis and eventually a

[4] Notable examples in the text include the human microbiome, including the symbiotic relationship we each have with our gut bacteria, as well as sea slugs incorporating genes from the algae they eat into themselves in order to photosynthesize, and lichen, a composite organism comprised of both algae and fungi.

merger into a new kind of individual "formed by symbiogenesis" (90). And as traditional graphical representations of evolution—the so-called "trees of life"—bear "only diverging branches," they do not, according to Margulis, accurately reflect life's history on earth (33). More representational than a "well-branched tree" might be Haraway's conception of a "liquid-crystal consortium folding on itself again and again," with identities emerging but remaining "always a relational web opening to non-Euclidian pasts, presents, and futures" (*When Species Meet* 31-32). Margulis's view of evolution, a seemingly orgiastic explosion and implosion of species merging and emerging, is equally likely to give a taxonomist "either an ecstatic moment or a headache" (31), but is nevertheless clear in its proclamation: all visible organisms, whether plants, animals, or fungi, evolved from this sort of "body fusion" (Margulis 56), and humans are no exception.

Though we might "ignore that we live symbiotically with our eyelash mites or with our underarm or gut bacteria," for example, it does not change the fact that we do indeed have eyelash mites and intestinal and underarm bacteria (18), and are dependent upon them. Recalling Alaimo's discussion of "in-habitation" and the porosity of organic life, humans function as "confederacies" (Margulis 21). Rather than existing as discrete single organisms, they instead enjoy "silent, unconscious relationships" (18)—in other words, symbiogenetic bonds—with millions of other life forms. This is clearly the Oankali's intention as they put in motion their hybridization project, and in Jodahs' experiences we can see an unexpected but highly successful merging of two species. It clearly revels in its porous, amorphous place within its environment, its relationship to the natural world becoming nothing

so much as Haraway's "knot of species coshaping one another in layers of reciprocating complexity all the way down" (*When Species Meet* 42). And though Haraway encourages an appreciation of this complexity, Margulis is aware that suggesting that organisms aren't as self-contained as previously thought, that humans are really "walking assemblages, beings who have integrated various other kinds of organisms," opens up uncomfortable questions. If we are a "sort of loose committee" and we get sick, is it "simply a single animal getting sick, or is illness more a rearrangement of the [committee's] members?" If we accept that pathogens, rather than outside attackers, are "part of the committee that makes up each of us to begin with, isn't health less a question of resistance to invasion from the outside and much more an issue of ecological relationships?" (Margulis 19). The conceptualization of the human body as ecosystem that must be balanced if it is to remain healthy bears much in common with the role the Oankali see themselves as having within larger ecosystems. If we are to see humanity as enmeshed with, and beholden to, a greater system composed of humans and nonhumans, it is necessary to step away from the notion of our human bodies having distinct, unbreachable borders, embracing instead an existence as fully porous, "multi-componented beings [who] are, in fact, falling apart" (19). As Margulis has admitted, this next step in the direction of a fully integrated ecofeminist future is daunting, carrying as it does the risk of a loss of subjectivity.

In Butler's novels, however, the symbiogenetic potential of the constructs represent the desirable, and indeed only, way forward toward the next stage in human evolution. To take its place as a fully realized and dependable locus

in an interconnected web of life, Jodahs must—and does—learn to operate in "responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying, and nurturing and killing" (*When Species Meet* 42). The fatal risk of losing oneself in this intimate species knot is real, as Aaor, deprived of the stabilizing presence of mates, comes close to realizing. It drifts through the wilderness, looking for humans with which to mate, becoming less and less itself, and less and less able to control the form it takes. Its family does everything possible to keep it alive and stave off a complete cellular break down. Oankali life is such that Aaor's individual cells might live for a time as single-cell organisms, or invade the bodies of larger creatures, but "Aaor as an individual would be gone" (Butler 682), leaving in its wake a trail of infected plants and animals and causing trouble in myriad unforeseen ways. Fortunately the risk is averted and, with the support of their respective mates, both Aaor and Jodahs become controlled, responsible adult ooloi, cognizant of their legacy as genetic engineers and fully committed to performing the "gift/duty/pleasure" of the ooloi (692). In Butler's novels, the construct ooloi's porous, ever-changing subjectivity is such that cohesion is only possible when firmly rooted in a social and environmental matrix, and that subjectivity is put in the service of others.

In the end, Jodahs' multi-formed, utterly integrated existence demonstrates, in an admittedly science fictional context, the very real benefits of breaking "down the logic of the species boundary" (Vint 294). Sherryl Vint argues that a better future requires "the acceptance rather than elimination of difference, [living] harmoniously with the Other rather [dreaming] of a homogenous utopia" (297). Here again, the constructed alien-human hybrids, especially the two

practically super-powered ooloi constructs, function as an idealized, ever-evolving bridge between human and nonhuman. Jodahs and Aaor embody Vint's proposed reconfiguration of "what it means to be a subject and what it means to have an ethics" as they take their nurturing, balancing place within the social and environmental fabric of their world (297). It is therefore unsurprising that Butler's final novel, focused as it is on Jodahs' journey, is titled *Imago*, after the final, perfect stage of an insect's metamorphosis. The construct oolois' "new modes of biological citizenship" (Nayar 127), necessitate a responsibility toward, and intimacy with, the natural world that precludes any ideological separation between the human and nonhuman.

In his quest for interspecies solidarity, Timothy Morton makes clear that our world is one that is "perforated and permeable," one that "malfunction[s] intrinsically" and allows different species access to each other (14), interacting and merging in a tangled form of ecofeminist utopia. Continuing his discussion of the severing as the moment that separated humankind from the "symbiotic real" of the natural world, Morton writes that solidarity "must mean human psychic, social and philosophical being resisting the Severing" (18-19). Though "Western philosophy has been telling itself that humans, in particular, human thought, makes things real for so long that an ethics or politics based simply on allowing something real to impinge on us sounds absurd or impossible," returning to a non-severed state is surprisingly easy (19). For Morton, an integrated ecological politics simply means "allowing and enhancing all kinds of enjoyment that aren't obviously to do with you" (104). Letting nonhuman beings exist on their own terms, not mediated by

human interpretation—or human exploitation—is a radical act, though one no more complex than being kind, "being-in-solidarity…with kind-dred" (138). This kindness implies an intimacy, a "pleasant confusion of feeling-with and being-with" (19). Any "command-control…models of human relationships with nonhumans," even notions of environmental "stewardship" that would seem opposed to "anthropocentric tyranny" are necessarily "artifacts of the Severing," to be discarded and transcended in the reversion back to the symbiotic real (25). Morton advocates for a relationship of equals, for "including nonhumans in our social designs," for no other reason than that it is "fascinating. Because we can't help it. Because we know too much…This is how we are" (143). Alaimo agrees, writing of the necessity for trans-corporeal subjects to "relinquish mastery as they find themselves inextricably part of the flux and flow of the world that others would presume to master" (*Bodily Natures* 17). For all of Morton's optimism, this entrance into the symbiotic real, the "understanding [of] the substance of one's self as interconnected with the wider environment," marks a "profound shift in subjectivity" for Alaimo (20). It is a necessary step forward, but one that will have enormous consequences for human subjectivity. Humanity's new, construct children will, by virtue of their Oankali DNA and their intimate, sensory tentacle-mediated perception of the world around them, have an ultimately unhuman understanding of the world. This understanding is one that is necessarily beyond the realm of human understanding, and for all the excited forward momentum with which the Oankali view this next step of their evolution, there is a bittersweet element to Nikanj asking Lilith, "did you think that your children would only look different?" (Butler 260).

Despite this push toward a responsible, interconnected, porous existence that will spell a new age for human subjectivity, the ecofeminist utopia promised by the Oankali remains disappointingly unrealized. In her discussion of "development" and the ways in which scientific and technological progress is often privileged over the wellbeing of the life forms—human and nonhuman alike—that populate the planet, Shiva writes of "maldevelopment," or the "violation of the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems, that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence" (Shiva 5-6). Though much of the Oankali ethos typifies ecofeminist ideology, and pre-Oankali earth was hardly a well-oiled paradise of "interconnected and interdependent systems," the ruthlessness with which the alien species implements its plans for the planet and its human survivors also bears the hallmarks of the unstoppable march toward "progress" to which Shiva is so categorically opposed. Even more so given the Oankali's predilection for genetic engineering, their methods resemble the "process of exploitation, inequality, [and] injustice" Shiva describes. Their presence may be non-violent, but it is nevertheless a colonial venture.

In this coercive treatment of the surviving humans, the Oankali are the ultimate users, deaf to the concerns raised by their ostensible trading partners, and committed to their plan for species merging regardless of opposition. The Oankali's troubling penchant for not seeking human consent in anything they do, discussed at length in subsequent chapters, supports Zaki's assertion that Butler's work constitutes "an implied critique of much feminist SF utopian writing" (247). Though the arrival of the Oankali does represent a "more democratic and egalitarian

movement in this body of fiction" (247), the bar of a world recently ravaged by nuclear war is not set high. While the human resisters actively engage in murder and rape throughout the three novels, the Oankali's tendency to absorb "all that a living being said—all words, all gestures, and a vast array of other internal and external bodily responses," then acting "according to whatever consensus they discovered" is equally troubling (Butler 553). The utterly alien tendency to base decisions on minute changes in body language, rather than the explicit verbal wishes of those whom the decision is likely to affect, is a violation in its own right.

Though Lilith does participate in the Oankali's hybridization project, acting as ambassador of sorts for the Oankali when waking up the surviving humans, it is never a comfortable position for her. Prone to "flares of bitterness" (Butler 273), even after many years and dozens of children, Lilith never fully reconciles herself to having helped a species so unconcerned with maintaining humanity on human terms. Her point of view on this matter is quite similar to that of the resisters, who see the Oankali trade as exploitative, as proof that the Oankali view humans not as equal life forms whose opinions matter, but as raw material to be used in whatever way the Oankali see fit. In their utter disregard for conserving humanity as the resisters conceptualize it, the Oankali's plans for hybridization harken back to Adams's "cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption" (*Sexual Politics* 58). The surviving humans then become Adams's women and animals, oppressed by a domineering culture and just another resource to be mined, a pool of genetic difference to which the Oankali can lay claim.

Articulating what Miller terms the "Oankali plan to save humanity by

healing and subsuming it" (340), Lilith herself often refers to humanity as animals meant either for research or consumption (Butler 33). In this way, Butler "refuses a simple valorization of multispecies belonging," choosing instead to warn of "new forms of bio-power that produce empowered and subaltern subjects in the new biological citizenship as well" (Nayar 34). The new Oankali order, in its unequal balance of power between human and alien, is not as free of the hierarchy only humans are said to possess, despite what the peaceful but unyielding extraterrestrials might like to believe. And though it is tempting to look at a verdant, non-polluted earth and believe that the Oankali's ends justify their means, the promise of a newly healthy world is in itself a lie. In a shocking revelation that is only disclosed once the reader is privy to Lilith's children's points of view, the full extent of the Oankali's plans become clear: in keeping with the Oankali custom of space travel, the constructs' life on earth has an expiry date attached to it. In only three centuries (a span of time so insignificant in the life of an Oankali that Jodahs will likely still be living), the larval spaceships that currently function as villages will be fully-grown. Having sufficiently fed on the nutrients of the Earth, they will break apart and scatter into space, leaving behind "a lump of stripped rock more like the moon than like this blue Earth" (Butler 531). It is telling that no human is made privy to this plan before entering into trade with the Oankali, and the eventual strip-mining of the planet casts the aliens' ostensible environmental concerns in an entirely different, horrifying light.

Though the promise of ecofeminist utopia remains frustratingly out of reach, the novels nevertheless posit a fascinating alternative view of the future in

which violence and exploitation have a chance of being transcended. As Haraway discusses in an interview, it is impossible to properly think about the boundaries of our species "without being inside science fiction" (Gane 140). Only in a genre that stretches the limits of the imagination can there be a true "interrogation of relationalities where species are in question" (140). The *Xenogenesis* trilogy, in its concern with environmental wellbeing, species interrelatedness, and the importance of living as part of the natural world, explores possible changes to human subjectivity—changes based on the acknowledgment of the human not as discrete, separate life form but as the sum of many symbiotically related organisms, working together not in competition but toward a united goal. Humans, the "products of situated relationalities," are in the words of Haraway, "quite a crowd" (146), both inside themselves and as parts of larger, entangled ecosystems. In the next chapter, a similar next step in human subjectivity will be discussed, focused on the posthuman potential of Oankali/human hybridization. Whether interconnected through a mutual posthuman sense of belonging, or simply through the acknowledgment of environmental interdependence, the half-human, half-alien constructs are rife with subversive evolutionary potential.

Chapter Two: "I Offer a Oneness"

Cyborg Potential and the Peril of Posthumanism

"She would be the walking monster with a little computer inside."

—Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*

The previous chapter explored the ways in which *Lilith's Brood* first establishes an ecofeminist utopia. Though in many respects the Oankali's symbiotic relationship with the organic matter now populating the earth is emblematic of the goals put forward by ecofeminist theory, the narrative then problematizes the very concept of that utopia, in large part through humanity's inability to determine the dynamics and boundaries of their relationship to their new planetary environment. That humans are reduced to the same status as the other nearly extinct life on earth in the Oankali hybridization project undermines humanity's ability to accept, let alone embrace, a radically different status quo. Unable to perceive this new world and its many dangers in the same way as the Oankali, humans are necessarily cut off from the intimate relationship established between the Oankali, their "construct" half-human children, and the organic life that provides sustenance, building materials, and a home. An entire form of communication that occurs through Oankali sensory tentacles and is based on minute physiological changes as well as verbalized sentiments is impossible from them, compounding the isolation the surviving humans feel in the face of their imprisonment and exploitation. Disconnected from all self-determination, the role of the human is then, despite a

lack of viable alternatives, one of resentful, bitter distrust stemming from their dependence on the benevolence of the Oankali.

If the Oankali are consigning this last generation of humans to obsolescence, so are they committed to fundamentally altering their own species. This hybridization will be a rebirth from which both species will come away changed, and it is significant that in the first section of *Dawn*, titled "Womb," Lilith becomes conscious with the declaration "Alive! Still alive. Alive… again" (Butler 5). Reborn into a world more complex and alien than she could ever have imagined, the newly awakened Lilith is now set on a path that will ensure new beginnings for her species. Humanity is being offered a second chance at life, both literally in the aftermath of a nuclear war, and in the opportunity to transcend what the Oankali term the "human contradiction." From the point of the view of the Oankali, a species whose worldview is wholly mediated by their ability to manipulate genetic material, the "human contradiction" is the dangerous, invariably fatal genetic predisposition humans have toward hierarchical behaviour. Humanity's heightened intellectual ability is almost perpetually used in service to the much older impulse for hierarchy, and the Oankali perceive this predisposition as a genetic flaw—one that is unavoidable and almost disqualifies humanity from becoming a part of the aliens' hybridization plans. Though Lilith, as an African American woman who has experienced various types of discrimination, fully acknowledges humanity's flaws, she cannot condone the alternative: generations of half-Oankali children who, in their very alien disregard for hierarchy, promise a decidedly posthuman future.

The Oankali, and the hybrid offspring they promise, are deeply

disruptive to the surviving humans, to the point where upon introduction their physical presence is nearly unbearable to Lilith. At first, she does not want to approach the strange, extraterrestrial creature in front of her: "She had not known what held her back before. Now she was certain it was his alienness, his difference, his literal unearthliness. She found herself still unable to take even one more step toward him" (13). Though Lilith's anxiety and fear gradually lessen with increased exposure to the Oankali, they remain an unsettling presence, one especially unbearable given the inevitable "Medusa children," with "snakes for hair [and] nests of night crawlers for eyes and ears" they will produce together (43). For feminist and science and technology theorist Donna Haraway, women, animals, and cyborgs function as "boundary creatures," marginalized life with the power to destabilize "the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives" through their very presence on the margins of those narratives (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 2). "These boundary creatures are, literally, *monsters*, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify" (2). The ostensible "monsters" that will be created in what Hoda M. Zaki terms the Oankali's "collective vocation" (240) will have the power, through their very existence, to destabilize the limits of conventional human narratives.

In many ways, Lilith is entitled to her caution and revulsion. The Oankali are patently non-human, a species of space explorers who, through careful hybridization with species met along the way, consciously evolve themselves into new life forms. The species' focus on conscious evolution is clear in the very name they give the ooloi, the third Oankali sex responsible for the majority of the species'

genetic engineering. “Ooloi” in Oankali has multiple significations, including “treasured stranger,” “bridge,” “life trader,” “weaver,” and “magnet” (526)—all terms pointing to the added responsibility shouldered by that sex. The Oankali view their hybridization with new life forms as a “trade,” enabling them to “survive as an evolving species instead of specializing [them]selves into extinction or stagnation” (40). In the 250 years it took them to learn about humanity and restore life to a planet very nearly destroyed, the Oankali have made themselves bipedal, and have begun using spoken language again, the better to introduce themselves to their new human trade partners. And yet, they remain definitively extraterrestrial. Their movements are unhuman, their stillness and fluidity unsettling. With no eyes, ears, or noses to speak of, they perceive through the use of sensory tentacles scattered over their bodies that allow them a much greater range of perception, and increased communication skills in the form of sensory messages when the tentacles are linked. Their living ship allows them to communicate en masse, coming to a consensus for every decision of import and eliminating the need for hierarchy. The Oankali are not human, and that they think and act differently remains something that Lilith, for all her complicity in their hybridization project, never fully learns to accept. She will come to care for the Oankali, mate with them, and build a life for herself and her children within their social organism. But despite this intimacy, it is never a comfortable experience for Lilith, who contends with the “simultaneously exhilarating and exhausting” task of “thinking outside the regime of the human” (Muñoz 209). For queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, the attempt at understanding that which is inhuman is necessarily a “ceaseless endeavour, a continuous straining

to make sense of something else that is never fully knowable" (209). It is by virtue of Lilith's "stuckness within humanity" that the Oankali remain fundamentally unknown to her, a "kind of knowing that is incommensurable with the protocols of human knowledge production" (209). Lilith cannot know who or what the Oankali are, and therefore cannot give her blessing when faced with the Oankali's plans for species mixing.

Hybridization will occur, however, and no recalcitrance on the part of Lilith or the other humans will deter the Oankali from their chosen course. They have expended significant effort rebuilding earth, learning about humanity, and altering themselves, all in service to this next step in their evolution. No deterrent will be permitted. Half-human and half-Oankali construct children will be born, a new generation of hybrids, monsters, and cyborgs. Haraway's conception of the cyborg, developed primarily in her "Cyborg Manifesto," is that of a "world-changing fiction" (*Simians* 149), an imaginative resource able to map the boundaries of our current "social and bodily reality" (150). More concretely, the cyborg as described by Chris Hables Gray, is a "self-regulating organism" combining the natural and the artificial together in one system (2). Not necessarily part human, cyborgs are, simply put, a combination of the living and inanimate, the evolved and the made (2). Entities that combine organic, "labouring, desiring, and reproducing" systems with machines (*Simians* 1), cyborgs function for Haraway as a condensed image of "both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (150). Postmodern scholar N. Katherine Hayles agrees, believing the cyborg's power to be rooted in this dual

nature, in the cyborg's existence both as discursive subject and real-world phenomenon—a reality to which the ubiquity of prostheses, pacemakers, in vitro fertilization, or designer babies would seem to attest. "Were the cyborg only a product of discourse," she writes, "it could perhaps be relegated to science fiction, of interest to SF aficionados but not of vital concern to the culture. Were it only a technological practice, it could be confined to such technical fields as bionics, medical prostheses, and virtual reality" (Hayles 158). That the cyborg manifests itself as "technological object and discursive formation" (158) signals its role as the harbinger of an all-too-real posthuman future, mixing together the biology of embodied humanity and a forward-looking focus on technology and information systems.

The cyborg, the more-than-human entity, represents the only hope for human transformation in Butler's text, and is crucial to the construction of a world "less riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality" (*Simians* 2), a world, in essence, free of the human contradiction to which the Oankali continually refer. And yet, this particularly Oankali evolutionary strategy, brought about through "invasion, acquisition, duplication, and symbiosis" (Butler 544) reflects what Pramod K. Nayar terms "new theories of evolution" (42): a human evolutionary history that takes into account our integral and continuing exchanges with other life forms—from the bacteria living inside of our digestive tracts to our mutually beneficial relationships with domesticated farm animals. Nayar goes on to find real-world biological and neurological phenomena that parallel the processes Butler has created in the Oankali. Notably, he focuses on the

mirror-neuron theory,[5] describing the occurrence as the "biological basis of empathy" (42). Nayar argues that if such a process could occur in humans, it would be theoretically possible for surgical and chemical interventions in the neurological structures of human brains to "make [those same brains] less or more empathetic" (42). For Nayar, this means feasibly creating a "more *humane* human through posthumanist changes" (42), and bringing about the changes in human behaviour the Oankali are working toward without the need for extraterrestrial interference.

In Butler's text, however, the move toward the posthuman—and indeed the very continuation of the human species—would be entirely impossible without outside help. And if the constructed hybridized offspring that stem from the genetic mixing of humans and Oankali are free of technology as we currently conceptualize it, they nevertheless embody the figure of the cyborg in how they are deliberately constructed by their respective ooloi parents. As Lilith is told soon after waking, the Oankali's ability to build with genetic material, a much more sophisticated version of human forays into genetic engineering, is as essential to them, as strong an urge, as the human desire to create and use machinery (Butler 40). The Oankali may not be crafting with motors, gears, and circuit boards, but there is nevertheless a similar mode of production in everything they do, whether it is breeding wide, flat creatures with millipede legs to serve as transportation, or

[5] In animals, the same neurons will sometimes fire both when the animal acts and when it observes that same action performed by another. Though some researchers believe the phenomenon occurs so that the organism will better learn from and empathize with others, the cause of this mirroring, and whether mirror neurons can be found in humans, is as yet unclear.

using infant versions of their spaceship life form as shuttles to and from earth. When Jodahs passes through its first developmental metamorphosis, it gains a new awareness of the productive capabilities of the Oankali (and, now, their half-human offspring), an ability stemming from a specialized organ known as the yashi:

> Within it, ooloi manipulated molecules of DNA more deftly than Human women manipulated the bits of thread they used to sew their cloth. I had been constructed inside such an organ, assembled from the genetic contributions of my two mothers and two fathers. The construction itself and a single Oankali organelle was the only ooloi contribution to my existence. The organelle had divided within each of my cells …It had become an essential part of my body. We were what we were because of that organelle. It made us collectors and traders of life, always learning, always changing in every way but one—that one organelle. Ooloi said we were that organelle. (Butler 544)

Rather than build cities, mechanize daily tasks, and produce waste, the Oankali instead live in symbiosis with their environments, though admittedly a symbiosis predicated on the continued altering of other life forms to better suit their purposes. The Oankali "interface" with the world—and in this cyborg context Éva Federmayer's word choice becomes increasingly relevant (104)—by continuously absorbing and altering the genetic material they encounter. Going backward, returning to their genetic roots, is by their own admission the "one direction that's closed" to the Oankali (Butler 36). Though their continuous urge to seek out

difference may seem diametrically opposed to a more human propensity for xenophobia, the equally Oankali impulse to absorb that difference into their species, to appropriate and use whatever new ability is encountered, seems decidedly less alien.

This radical, purposeful combination of Oankali and human traits bears substantial resemblance to the cyborg as conceptualized by Haraway: a creature that has made "thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines" (*Simians* 152). "Our machines," she writes, "are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (152). Faced with the ascendance of the Oankali-human construct—long-lived, perfectly suited to life on this new earth, and brimming with potential—compared to the straggling few human survivors of a self-inflicted nuclear cataclysm, it is difficult to disagree with Haraway. That a new, half-alien species must be created in order for this lively posthumanist vision of the future to take place speaks to how deeply ingrained Butler believes humanity's impulse toward hierarchy and oppression to be. According to Zaki, the creation of the constructs, the insertion of Oankali DNA and social mores into humanity, shows that within these novels the "human propensity to create the Other can never be transcended" (241). The end of racial discrimination, among other forms of hierarchical behaviour, "must coincide with the rise of some kind of similar discrimination based upon biological differences" (241)—in this case hatred of the new alien visitors. Zaki's interpretation of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy is that humanity will never

transcend its genetically-dictated nature on its own, will never accept the Oankali and the posthuman future they offer without first being altered on a genetic level. The instinct for hierarchy, for creating the Other, can only be eradicated through a radical move toward the cyborg. Once this move is underway, "the certainty of what counts as nature," for Haraway is now "undermined, probably fatally" (*Simians* 152-153). Posthumanist scholar Rosi Braidotti reiterates the thought, arguing that even today—let alone in Butler's future alien narrative—the "binary opposition between the given and the constructed is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction" (*Posthuman* 3). By moving beyond an understanding of life that places the born and the constructed in opposition to one another, Butler creates a world in which members of the new construct generation—cyborgs all—represent the ideal vision of the posthuman.

For Braidotti, the critical posthuman subject is a "relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable" (49). A bridge between the Oankali and humanity, the constructs are nevertheless entities entirely differentiated from either parent species.[6] They are still firmly rooted in their Oankali past, with their subjectivity expressing "an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building" (49). The constructs are fully able to perceive their environment, and each other, as the Oankali do, allowing

[6] The very name of the combined novels, *Xenogenesis*, implies the creation of something new and unknown, the production of offspring different from its parents.

them access to the collective community of their parent species, and a much greater sense of harmony. Through their origins with the Oankali, the constructs have transcended the human contradiction. This new generation, however, quickly begins moving beyond what is expected of them as a child species. Akin's ability to understand humanity in a way unavailable to the Oankali, and his subsequent insistence that the humans be allowed a Martian colony free from Oankali interference, along with Jodahs' unexpected sexual precociousness, are, if in the end positive developments, deeply inconvenient for the Oankali's tightly controlled, conservative hybridization project. The constructs are, in other words, "deeply differentiated," if still "grounded and accountable" to both humans and Oankali (49).

These tensions, present in an offspring species that remains beholden to its parents while becoming something else entirely, are unsurprising given what Anne Balsamo calls the "fraught" nature of cyborg identity (147). Cyborgs, who come into being through the transgression of boundaries, through a "radical disruption of otherness," foreground "the constructedness of otherness" (153). Put differently, cyborgs are at once entirely new entities and surprisingly recognizable to us, reminding us of difference while also reminding us of ourselves. The duality of the cyborg brings into clearer focus the arbitrary nature of "the other," and Balsamo writes that cyborgs "fascinate us because they are not like us, and yet just like us" (153). It is the nature of the cyborg to "alert us to the ways culture and discourse depend upon notions of 'the other' that are arbitrary and binary, and also shifting and unstable" (153) by disrupting boundaries, subverting expectations, all

the while maintaining an immediacy that forecloses the possibility of othering the cyborg. The cyborg can never be like us, but we will always remain a part of the cyborg.

The half-Oankali constructs reside at the nexus of Haraway's cyborg and Braidotti's posthuman, embodying both the "opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge, and self-representation" (*Posthuman* 12) and the "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (*Simians* 154). The posthuman condition, according to Braidotti, "urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (*Posthuman* 12), introducing a "qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" (1-2). Though it is possible to think of humanity as a natural phenomenon, developing organically through evolution and spontaneous genetic mutation, "no such illusions are possible with the cyborg" (Hayles 159). From the beginning, the cyborg's origins are constructed, and therefore its existence must have purpose. The cyborg forces Braidotti's hoped for creative and critical rethinking of what humanity will become precisely because of its constructed nature. The cyborg, the entity with the power to transform humanity's biological and political potential, is then an integral part of the posthuman future, and one explored in detail in Butler's trilogy. The constructs are a much-needed new form of life if humanity is to have any hope of enacting real, lasting, radical change. Though the Oankali engineer them from, as Lilith wryly

puts it, "human raw material" (Butler 84), the constructs are nevertheless "illegitimate offspring…often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins" (*Simians* 151). They are cyborgs, new entities unto themselves, and as such, they benefit from not having an origin story (150), from not being constrained by humanity's painful, fatal flaws.

Butler's cyborg world is one in which "people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (*Simians* 154). As beings who are both still human and yet capable of intimately connecting with the new life on a refurbished earth, the constructs are the only entities able to undertake the "political struggle…to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point" (154). For the cyborg, nothing is more dangerous than the "single vision" that produces nothing but illusion—of one's own importance, immutability, humanity (or the Oankali equivalent). In his book *Cyborg Citizen*, Hables Gray is of the opinion that "living in more than one world confers leverage and therefore power" (192). He writes that the cyborg, both as imaginative tool and real-world phenomenon, "opens a place in politics for disempowering master narratives and reinscribing the political margins into the centre" (192). Within this multiplicity of experience, this identity "constructed out of past and possibilities" (195), it is impossible to maintain one dominant narrative. And so the constructs Akin and Jodahs necessarily diverge from both their human and Oankali parents while simultaneously working toward reconciling what would otherwise be an untenable situation between the two

species. For Hables Gray, the "proliferation of cyborgs is the promise of monsters, the promise of possibilities. Horror is possible, perhaps inevitable. But resistance, even joy, should be just as possible" (195). Haraway shares this belief, writing that the double vision of the "many-headed monster" is far preferable to whatever static existence humanity can expect (*Simians* 154). The constructs may appear monstrous to the "resister" groups of humans who have left the Oankali and live in their own settlements—a sentiment Lilith absolutely shares before beginning her own half-alien brood—but the novels clearly frame this repulsion as an impulse to be transcended. As Gregory Jerome Hampton explains, the "inability to embrace that which is multidimensional and ambiguous as normative is the narrative's explanation for humanity's failure in its potential future" (72). The constructs represent all that is mutable, optimistic, and posthuman. The failure to acknowledge them as such make of the resister humans not so much the plucky heroes defending against extraterrestrial tyrants as intractable and inflexible in the face of their own imminent obsolescence.

The constructs, able to communicate using the Oankali "impressions" delivered via sensory tentacle, share a closer, more intimate knowledge of one another than anything the humans will ever experience. Clustered together and communicating silently, they may well resemble Haraway's many-headed monster, writhing together in a perverse mass of interconnection. This closeness does not go unnoticed by Naomi Jacobs, who writes of the Oankali "constantly penetrating and being penetrated, dramatizing a terrifyingly limitless intimacy" (98). This mode of communication functions as the manifestation of the cyborg's "inarticulate longing"

for connectedness (Stone 91), which Allucquére Rosanne Stone refers to as cyborg envy, or the desire to "cross the human/machine boundary, to penetrate and merge" (91). Despite how natural this connection might feel—Akin more than once likens the removal of sensory tentacles to the gouging out of eyes (Butler 398)—these new modes of intimacy are beyond the humans' realm of comprehension. The resisters view this tentacle-based communion as an active threat to their bodily integrity, a monstrous porosity jeopardizing any previously held conception of individual subjectivity. Recalling the previous chapter's discussion of bodily porosity and interspecies mingling—both characteristics of ecofeminist being that are always already occurring and need only be acknowledged—the resisters' fear of this threat to their subjectivity is understandable. Indeed, despite her at times overwhelmingly positive view of posthuman potentialities, Haraway herself echoes this fear in an interview: "How could we not be terrified and in some kind of collective paranoia when we see nothing but connection—this kind of paranoid fantasy of systems? Clearly this is a nightmare" (Gane 151). When faced with an extraterrestrial presence that disrupts every conceivable aspect of human life, what the resisters find most troubling is a totally porous system of interconnection that turns individuals into a monstrous entity, part hive mind, part many-headed hydra, and utterly alien. Though the *Xenogenesis* trilogy arguably frames the advent of the constructs as a positive development, it does so without forgetting the potentially horrifying, monstrous implications of a truly cyborg existence.

It is in their monstrosity, however, that the constructs are freed from the constraints and conceptual limits of either of the parent species. Nowhere is this

freedom clearer than with Akin, the first construct male born to a human mother—Lilith—who is kidnapped by resister humans. Resisters are allowed to "escape" the Oankali and live independently only because their fertility was never restored to them and therefore they cannot produce fully human children who could pose a threat to the newly created hybridized constructs. Akin, still an infant, is taken by such a group of humans, who then sell him to a nearby human town. Left in the care of humans for many months, Akin begins to realize that he is being left on purpose by the Oankali, in the hopes that spending his formative infancy in the humans' midst will give him a clearer insight into why the resisters continue to fight the Oankali regime. The experiment works perhaps too well, and though Akin is eventually brought home he spends many of the next years visiting resister villages, bonding with his human roots far more completely than the Oankali could have anticipated. His estrangement from the Oankali is made explicit in his inability to bond with his paired sibling,[7] effectively cutting him off from an intimate and uniquely Oankali relationship for the rest of his life. His primary goal once he reaches adulthood is to create a human-only colony for the resisters on Mars, a plan he is only able to enact due to his particular blend of Oankali authority and human understanding of the resisters' plight.

That Akin is able to advocate for humanity, and to do so successfully,

---

[7] In the five-way reproductive technique that produces the constructs, both Oankali and human females are impregnated at the same time. The paired siblings are born close together, and spend their infancy bonding, building an intimate relationship to one another that will, hopefully, lead to them choosing complementary sexes, and then both mating with an unrelated ooloi once adulthood is reached.

is unprecedented. Even his ooloi parent Nikanj, who mates with Lilith and becomes the Oankali's de facto human expert, is unable to fully understand the need to treat humanity as a species equal to the Oankali, as a full partner in their self-described "trade." Though Nikanj does come to believe that performing genetic alterations on humans without their consent is wrong, eventually stating that the Oankali are treating humans "as though they aren't people, as though they aren't intelligent" (Butler 79), even this rather basic sentiment is a radical concept for the Oankali. Having only recently reawakened a long-dormant ability for speech, the better to trade with humans, the Oankali remain more familiar with communication that uses telepathic impressions and minute changes in body language—and therefore rarely require explicit verbal consent from each other. Yet despite its knowledge of humanity, Nikanj cannot step outside of its fundamentally Oankali nature enough to act in ways that truly set up humans as equal partners. It impregnates Lilith for the first time soon after the death of her lover Joseph, ostensibly because it could not keep Joseph's sperm alive indefinitely, but in truth because it sensed in Lilith an unspoken and unacknowledged desire for a child. That Nikanj knows Lilith will never forgive it for this betrayal—and indeed she never does—barely registers as an obstacle.

Lilith's impregnation is but one of many instances in which the Oankali betray the uneven distribution of power inherent in their trading. Though they fully believe that in enacting their hybridization project they are saving humanity from certain destruction—and, perhaps, because of this belief—the Oankali allow for little human agency. Their autocratic decision to take humanity's

welfare in hand, despite strong opposition, shows the dangers inherent to posthumanism: in a biotechnologically driven posthuman existence, there is no guarantee that humanity as it is currently conceptualized will be preserved, and little incentive to retain even those positive traits that we have come to believe define us. Despite the generally promising way Braidotti and Haraway paint the posthuman future, more conservative theorists like Francis Fukuyama offer cautious skepticism:

> What is it that we want to protect from any future advances in biotechnology? The answer is, we want to protect the full range of our complex, evolved natures against attempts at self-modification. We do not want to disrupt either the unity or the continuity of human nature, and thereby the human rights that are based on it. (Fukuyama 172)

In our world, as well as in Butler's alien-visited near future, the push toward posthumanism, toward the cyborgization of humanity, does not necessarily promise greater power and personal agency. Even those traits that make up the "full range of our complex, evolved natures" are threatened by such a fundamental reformulation of what it means to be a part of the human species. Hables Gray further describes the potential pitfalls:

> Cyborg politics are about power, as all politics are. Who has the power to develop and deploy cyborg technosciences? Is it the citizen or the government? Is it the patient or the doctor? Is it the scientist or the experimental subject? Power is both coercive and constructive.

> Coercive power can be greatly augmented by cyborg technologies to our peril, so we need specific protections for the cyborg citizen. Constructive power, for cyborgs, arises from having information and controlling our technologies. (Hables Gray 198)

Within the Oankali's hybridization project the human survivors, though treasured and beloved as trade partners, are very much beholden to this coercive power, a power the Oankali wield unapologetically on an interpersonal and biochemical level. Lilith is never given the option not to bond and mate with a subadult Nikanj. Told simply to take care of it during its metamorphosis, her physical proximity seals a connection that will last for the rest of their long lives; she will never be able to leave Nikanj and her other mates for more than a few days at a time. Enlisted into a five-strong polyamorous relationship that soothes as much as it stifles, Lilith can only make the best of a situation entirely outside of her control.[8] It is no accident that Lilith spends much of the first novel unable even to open doors into and out of the Oankali's house-like structures; physically as well as emotionally and biochemically, Lilith is trapped.

Despite the Oankali's exploitation, the constructs are still, in many ways, a successful experiment, embodying the ideals of both cyborg and posthuman theory. Haraway stresses that her conception of the cyborg is an "argument for

---

[8] For instance, once two human partners have engaged in ooloi-mediated sex, they are unable to come into physical contact with each other without experiencing an extreme sense of discomfort (Butler 220). This is understandably an unwelcome development for them, and Lilith, along with many other humans after her, counteracts this limitation by making hair touching, or the touching of dead cells, a commonplace affectionate gesture that persists throughout the novels.

pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (*Simians* 150). In the Oankali's careful mixture of genetic material to create what they hope will be the perfect blending of two species, the responsibility they feel is clear. However, through their willingness to surrender to their biological impulses, the urge to do and create what feels right, the Oankali and their construct children are also undeniably governed by pleasure. Every decision—from Nikanj lying to Lilith during its metamorphosis, keeping her with it long enough for neurochemical bonding to fully set in, to Jodahs' desperate search for human mates during its painful transformation into an ooloi—has as impetus, a biological urge that provides pleasure and a feeling of rightness. The Oankali's separation of physical pleasure from sexuality, a true subversion of human conventions, is evidenced in the most mundane of tasks. Even passing along a message involves some measure of exchanging pleasure, as is seen when Akin, wishing to contact Nikanj, signals the Lo entity, the proto-ship life form that in its infancy functions as village: "He penetrated the flesh of the [sleeping] platform—of the Lo entity—and asked it to send Nikanj. It liked doing such things. Nikanj always pleasured it when it passed along such a message" (Butler 424). A primary feature of the intimate, neurochemical bonds the Oankali and constructs have with each other and with symbiotic life forms is indicative of what Haraway calls the Oankali "postmodern geometries of vast webs and networks, in which the nodal points of individuals are still intensely important" but exist in an ever-present communion with the system as a whole (*Simians* 228).

Bearing striking resemblance to the cyborg's "complexly

webbed…universe of living machines, all of which are partners in their apparatus of bodily production" (228), the Oankali and their partially human offspring exist in a permanent state of synergy, a state that can have catastrophic consequences when it breaks down. During the birth of a child, the four non-birthing mates "protect [their pregnant partner] from interference and reassure her that they [are] with her—all part of her child that was part of her. All interconnected, all united—a network of family into which each child should fall" (Butler 332). It is partly because of the imminent arrival of his paired sibling that Akin is left alone, his family needing to stay close to home during the birth and unable to travel to rescue him. Akin's damaged relationship with his sibling is an uncomfortable, noticeably dysfunctional portion of his life, and a prominent example of the dangers of stepping outside the Oankali's established conventions. Through no fault of his own, Akin is barred from fully bonding with his paired sibling, and this loss is one he will feel so keenly that even proximity to the sibling is painful.

While Akin's marginalization is rooted in the body, Jodahs comes into conflict with the Oankali social order more explicitly, to equally devastating results. Jodahs' very existence, as the unanticipated first construct ooloi, disrupts the Oankali's carefully laid plans. They had, as a collective, determined that there were still too many unknown factors to allow for construct oolois to develop. An untrained, unpredictable ooloi, with its increased ability to work with genetic material, could cause untold, if inadvertent, damage to any life form it perceived through its sensory tentacles. Since the urge to feel, learn about, and collect genetic variety is particularly strong in an ooloi, one individual could cause entire

ecosystems to become corrupted and die just by moving through the world and not taking the proper care to leave the encountered life forms untouched. Construct children tend to spend more time with the parent of the sex they will eventually metamorphose into, and through increased contact with Nikanj, Jodahs begins a totally unanticipated transformation into the one sex forbidden to it. The Oankali decide that Jodahs must return to the ship for surveillance, but its urge to find human mates is so unavoidable that the entire family decides to leave Lo to escape (there is, additionally, the fear that Jodahs' uncontrollable genetic engineering abilities will damage the village of its birth). Jodahs' metamorphosis catches the Oankali unprepared, and despite the species' constant push toward fluidity and change the rigidity of the Oankali's conventions results in a painful self-exile that Jodahs' entire kin group must face.

Jodahs' existence, however, is in the end a success. It not only manages to control its abilities—its genetic manipulation of human cancer so powerful that constant shape shifting becomes its standard mode of existence—but in fact becomes infinitely better at harnessing the regenerative power of the disease that made humanity such a tantalizing trade partner in the first place. Able to stimulate rapid cell production in order to heal and regrow organs and limbs, Jodahs is the epitome of the "forward-looking experiments with new forms of subjectivity" that for Braidotti characterize the posthuman (*Posthuman* 45). Its very existence as a fluid, constantly shape-shifting entity is reminiscent of the cyborg's propensity for "ether, quintessence" (*Simians* 153). The ability to metamorphose, adapt, and change shape is, for Haraway, what sets the cyborg apart from "material and

opaque" humanity (153). By their very nature, cyborgs are "creatures of mixity or vectors of posthuman relationality" (*Posthuman* 73). Jodahs, with its ability to constantly alter even its physical form, pushes the posthuman vision of the cyborg farther than any of Lilith's other half-human, half-alien children.

Jodahs is now fully integrated into its environment. More than any previous Oankali, the construct ooloi reflects "the posthumanist vision of human embodied intelligence that draws its 'selfhood'…from the sum total of the interactions of its parts within an environment" (Nayar 39). Nayar's view of the posthuman ideal is, in place of a self-contained consciousness, one "that can only emerge within an environment and through distributed, beyond-the-brain networks" (39). In this view, the posthuman erodes the idea of "a sovereign, autonomous, bounded life form, postulating, in its stead, a congeries of genetic sources [and] multispecies origins" (47). Jodahs, constantly in flux and in perpetual communion with any life form to which it finds itself in proximity, functions in many ways as the apotheosis of the human-Oankali hybridization project, the never-static end point of a cyborg transformation. This version of the posthuman can, through Jodahs, "discuss alterity in its multiple forms, rejecting the human intolerance of Otherness or difference, showing alterity as constitutive of subjectivity and moving toward an entirely new conceptualization of the human" (54). This permanent yet ever-changing alterity signals the end of the age of the "bounded body," bringing about instead a subjectivity that is "fluid, networked and capable of morphing into, or connecting with, some other body/ies as never before" (55). It is a consciousness that depends upon these multispecies networks while never becoming the

dominating agent (79), a consciousness that forms an information feedback loop with its environment, with "information flow[ing] into and out of the [post]human body or system into the environment" (37). Lest this intimately connected, mutable and symbiotic existence seem like a surrender of human consciousness into a multi-species hive mind with no discernable subjectivity, Nayar is quick to reassure that in his posthuman symbiosis information does not "cross into the body," instead triggering "changes in the internal structure but changes that [are] determined by the internal structure itself" (37). In other words, the posthuman symbiotic relationship is not one in which the subject becomes a passive receptacle for information, losing all sense of subjectivity, but rather one in which the subject is in constant negotiation with its environment, constantly altering itself in response to stimuli but in control of those changes. As Roberto Esposito explains, "diversity, alterity, hybridization are not necessarily a limit and a danger from which we have to defend ourselves in the name of a self-centered purity of the individual and the species" (83). The posthuman can retain that sense of individuality even in an environment of increased connection and communion. For the posthuman, purity is no longer a feasible or desirable goal.

In Jodahs' physical transformations, there is not so much a rapprochement of Oankali ideals as there is a reconciliation of the human and the alien, an acknowledgement that Esposito's undesirable purity is no longer even a relevant benchmark. The posthumanism of Butler's cyborg species incorporates Oankali futurity while remaining rooted in the traditions of the human. To be posthuman "does not mean to be indifferent to the human, or to be de-humanized,"

writes Braidotti, who continues, "On the contrary, it rather implies a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one's territorial or environmental inter-connections" (*Posthuman* 190). It is not through hatred of the human that posthumanism becomes attractive, but rather because humanity as a category has, historically, had such a limited membership. Even in their post-apocalyptic setting, the resisters are quick to fall back on their old methods of dehumanizing one another. Worried for Joseph's safety once it becomes clear he has allied himself with Lilith, Nikanj relays that two resisters have been speaking against him in unfortunately predictable ways: "One has decided that he's something called a faggot, and the other dislikes the shape of his eyes" (Butler 159). Though the resisters' main issue might be with Lilith and Joseph's complicity with the aliens, the ways in which they express that disapproval remain couched in humanity's age-old hierarchical stratification.

Though Fukuyama might believe that the current world is "free, equal, prosperous, caring, compassionate" (218) and that posthumanism is a potential threat to that world, for Braidotti, whose "sex fell on the side of 'Otherness,' understood as pejorative difference, or as being worth-less-than" (*Posthuman* 81), the posthuman offers a belonging previously unavailable to her. "The becoming-posthuman speaks to my feminist self," she writes, precisely because full humanity has always been out of reach. Her allegiance to humanity is then "at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted" (81), leaving room for the posthuman to become the vision of the future that best allows for multiplicity of opinion, experience, and identity. In fact, according to Nayar, it is precisely because

of the "exclusionary principle behind all humanist thought" that "critical posthumanism's philosophical and political purchase emerges" (35). Posthumanism foregrounds "greater inclusivity, interconnections, co-evolution and mutualities" (35); it is not a renunciation of the human so much as an expansion of what we are allowed to consider as part of ourselves.

Women of colour, whom Haraway sees as historically "the bottom of a cascade of negative identities, left out of even the privileged oppressed authorial categories called 'women and blacks,' who claimed to make the important revolutions" (*Simians* 156), are then ideally placed to enact a posthuman future through embodiment of the cyborg. "The category 'woman' negated all non-white women; 'black' negated all non-black people, as well as black women," Haraway writes (156), and it is in these exclusions, this identity dissection that women of colour have historically—and contemporarily—faced, that their cyborg potential can be found. Haraway suggests "that 'women of colour' might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities" (174). The cyborg potential of women of colour then allowing them to "build an effective unity that does not replicate the imperializing, totalizing revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms which had not faced the consequences of the disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonization" (156). Balsamo also writes of the kinship between cyborgs and women, stating that "cyborgs become like woman in that cyborg images represent something 'unknown' and perhaps, 'unknowable' in our popular imagination" (152). She draws parallels between the constructedness of these identities, and how "both Woman and Cyborg

are simultaneously symbolically and biologically produced and reproduced through social interactions" (150). In this sense, the creation of "woman" and "woman of colour" as identities is necessarily an artificial undertaking, an othering of certain biologically varied humans that occurs only to reinscribe the male and the white as the true forms for human subjectivity. It is as purposeful and synthetic a process as the creation of the cyborg, and Lilith, who exists at the nexus of "woman" and "black" and is thus the Other even before her association with the Oankali, is perhaps a cyborg even before the Oankali modify her in any way.

That Lilith is the Oankali's choice of mediator points toward the Oankali acknowledging and working toward a posthuman future in which only Lilith can properly "parent" the group of humans destined for earth. She is someone who will guide and teach newly awakened humans as they make their first attempts at understanding, and accepting, their new role, and for her lover Joseph, the choice seems obvious. "Do you understand why they chose you," he asks Lilith, "someone who desperately doesn't want the responsibility, who doesn't want to lead, who is a woman?" (Butler 157). His interpretation of the Oankali's motives—that they would choose a woman wary of leadership as someone who best demonstrates their own impulse for non-hierarchy—is perhaps facile, but it begins to uncover the necessity of having a human like Lilith usher in an era of posthumanism. For Haraway, Butler and her science fiction novelist contemporaries are "theorists for cyborgs," acting as the "story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds" (*Simians* 173). Even Lilith's name, rooted as it is in Jewish folklore, speaks to Lilith's existence as a cyborg being with multiple identities. Hampton writes that

much like her folkloric counterpart, it is Lilith's role "to reject the rules of the patriarchy/mankind by choosing to survive outside the boundaries of purity and homogeneity" (73). The figure of Lilith—mother of demons, demon herself, first and unsatisfactory wife of Adam—is "put in the position of traitor to mankind despite her quest to save the existence of human identity" (73). Everything about Lilith, from her multiple marginalized identities to her name loaded with subtextual significance, is primed for a coming cyborg revolution.[9]

That Lilith, her burgeoning cyborg identity dovetailing with the Oankali's posthuman vision of earth's future, is the obvious choice to help the Oankali with their hybridization project does nothing to render her a willing participant. From her first waking moment, she is aware of her total lack of agency, her inability to control what happens to and inside her body. A new scar decorates her stomach, a remnant from an operation performed while she was asleep. The procedure may have cured her of a hereditary cancer, but it is nevertheless merely "one more thing they had done to her body without her consent and supposedly for her own good" (Butler 33). Lilith reflects bitterly that this type of treatment was, prior to the Oankali's presence, reserved for animals, referring to herself frequently, and with an increasingly volatile mixture of desperation and resignation, as laboratory experiment and breeding livestock. The fact that she now enjoys a status little better than the animals of pre-war earth is not lost on Lilith: "We did things to

---

[9] It is worth noting that for many critics it is Lilith, and not her brood of children, who comes to embody a cyborg identity. Éva Federmayer, in particular, describes *Dawn* as a bildungsroman charting Lilith's path from middle class human woman to cyborg (Federmayer 107).

them—inoculations, surgery, isolation—all for their own good. We wanted them healthy and protected—sometimes so we could eat them later" (33). That the Oankali are strictly vegetarian is immaterial to Lilith, it is a symbolic consumption that she fears—a calm, even pleasurable destruction of humanity occurring "so softly, without brutality, and with patience and gentleness so corrosive of any resolve on her part" (67). There is no violence, no outward cruelty in the Oankali's plans, rather a gentle, inexorable condescension that leaves no room for argument, negotiation, or escape. Lilith's initial thought of "patronizing bastard" when first encountering an ooloi (50), the Oankali sex most directly responsible for the trade, is a sentiment she never fully leaves behind.

In fact, in all aspects Lilith refuses the role of experiment, of object of wonder, of exotic other, and this resistance manifests in ways explicitly tied to her identity as a black woman. Growing tired of a young, subadult Nikanj showing her off to its friends, she moves "away from a pair of children who were reaching to investigate her hair," an act that implicitly reifies her identity as a black woman, with politically charged hair subjected to intense scrutiny and control, and often unwanted touching. It is unsurprising that in her resentment of her captivity, and resentment of her complicity in the situation that keeps her captive, Butler emphasizes Lilith's identity as an African American woman. For Haraway, the "deracinated captive fragments of humanity" held hostage in stasis in the body of the Oankali's ship "inescapably evoke the terrible Middle Passage of the Atlantic slave trade that brought Lilith's ancestors to a 'New World'" (*Simians* 228). Though Lilith is the "representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent

species whose centrality is now [being] challenged" by an ostensibly more advanced and evolved life form (*Posthuman* 65), she is nevertheless keenly aware that this new Oankali order, and its attendant radical changes to human genetics and ways of life, does not fully do away with the power dynamics inherent to the human contradiction. The Oankali interconnected kinship webs are "hardly innocent of power and violence," according to Haraway. "Hierarchy is not power's only shape—for aliens or humans" (*Simians* 228). In their desire for a full trade with the humans, the Oankali are proposing what Haraway terms a "joint colonial venture," and that they wish to enact this project in the Amazon valley is an irony not lost on Haraway (228). The Oankali are, in their attempt to have humans transcend their contradiction, replicating many of the patterns that gave rise to some of humanity's worst crimes. The aliens' continuous sexually coercive behaviour, in particular, merely a less forceful version of the sexual assault employed in humanity's colonial past, and in the resisters' present "caveman bullshit" (Butler 178).

It is imperative for any posthumanist project that wishes to successfully enact its promised equality and connectedness to approach these issues carefully, something that in Butler's text only happens once the constructs begin to mature as a new species. In his analysis of Butler's work, Nayar terms the trilogy "realist utopian fiction" in an acknowledgement that *Lilith's Brood* demonstrates the utopian "alternative forms of behaviour among humans [that change] the social order itself" (111). Nevertheless, there is "an awareness of and alertness to the possibilities of the moral enhancement of humans also being commercialized and exploited for reinforcing power relations in the social order" (111). In this case, the

exploitation occurs softly, without violence, and, from the resisters' point of view especially, almost entirely for the Oankali's benefit. The risks of posthumanism are real, with Fukuyama writing that though "many assume that the posthuman world will look pretty much like our own…only with better health care, longer lives, and perhaps more intelligence than today," such an undertaking is a step to be taken only "with eyes open" (218). Braidotti, for her part, agrees that a posthuman landscape like the one the Oankali embody and are seeking to bring to earth is not "necessarily more egalitarian or less racist and heterosexist" than the world it is replacing (*Posthuman* 97). That hierarchy is not part of how the Oankali organize themselves socially matters little to Lilith, who has no way of understanding how the Oankali telepathically arrive at consensus and who, as human, is barred from the decision-making process entirely. She, somewhat rightfully, understands when first living with an Oankali family unit that special respect is paid to the ooloi mate. "The ooloi seemed to be the head of the house," she observes, "everyone deferred to it" (Butler 48). The Oankali may not be hierarchical, but unequal power dynamics are nevertheless present, particularly in the unbalanced Oankali-human relationship.

Dynamics between Oankali and human are necessarily rooted in the body, in part because of the Oankali's reliance on, and manipulation of, neurochemical stimulation, and due to their overwhelming biological impulse toward exploring and collecting new life that manifests as physical need. It is therefore unsurprising that the Oankali's posthuman presence should disrupt as fundamental an aspect of human embodiment as sexuality. Given the Oankali's goal to create constructed cyborg children, a radical reformulation of sexual identity and

reproductive conventions is necessary—a "fruitful coupling" that will produce a long-awaited cyborg generation (*Simians* 150). Oankali-human relations, cyborg relations, promise "an intimacy and…a power" not previously "generated in the history of sexuality" (150). For Haraway, "sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in [the] high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility" (169). Braidotti agrees: "sexuality is a force, or constitutive element, that is capable of deterritorializing gender identity and institution," and ushering in a posthuman future (*Posthuman* 99). If a posthuman, cyborg vision is to be achieved through the Oankali's hybridization project, it will, fundamentally, have to have an impact on human ideas of sex and biological reproduction. While the alien species' five-way reproductive process would seem to be unfamiliar enough in itself to satisfy Haraway, the ways in which the surviving humans are discomfited by Oankali sexuality do not end there.

The Oankali's sexual experience involves the male and female lying on either side of the ooloi, being fed neurochemical impulses that produce physical pleasure and visions to go along with it. Once this act has taken place, however, the human partners can no longer bear to touch each other, and any sexual experience not mediated by the ooloi becomes impossible. The "exquisite pleasures of posthuman sexuality make human pleasures obsolete" (Jacobs 100), something neither Lilith nor any of the awoken humans are told prior to entering into these relationships. Lilith does not learn until it is too late that by experiencing a sexual encounter with Joseph through Nikanj—sharing with both of them a state of neurochemical bliss—that attempting to touch Joseph will henceforth cause her

deep uneasiness. Though she does, eventually, come to accept this sexuality, wholly mediated by her ooloi mate, as a "powerful threefold unity," it remains "one of the most alien features of Oankali life" (Butler 220), and one with which she never fully becomes comfortable. Oankali sexuality, a "polymorphously perverse transcendent moment" (Miller 344), is for Jim Miller a "utopian loss of ego" and blissful "merging with a larger self that includes the alien other" (344). Similar to the Oankali mode of communication that requires no small amount of merging of subjectivities, sexual pleasure in a posthuman landscape will involve a joyous loss of selfhood, gladly given up. When Lilith is lost in her own pleasures and her brain produces images to accompany the sensations created by Nikanj, she is incapable of determining "whether she [is] receiving Nikanj's approximation of Joseph, a true transmission of what Joseph [is] feeling, some combination of truth and approximation, or just a pleasant fiction" (Butler 162). Miller seems to believe that this ambiguity, this porosity between sexual partners, is something for which one should strive, and Lilith does eventually make peace with this reformulated sexual practice. But at the outset she experiences fear, not least because she feels on some level manipulated. Unable to determine what these interactions mean to the Oankali involved, Lilith cannot know how necessary the humans become to the Oankali and constructs who hope to mate with them. It is through Jodahs' experiences that this deep-seated biological urge to give pleasure is later revealed. To Lilith, whether she is understood to be a "tool," "pleasurable perversion," or "accepted member of the household" by the Oankali remains up for debate (Butler 179). In this new,

unsettling sexual practice, that by conventional human standards is not a little incestuous and miscegenetic, it takes a long time for Lilith to find her place.

Though Lilith expresses many reservations when confronted with the realities of Oankali reproduction, the violence of her reactions are dwarfed by those of the newly awakened human men. A significant portion of the male humans see the Oankali subversion of human sexuality as a way of seizing the control previously held by men, of supplanting men as the dominant partner and in the process feminizing all humans. In this way, Oankali pleasure and reproduction queers the human understanding of sex, something against which many humans, including those who will later become resisters once back on earth, struggle. For one man, who is so violently upset by his introduction to the Oankali that they decide to medicate him into calmness, even the drugging is a removal of bodily agency that is too much to bear: "the drug seemed to him to be not a less painful way of getting used to frightening nonhumans, but a way of turning him against himself, causing him to demean himself in alien perversions. His humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away" (192). With his inhibitions lowered, the man submits to sexual experiences with his ooloi who penetrates his skin with its sensory tentacles and gives pleasure. In the man's view, this is tantamount to occupying the feminized position of the penetrated partner. It is an act the man considers shameful, his feelings summarized by Joseph thusly: "He knows the ooloi aren't male. He knows all the sex that goes on is in his head. It doesn't matter. It doesn't fucking matter! Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can't let them get away with that" (203). It is the lack of control over his own body that the man

cannot stand, his resentment not so different from Lilith's bitterness.

It takes years and the arrival of Akin, a male construct, to adequately understand the particular heterosexist reaction to Oankali sex that human males experience. "Most prewar men don't like you," Lilith tells Nikanj. "They feel you're displacing them and forcing them to do something perverted. From their point of view, they're right" (259). Earlier, Lilith is afraid when Joseph has trouble accepting Nikanj as an ooloi and not male. For her, this is indicative of an inability to accept Nikanj—to whom she is already permanently mated—as the pleasure-giving partner (170). That Lilith is later called the Oankali's whore (241) by resister humans points to a conflation of her complicity with the Oankali's hybridization project with sexual degradation at the hands of the Oankali. And as Lilith points out, that assumption is not necessarily incorrect. Despite its posthuman potential, the perversity of Oankali-human relations—often undertaken in public spaces—is undeniable, and the shamefulness of it is certainly something that Lilith has internalized. When Nikanj asks her whether it is "an unclean thing that [the Oankali] want," her response of "Yes!" is forceful, though in light of Lilith's eventual fate perhaps a bit of an overcompensation (246). But in a posthuman future, the need to "experiment…in order to find out what posthuman bodies can do" is crucial (*Posthuman* 99). According to Braidotti, because the "gender system captures the complexity of human sexuality in a binary machine that privileges heterosexual family formations and literally steals all other possible bodies from us," it becomes impossible to know what exactly "sexed bodies can do" (99). Put differently, so much of the social and sexual selves of humans is lost when only

certain, narrowly-defined relationships are privileged. It is in rediscovering the notion of sexual complexity that "sexuality in its human and posthuman forms" can be explored (99). In subverting the traditional male-female sexual relationship, the Oankali presence certainly promises a broadening of humans' understanding of what their "sexed" bodies can do.

Nikanj seems convinced that this redefinition will be beneficial to the future generations of constructs, telling Lilith that "trade means change. Bodies change. Ways of living must change. Did you think that your children would only look different?" (Butler 260). The familial structures it is referring to however, are somewhat less than subversive. Nikanj, and the other ooloi who have come to a consensus on how the constructs are to be built—or programmed, to use cyborg parlance—believe a complete family to be "a female, an ooloi, and children. Males will come and go as they wish and as they find welcome" (260). This configuration, which assumes a sedentary nurturing role for females, and a nomadic, emotionally distant one for males, replicates established conventions acted out in many pre-Oankali societies. Apart from the mediating presence of the ooloi, not much appears truly subversive. Sexual pleasure remains, for the most part, in service to reproduction, and nowhere in the three novels are these sexual practices that remain firmly rooted in male-female pairings challenged by the presence of queer characters. This absence stands out as an anomaly—particularly given the role queerness often plays in Butler's other texts—and further implies, perhaps, that the Oankali may not be as subversive as they believe themselves to be. For Haraway, the strength of cyborg sex is that it provides "imaginative alternatives to

heterosexist reproductive processes that rely heavily on organic reproduction" (*Simians* 150). Sex for cyborgs, a "disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling" (152), is then divorced from a type of sex performed purely for reproductive reasons, while restoring "some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates" (150). In Nikanj's conceptualization of construct sexual and familial configurations, the cyborg subversion is notably missing. As Haraway notes, within these novels "heterosexuality remains unquestioned, if more complexly mediated" (229). Pleasure, though at times given non-sexually, remains largely a part of the reproductive process, perhaps an offshoot of the Oankali biological urge to create new life. According to Haraway, the "different social subjects, the different genders that could emerge from another embodiment of resistance to compulsory heterosexual reproductive politics, do not inhabit this *Dawn*" (229). All the complexity imagined by Braidotti's posthuman future, all the alternative configurations and experiments made possible in a posthuman utopia populated by intimately interconnected cyborgs, is sadly lacking. With the sexed roles of a nurturing female and nomadic male already laid out for the next generation, this new, constructed, half-alien posthuman will be, it seems, just as constrained as its hierarchical, pre-Oankali ancestors.

The main difficulties in achieving a posthuman utopia, then, are the continued relationship between construct and human, and the disappointingly conventional conceptualization of Oankali-human sexual relations. Unable to divorce themselves completely from their human heritage, the constructs feel keenly the injustices done to the human survivors, injustices couched in the Oankali's

exploitation. It is the cyborg's nature to remain responsible toward its origins, and for the constructs this means never forgetting their humanity, their need for self-determination free from the Oankali. Though the constructs have a personal relationship with the posthuman potential of the Oankali's hybridization project, they are all the more aware of its insufficiency because of their desire to reconcile both their human and alien natures. Though within the scope of the novels, the constructs seem happy to maintain post-hybridization conventional family structures, in which the female and ooloi stay a mated pair and the male travels according to his wishes, this limited view of the possibilities promised by the posthuman betrays the many experimental alternatives possible in posthuman and cyborg futures. For Jacobs, Butler's trilogy "conveys both the beauty and the horror of a future in which the self-determining self has dissolved and the human body as we know it will have changed or disappeared" (96). Given the many ways in which the Oankali have promised utopia, their failure to truly subvert established conventions is all the more disappointing. This ambivalent posthuman fantasy, recalling Nayar's "realist utopian fiction," works more as metaphor than manifesto. For Jacobs, Butler's "extreme depictions of the humanist self, violently defending its integrity against the threatening Other, and of the posthuman self, struggling to maintain any coherence in the absence of constituting Others" can both be read as cautionary accounts of "the excesses of humanist and posthumanist thought" (109). Setting up and then blurring the "false dilemma between integral and dispersed subjectivities" (109)—identities beholden to either humanist notions of individuality or a posthuman decentralized subjecthood—provides no easy answers. Butler

refuses to confirm one way or another whether the Oankali's plans are worth enacting. Nevertheless, hybridization will continue, the constructs will proliferate and thrive, and, with their fully-grown village/spaceship organisms will leave for the stars again, leaving earth a husk, in as bad shape as humans left it hundreds of years before. All of this will come to pass, but to call it utopia would be a grievous mistake.

And yet, despite this inevitability, Lilith, the humans, and their construct children continue to resist. The next chapter will explore these resistance strategies, the better to understand why, in the face of the Oankali's calm, patient, and inexorable plans for humanity, resistance is attempted at all. Between Lilith's ever-present sense of betrayal, Akin's loyalty to the resister humans, and Jodahs' very existence threatened by the Oankali's fear that it will become uncontrollable, each of the protagonists must struggle against the established Oankali order to retain both agency and identity. The ways in which this struggle is enacted bear striking resemblance to resistance strategies in the face of patriarchal and racial oppression, drawing an uncomfortable parallel between the Oankali and the very human systems of hierarchy they, with their plans for posthuman utopia, hoped to supplant.

Chapter Three: "Let His Flesh Be Part of the New Beginning"

Embodiment, Resistance, and Utopia

"Human means written in flesh, the word is pain and pain and pain again—"

—Leonora Carrington, "My Mother Is a Cow"

The two previous chapters, though different in scope, both deal with the changes that the Oankali's alien invasion has wrought with regards to the human body. Whether making explicit the symbiogenetic nature of human corporeality and humanity's place in interconnected ecofeminist webs of being, or bringing about Pramod K. Nayar's "posthumanist visions of assemblage and deterritorialized states of existence" through their half-human construct children (71), the Oankali radically create what Eric White calls the decentering of human experience (403). Through their arrival at what is ostensibly the tail end of human civilization, the Oankali transform the "hierarchical power structures and binary oppositions" that for so long characterized human social organization into "a play of differences along a number of axes" (403). The human survivors must contend with changes to their bodies—notably, the scar that Lilith has no memory of being given and, later, her genetically enhanced strength and memory—their families, their unknowable, half-alien children, and the very planet on which they live. When Lilith is introduced to the Oankali's plans for Earth, she is told in no uncertain terms to be wary of everything she previously thought to be true. She will need to be "especially careful" with the plant life of this new world (Butler 33). Between the mutations of familiar species

and the completely new plants the Oankali have brought with them, human knowledge is no longer sufficient to ensure survival. Previously edible plants have become lethal; animals that once were harmless now pose much more of a threat. Though the Oankali might insist that "your Earth is still your Earth" (34) only with a few minor, necessary modifications, the fact remains that an environment to which humans previously laid claim can now only be accessed through alien intervention and otherworldly knowledge.

The Oankali presence in our world is such that "things, material or psychical, can no longer be seen in terms of rigid boundaries, clear demarcations" (*Volatile Bodies* 167). This alien invasion, still aggressive despite its subtlety, has made explicit the fact that, as philosopher Elizabeth Grosz writes, "subject and objects are [a] series of flows, energies, movements" (167). Earth is now much more overtly a world of interconnections ripe with posthuman and ecofeminist potential, where "fragments capable of being linked together or severed in potentially infinite ways other than those which congeal them into identities" exist (167). Hoda M. Zaki points to Oankali communication and the ways in which the species arrives at consensus—"totally coalescing with one another" before resuming "their separate individualities" (243)—as exemplary of the mutability inherent to Oankali existence. It is a sensation Akin describes once he finds himself on the Oankali's ship for the first time, communing with others and realizing that "no matter how closely he was joined to the two ooloi, he was aware of himself. He was equally aware of them and their bodies and their sensations. But, somehow, they were still themselves, and he was still himself" (Butler 455). Aware of both his own

corporeal existence and that of others (including, in a cross-species moment of kinship, that of the ship), Akin's consciousness feels "as though he were a floating, disembodied mind…as though he looked from some impossible angle and saw everything, including his own body" (455). In this intimate, interconnected mixing of individuals, Akin operates both as unique organism, and as one node in a complex machine or ecosystem.

Akin's experience offers a glimpse into the state of flux in which the Oankali exist, at once individuals and part of a larger, species-wide organism. As a group, the Oankali describe themselves as "mature asexual animals" dividing into three, with two groups—one staying on earth and the other leaving in a new living space ship—merging with humans to form a new type of Oankali, and another remaining genetically separate on the ship in which they arrived (35). This dual existence, an example of Nayar's posthuman "cultures of morphing" (71), makes clear that the surviving portion of humanity must "lose its sense of exclusivity and acquire a sense of merger and mutuality" if it is to survive the new Oankali world order (132). This new posthuman biology entails, according to Nayar, "not only the acquisition of a new/renewed body…but also an entire process of socialization in which the individual 'body' learns its new uses and responsibilities" (132). Reminiscent of both Lynn Margulis's conception of a human evolution that privileges symbiogenetic merging with other species and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman, divorced from its origins but still responsible toward them, Nayar's "posthuman biology" makes clear that human identity and evolution were never static. The delusion that they were is, in the face of the Oankali and their half-

human children, no longer possible.

Despite the many issues inherent to the Oankali's coercive hybridization project, the progression of the novels—moving as they do from the point of view of Lilith the reluctant collaborator to her child Jodahs, the successful, ever-changing product of interspecies breeding—implies that the "erosion of 'Man' as a putatively ontological category…need not exclusively elicit horror and anguish" (White 394). After the Oankali's interference it is impossible to deny the human as a "historically contingent, transitional phenomenon rather than the apex of biological possibility" (399). For White the trilogy "registers the anguish and horror occasioned by the recognition of human subjection to evolutionary process" before attempting to work through this trauma "in order to affirm becoming" (399). Acknowledging that "no species can exempt itself from the reality of ceaseless flux" (401), *Lilith's Brood* can, in White's estimation, be said to "intervene in and reverse a tradition of paranoiac responses to evolution in which Nature in effect persecutes Culture" (402). Gregory Jerome Hampton agrees, writing that Butler's fiction can be interpreted as an "ambiguous and elaborate configuration and reconfiguration of the body" (xi). For both White and Hampton these bodies are, with or without the Oankali's interference, in permanent, immanent states of flux—an uncomfortable truth that must be acknowledged, but can be accepted in time.

Lest the reader come away from the trilogy believing the body to be wholly constituted by nature and its constant evolutionary momentum—the Oankali then functioning as mere personification for unstoppable evolution—Butler never falls victim to the "temptation to identify the body as something purely physical or

material" (Hampton xxi). Social and cultural discourses also play an undeniable role in the construction of the body, in Butler's fiction and outside of it. Grosz characterizes the body as a "kind of *hinge* or threshold…placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority" (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 33). It is, in Grosz's opinion, the inscription of the body's outer surface that produces its interiority—that is, its identity or sense of self (33). This play between social construction and identity is something feminist scholar Susan Bordo further explores in her seminal text *Unbearable Weight*, where she writes that though "in some areas biology may play a very great role in our destinies," always informing our lives to varying degrees, "its effect is never 'pure,' never untouched by history" (Bordo 36). We are, according to Bordo, "creatures swaddled by culture" (36), an assertion that calls into question "the assumption that we ever know or encounter the body—not only the bodies of others but our own bodies—directly or simply" (35). Rather, the body as we experience and conceptualize it is "always *mediated* by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature" (35). Through culture, history, and politics, the body is always at least in part socially constructed.

While the body may, in Butler's fiction, be "indispensable in understanding how identity is formed and marshaled" (Hampton xi), it is nevertheless the sum of both its biological and social parts, extending "far beyond flesh and bone" and becoming Hampton's "boundless edifice for the articulation of difference" (xii). If identity is constituted, as Grosz states, through what society inscribes onto the body's surface, then gender, race, sexuality, and other

"ambiguous referents" assigned "arbitrary symbols" are of the utmost importance (Hampton xi). These symbols bring order to the bodies that populate society's existence (xi), and though "as singular pronouns, race, sex, and gender are mystical processes of categorizing," as a composite structure they "help form the building blocks of the body's identity in society" (xi). To emphasize the corporeality of race, gender, and sexuality, those puzzle pieces of identity, gender theorist Judith Butler writes that the human is understood "differentially depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognizability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, [and] the categorical understanding of that ethnicity" (*Undoing Gender* 2). Put differently, it is the ways in which identities are located and *externally interpreted* on the body that determine how that body will be treated by society.

Sexism, racism, and homophobia, what White calls "multifarious forms of scapegoating," are exerted upon the body based on that same body's external form, all involving the "exclusion and subordination of an 'outside' in relation to a privileged 'inside'" (403). This notion, too, Judith Butler discusses, writing that the "very terms that confer 'humanness' on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status" (*Undoing Gender* 2). This separation between those on the "inside" and on the "outside" produces a "differential between the human and the less-than-human," in which the "inhuman, the beyond the human, the less than human" secures the human "in its own ostensible reality" (30). For those not permitted into the category of the human, most notably due to the social positioning of their gender, race, or

sexuality, there is a lack of recognition. For Judith Butler, this disavowal leads to "yet another order of unlivable life" (2), a subjecthood "constituted through the force of exclusion" (*Bodies That Matter* xiii). The "exclusionary matrix" that relegates those marginalized by their gender, race, or sexuality to a space outside proper human subjecthood, requires, at the same time as the creation of subjecthood, the "simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings…who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject" (xiii). In other words, abjected outsiders will always be a part of that same socially constructed subjecthood, if only as the locus against which the subjecthood is contrasted.

In an Oankali context, the creation of constructs makes of the surviving humans abjected, marginalized beings, imperfect by virtue of a genetic flaw that to the Oankali spells certain death. The irony of the Oankali's rescue of humanity is that humans become the very beings excluded from the category of "human." As seen in the previous two chapters, despite the utopian potential of the Oankali's hybridization project, the constant barring of human input regarding the fate of the planet or species effectively negates the promise of the aliens' arrival. The novels' tension between the genetic predeterminism espoused by the Oankali and the humans' insistence that they be allowed a chance to transcend their own natures is such that Jim Miller describes the trilogy as a "dialogue between opposing views" (342). The Oankali may believe—and have tangible reasons for the belief—that humanity's injustices and near-extinction stem from genetic factors, the contradiction to which they so often refer. But, as Miller notes, given that "Lilith's children, Akin and Jodahs, go on to fight for and win freedom for the resister-

humans, it would seem that, if anything, the trilogy favours the view that social construction is just as important as biology" (342). In her analysis of the novels, Jessie Stickgold-Sarah agrees, writing that the trilogy "offers a way out of the closed system" of biological essentialism (415). Far from foreclosing possibilities of freedom, the "fantastic elements of Butler's story provide a utopian break from the dystopian genetic vocabulary we take for granted" (415). Through Lilith's reticence, and her children's political work, the Oankali's deterministic party line is challenged at every step.

This tension is an important development in Butler's narrative, making clear that the constructs, with their half-alien bodies but patently human outlooks, hold the key to the social and cultural transformation necessary for humanity's survival. When an infant Akin is sold to Phoenix, the resister village in which Lilith's erstwhile friend Tate lives, he is quickly joined by two other stolen construct children. Though they are still young and ostensibly sexless, the two children resemble human girls, and are purchased in the hope that they "might eventually be fertile together" with Akin (Butler 373). Without an ooloi mate this is necessarily impossible, but Akin has no doubt that some of the resisters "really believe that they could soon breed new, Human-trained, Human-looking children" (373). That all three children are clearly non-human, with their precocious intellect and sensory tentacles, matters less in this situation than the social conditioning they would receive in a human-only village. In the absence of reproductive options unmediated by the Oankali, the resisters are willing to settle for half-Oankali children brought up in human society, with all the attendant values, culture, and

history. If nature is crucial to the conceptualization, and differentiation, of bodies—human, Oankali, and construct bodies alike—culture is demonstrably just as important.

For Bordo, feminism as a political and academic movement imagines the "human body as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control" (21). If cultural control and oppression are enacted upon the body, then so too does the body become a site of struggle and resistance. Bordo continues, writing that without "imaginations (or embodiments) of alterity, from what vantage point can we seek transformation of culture?" (41). It is thus through the body, through embodying alternative modes of being, that change can be imagined and enacted, and what "has been silenced, repressed, disdained" can be reclaimed (41). Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Jodahs, protagonist of Butler's final novel in the *Lilith's Brood* trilogy and a new, shape-shifting life form. Developing into the third Oankali sex far before the aliens intended to construct ooloi, Jodahs represents a more powerful, riskier next step in the hybridization process. Doubly marginalized by virtue of its contradiction-based human heritage and heightened genetic engineering powers, Jodahs must prove that its new, unanticipated body—its "alternative mode of being"—is valid. Running away from the Oankali who would wish to bring it back to the ship to better control it, Jodahs eventually finds an unknown resister village and is able to bring them into the Oankali fold using its own particular gifts.

Jodahs' embodied experience places it at odds with the established Oankali order, manifesting what Stacy Alaimo describes as the disruptive "bodily

transgressions" in Butler's fiction that occupy corporeality "to recreate it as a space of liminality and resistance" ("Skin Dreaming" 123). For Alaimo, it is "precisely because ideologies of the body have been complicit in the degradation of people of color [and] women" that the body must act as a "crucial site for contestations and transformation" (136). Therefore, marginalized bodies in particular offer this political power, turning "the body from a site of abjection into a means of connection" (137). Reminiscent of Judith Butler's claims, Alaimo discusses at length the historical dichotomies that relegate women and people of colour to the margins and associated them "with abject bodily resources" (125). Jodahs' body, with its liminal, ever-changing power, elicits real fear among the Oankali. The ooloi's very existence threatens an abjected dissolution of the boundaries between the individual and its environment, putting at risk the well-being of any other life Jodahs comes in contact with, and the Oankali's carefully laid plans in the process. But through Jodahs' insistence on staying on earth and finding human mates, it successfully transforms itself, its body, from site of abjection to means for connection, facilitating liberation for both itself, its mates, and their entire village. Jodahs and its ooloi sibling Aaor, as brand new and unanticipated life forms, in many ways represent the ultimate marginalized body. Enemy of the remaining resisters by virtue of their Oankali heritage, feared and controlled by an Oankali population that does not yet know what to make of them, and in a constant state of transformation unrecognizable to their fellow constructs or either of their parent species, Jodahs and Aaor are the most socially isolated characters in any of the novels.

When discussing real-world oppressions and their science fictional counterparts in Butler's text, it is important to note the unique authorial position Butler herself occupies. Zaki writes of Butler as a "utopia-generating" science fiction writer who explicitly brings "to her fiction the experiences of being a black woman" (239). Jeffrey A. Tucker concurs, discussing "racial difference as a theoretical phenomenon" that informs the "construction of the subject position from which Butler writes, and enables an assertion and celebration of intra- and extra-textual cultural diversity that the novel and its author endorse" (171). The strength of Butler's writing lies in her ability to create narratives specific in their portrayal of marginalization, while also considering the "perspective of a universal marginalized body" (Hampton 69). That this analysis employs a variety of critical perspectives—from W. E. B. Du Bois's writings on race to Susan Bordo's materialist feminism—is not meant as a conflation of disparate oppressions, or a minimization of the real-world harm they cause. Rather, the use of queer, race, and gender theory functions as an acknowledgment of the many identities coexisting in Butler herself, and an attempt to, as Judith Butler states, "think contemporary power in its complexity and interarticulations" (*Bodies That Matter* xxvi). She writes:

> It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations. The assertion of their abstract or structural equivalence not only misses the specific histories of their construction and elaboration, but also delays the important work of thinking through the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose

of their own articulation. (*Bodies That Matter* xxvi)

Rather than act in opposition or as parallels of each other, these critical lenses should, and indeed must, operate together to effectively show the dynamics of power and oppression, both in Butler's text and out. In *Lilith's Brood* particularly, the arrival of an alien species to a war-torn earth radically reformulates existing forms of hierarchy and power, without replacing them entirely. Lilith might well think that the Oankali's arrival has created "a true xenophobia" (Butler 23), but the existence of racially-segregated resister villages back on earth (434), not to mention the prevalence of sexual assault perpetrated by resister men (497), belies the notion that hatred and fear of the Oankali have united humanity and erased the many ways in which humans categorize and harm one another. As Tucker notes, "racism does not vanish upon the arrival of aliens; the human propensity for hierarchical thinking sustains it and maps it onto another group, at a higher, species-oriented, taxonomic level" (170-171). Racism, as but one of myriad other forms of hierarchical thinking, is altered but continues to exist.

The Oankali's very presence on earth, bringing as it does their hopes for interspecies breeding, implies a colonial venture enacted by "imperialistic or piratical adventurers who roam the galaxy preying upon and ultimately abolishing the difference they crave" (White 405). The previous chapter discusses Haraway's assertion that the Oankali's ship, storing as it does the many sleeping bodies of human survivors, bears the hallmarks of a Middle Passage vessel, and in this claim the Oankali's altruism—as well as their belief that they are immune to hierarchical thinking—is thrown into sharp question. The notion of bondage and control is one

that, for Hampton, has been embedded in science fiction literature from the genre's inception. Discussing Karel Čapek's 1921 play *Rossum's Universal Robots*, in which humanoid mechanical beings are produced explicitly to serve humanity, Hampton believes science fiction to be "forever attached to the notion of servitude" (xv), almost inviting "the corollary placement of the African American body at the center of any discourse about robots or the extraterrestrial in general" (xv). Tucker agrees, viewing the Oankali hybridization program as a form of "coerced miscegenation, comparable to the rape of black slave women by white owners and overseers" (172). Though Lilith makes the best of an existing, unchangeable situation, she has not in fact consented to this life. The acceptance of the Oankali hybridization project, a reality the survivors cannot escape and about which they can do nothing, is hardly a ringing endorsement.

By leaving the human survivors no choice except to join in their interbreeding or live childless lives in resister villages, the Oankali enact what many, including Michele Osherow, view as a replication of the transatlantic slave trade. Particularly in terms of reproductive freedom and the appropriation of children, Osherow writes of the "dire likeness shared by Lilith and the female black slave," both of whom are vulnerable to sexual assault (79). That Lilith experiences biochemical manipulation rather than physical force changes little; she remains "violated so thoroughly that human sex is no longer a possibility for her" (79). Here the dehumanization of slavery and sexual assault—a reformulation of the "objectification" and "fragmentation" of women's bodies posited by Carol J. Adams and discussed in chapter one—is linked explicitly to Lilith's literal dehumanization.

Akin's assertion that both animals and people could be controlled "by controlling their reproduction—controlling it absolutely" solidifies the ecofeminist connection between the exploitation of women and that of animals (Butler 447).

Though not a perfect parallel to the institutionalized rape of slavery, Lilith is fundamentally altered by, and beholden to, the Oankali. The resisters' constant insinuations that Lilith is not human (or, that if she once was her alliance with the aliens has made her inhuman) paint her involvement with the Oankali—whether collaborative, coerced, or both—as an act that removes her from the realm of the human. Every time Lilith is called the Oankali's "animal" (227) or "whore" (241), the rhetoric of slavery is reified. From the resisters' point of view, any less than a full disavowal of the Oankali's plans involves an inexcusable loss of agency, and therefore subjecthood. But for Lilith, chosen by the Oankali to help in their efforts and impregnated with a construct child without her consent, there is no such option. Osherow believes that Lilith's "negotiation for stability and survival in a foreign world" makes her "representative of the black matriarch" (79). Pragmatic to her core, Lilith's goal becomes "survival by any means necessary, but mainly by accepting difference and acknowledging the inevitability and omnipotence of change" (Hampton xix). Offered death by tentacle sting by a sympathetic Oankali at the beginning of the novels, her hand hovers, "wanting to fall amid [his] tough, flexible, lethal organs" but incapable of completing so drastic an action (Butler 44). She questions her own motives, asking, "Why didn't I do it? Why can't I do it?" (44), but such an extreme is not Lilith's survival strategy of choice. She might at times become so angry that "it's as though there's something in her trying to get

out. Something terrible" (273-274), but she stays and stays alive, choosing instead to help the resisters in any way she can, "just as her African American ancestors participated in the sabotage and destruction of their oppressors" where and when they could (Osherow 79). She attempts to train the newly awoken humans well enough that they will be able to survive on their own back on earth, and once planet-bound herself, maintains a much larger garden than her own needs dictate, wanting the resisters to take what they need in their ongoing struggle (Butler 561).

The Oankali's form of control, what Lisa Dowdall terms their "biocolonialism" (508), may not be enacted through force, but still entails "extremely restrictive conditions" under which Butler's characters must manoeuver in order to "assert their own form of resistance" (510). Dowdall, who believes Butler to be capable of at once illuminating the history of the control of black bodies and acknowledging the "transformative possibilities" of alien encounters, sees Lilith's ambivalent relationship with the Oankali as a "form of oppositional consciousness that recalls the severely limited options of slaves and other colonial subjects." Within this biocolonial context, "survival becomes a primary form of resistance," and Lilith's "learn and run" strategy a familiar technique "within the history of the oppressed" (510). Her focus on humanity surviving, adapting, and "maintaining an identity beyond what is imposed by the colonizer," reveals how "assemblages of race, gender, and empire demand creative ways to assert personhood and mount resistance" (510). If Lilith is unable to live without the Oankali, and unwilling to die to be free of them, her next best alternatives will be

teaching and providing for others, and allowing herself occasional moments of anger and solitude.

However, Lilith's strategic complicity, a pragmatic ambivalence when faced with the inevitability of the Oankali hybridization project, does nothing to ingratiate her to the other resisters. Blamed for the Oankali's arrival to the point where her very name becomes hated (Butler 297), Lilith's role as a colonized subject is similar to that of La Malinche, the much reviled interpreter, advisor, and mistress to Hernán Cortés. A Nahua woman born near the turn of the sixteenth century, La Malinche was instrumental in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, eventually becoming, according to Cordelia Candelaria, a "cultural symbol" (1), a conflicting archetypal figure of victimhood, of treachery, and of a new Mexican Mestizo people. La Malinche, having collaborated with Spanish forces and born Cortés a son, both literally and symbolically "spawned a new race" in much the same way as Lilith (3). Both Lilith and La Malinche are placed in impossible predicaments—the Oankali's species mixing for Lilith, and an unstable local political situation, as well as European martial and technological development, for La Malinche (5). The actions of both women aim to spare as many lives as possible (4), while maneuvering around the "severely limited options" available to colonized subjects, as discussed by Dowdall. In more recent reclamations of La Malinche—including attempts to refigure her as the "prototypical Chicana feminist" (Candelaria 6)—the question of her loyalties is given thorough consideration. No longer assumed a traitor to her people, La Malinche is neither praised nor condemned wholesale, instead allowed to occupy a nuanced and conflicting place in

history (5-6). It is this form of careful analysis that Lilith, in her attempts to spare human life and ensure her species' continued survival, merits. Whether unwilling or complicit, her role in the Oankali's colonial venture is borne out of necessity, and her survival—indeed, the survival of the entire human race—is proof enough of her success.

Despite the many parallels to be drawn between the transatlantic slave trade and colonization of the Americas, and the Oankali's plans for species merger, the Oankali need not be viewed solely as slave owners or conquistadores for their exploitation to become apparent. Dowdall, for one, continues her analysis by making clear the ways in which more contemporary methods for control are present in the Oankali's treatment of humanity, particularly "the complex history and politics of reproduction in relation to the African-American body" (520). Writing that *Xenogenesis* "speaks not only to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also to the persistently hierarchized systems of biocapital that continue to expand in the twenty-first century," Dowdall makes clear that the ways in which flesh is transmuted into capital have evolved rather than disappeared (506). The trilogy then "extrapolates on the entanglement of race, biotechnology, and capital in the United States," with a more contemporary bioeconomy perpetuating the "scientific racism experienced under slavery and colonialism by African and African-American women" (506). Though Dowdall's interest lies predominantly with the figure of the "black woman as breeder" in Butler's novels (507), she nevertheless expands her definition of exploitation enough to mention Henrietta Lacks. An African American woman who in 1951 provided the first immortalized cell line, Lacks's constantly

self-replicating genetic material is used extensively in medical research to this day, despite Lacks never giving permission for its continued use or receiving recompense. By invoking Lacks as the archetypal unwitting, unwilling donor, Dowdall makes clear that, in matters of genetic experimentation, the Oankali's relationship to humans "as both trading partner and resource" often skews in the latter's direction (520). Lacks, explicitly due to her identity as an African American woman, demonstrates this phenomenon as rooted in the legacy of slavery and the continued exploitation of the "labor of black and brown bodies" in our "distinctly racialized contemporary bioeconomy" (507). Lacks' treatment is but one example in a long history of unethical medical practice wielded against racialized bodies in the Americas. It is a history that begins in conquest and slavery, and extends through to the unanaesthesized gynaecological experimentation of J. Marion Sims and the twentieth century Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment—two of many instances in which medical and scientific "progress," and the associated wealth, were built on the backs of racialized bodies. In *Xenogenesis*, the multiple references Lilith makes to scientific experimentation on animals when referring to the Oankali's treatment of humanity seem pointed, explicitly linking her both to non-human life forms unable to give consent, and to those, like Lacks and many others, who have historically been barred from the category of human and therefore been mined as resources.

This constant dehumanization of the survivors on earth, which treats humanity as the raw material for the next stage of Oankali evolution, pits any form of human self-conceptualization against the Oankali belief in the contradiction. The conflict engendered between these two disparate points of view bears resemblance

to W. E. B. Du Bois's writing on the African American double consciousness. Asserting in his essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" that "being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else" (8), Du Bois articulates the difficulties of self-identification when one is relegated to the sociopolitical margins. Recounting a childhood experience with racism, Du Bois recalls feeling similar to his white peers in "heart and life and longing but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (8). Through that veil, Du Bois is yielded "no true self-consciousness," allowed only to "see himself through the revelation of the other world… always looking at [him]self through the eyes of others, of measuring [his] soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (9). He continues:

> One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. (Du Bois 9)

In Lilith and the other humans, this double consciousness comes into play once they are measured against Oankali standards—and found wanting. By virtue of her intersecting and marginalized pre-Oankali identities, Lilith's struggle is the conflict between knowing the horrors of which humanity is capable, while also believing in the human capacity for good. She tells the first group of awakened humans "there'll

be no back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit! …We stay human. We treat each other like people, and we get through this like people" (Butler 178). Her faith in humanity might be tested—her near rape at the hands of multiple men, the death of Joseph, and the near-death of Tino stand out as particularly salient examples—but she nevertheless retains the conviction that humanity's fate is not nearly so predetermined as the Oankali believe.

This conflict manifests as Lilith's decision to stay with the Oankali despite bouts of bitterness that occasionally frighten even her own children (274). She complies with, and even finds fulfillment in, the reproductive role the Oankali have assigned her, while still retaining a very human appreciation for writing and solitude, activities for which the Oankali have no use. Lilith's journey is one toward reconciliation of her past and present selves, the self she remembers from before the Oankali, and the self reflected back to her from the aliens' point of view. Though Lilith does find some measure of peace by the end of the trilogy, Du Bois makes clear that the waste of this "double aim," this "seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals" wreaks "sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people" (10). Du Bois laments that his nascent people, so recently emancipated, have not been given a chance to grow into themselves, kept so low that their youth wastes "itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?" (8-9). The futility of resister anger in the face of the unyielding Oankali hybridization project seems similarly discouraging. Any attempts at rebuilding human civilization, at reclaiming their own house, seem pointless, a hopeless endeavour that results in bitterness, a sense of futility, and

waves of suicide (Butler 434). The question then becomes whether it is possible to recreate oneself when faced with an utterly unsympathetic majority rule; is it possible for the humans to reclaim or rebuild identity when up against an alien species that fundamentally misunderstands their need for self-determination, and finds it difficult to think of them as anything but children? (566).

Gender theory offers another lens through which to view the marginalization of the human survivors on their own planet. Judith Butler writes of the "implications of thinking about gender in relation to biotechnology, global politics, and the status of the human and life itself" (*Undoing Gender* 11), linking previously discussed notions of the biotechnological cyborg as a feminized subject to the "host of ethical and political perspectives that have…galvanized feminist studies" (10-11). In her work *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti outlines her conceptualization of the "mother machine," a figure embodying a "negative and rather hostile view of the body-machine relation, stressing its potential for exploitation and manipulation" (106). An interesting conceptualization given the many genetic enhancements with which Lilith is endowed, and her role as progenitor of a new cyborg race, Braidotti's exploited and manipulated mother machine recalls both the reproductive control of the transatlantic slave trade and the ways in which cyborg technologies can be deployed and controlled by those in power.

An extension of the analysis that sees bodies, particularly those of African American women, as resources to be plundered, the mother machine becomes a more science fictional form of Bordo's assertion that culture's "grip on

the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life" (17). It is Bordo's belief that women in particular are culturally "associated with the body and largely confined to a life centered on the body," both in terms of the demands of beautification, and in order to reproduce and provide for the bodies of others (17). In a biotechnological, cyborg world the demands placed on the body—feminized and therefore already marginalized—become increasingly sinister, making it imperative to turn to feminism as an "outsider discourse," a "movement born out of the experience of marginality" (225). For Bordo, contemporary feminist discourse remains "unusually highly attuned to issues of exclusion" (225), making the feminized body an ideal site of transformation and resistance. And in yet another Oankali subversion of established human narratives, that resistance takes place not within the bounds of a human woman's body—Lilith's, for example—but in the mutable, shape shifting corporeality of her ooloi child Jodahs.

Elizabeth Grosz discusses the concept of "becoming-woman" as a means of going "beyond identity and subjectivity, fragmenting and freeing up lines of flight, 'liberating' multiplicities, corporeal and otherwise, that identity subsumes under the one" (*Volatile Bodies* 178). Rather than belonging exclusively to women, the process of "becoming-woman" becomes instead a "movement for and of all subjects insofar as it is the putting into play of a series of…impulses, wills, in all subjects" (178). One individual's becoming-woman, regardless of gender, "carries all humanity's" (178). Jodahs, in its porous, constantly altering multiplicity of forms, embodies this becoming-woman to a quite literal degree. When Lilith expresses disapproval of Jodahs' changes, her child having recently shifted colour

and developed webbed limbs, Jodahs confirms that it will let its body "do whatever it wants to…as long as [it doesn't] develop an illness" (Butler 291). When Lilith's response to her child's fragmentation—to adopt Grosz's parlance, its "liberating multiplicities" (*Volatile Bodies* 178)—is to assert that "deformity is as bad as illness," Jodahs walks away from her, dismissing her opinion for the first time in its life (Butler 291). According to Grosz, in the "metaphorics of uncontrollability," the female or feminized body has been constructed "with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid" (*Volatile Bodies 203*). It is "formless flow… viscosity, entrapping, secreting," and "lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment…a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order" (203). Offensive to a human's fear of deformity while also threatening with harm the Oankali's carefully constructed webs of interspecies life, Jodahs' "formlessness" that threatens to engulf "all form" must be, in the eyes of both parent species, tightly controlled.

And yet Jodahs' uncontrolled shape shifting feels as natural to it as a bounded, static form would feel to a human. It tells its family, "I can change myself…but it's an effort. And it doesn't last. It's easier to do as water does: allow myself to be contained, and take on the shape of my containers" (Butler 612). In the uncontrolled fluidity that is "becoming-woman," Jodahs, by its very existence as an unplanned but self-assured new life form, embodies the "ambivalence between desperate, fatal attraction and strong revulsion, the deep-seated fear of absorption" that we have come to associate with the feminine (*Volatile Bodies* 203). For Grosz, the roots of women's marginalization stem from femininity's association with

"contagion and disorder, the undecidability of the limits of the female body" (203), and in Butler's novels, the strong negative reactions that both Lilith and the Oankali consensus have when faced with Jodahs' ever-shifting corporeality demonstrate that the very act of living will, for Jodahs, place it in conflict with both its parent species.

Both humans and Oankali, then, must change if they are to remain relevant in a world belonging to their construct children. For the human survivors, the path is clear: they must, either by joining the Oankali or by rebuilding a human civilization on Mars, prove their ability to transcend the human contradiction, to move beyond the hatred, fear, exclusion, and hierarchy that have thus far defined the species. The Oankali, however, have less clearly demarcated goals. Sure of their own infallibility by virtue of their consensus-based decision making, the next step in Oankali progress must be to recognize that they are, as Judith Butler writes, "in power even as [they] oppose" it (*Bodies That Matter* 185). The lesson they must learn is that one is perpetually beholden to power, formed by it even "as one reworks it" (185). For the Oankali, this means acknowledging their control of humanity's future as hierarchical, even as they constantly disavow that particular form of power. For Miller, the trilogy "defamiliarizes the victim/victimizer paradigm and shows it to be an inadequate way of understanding oppression" (343). The Oankali must understand their own role in the continued oppression of humanity in order to move forward, acknowledging the complicated inter- and intra-species relationships of which they are a part, and in which they are far from blameless. Recognizing their own hierarchical behaviour is the necessary first step

in planting "the seeds of a community based on collective cooperation" that nevertheless "respects 'independent life'" (342).

The belief that interspecies cooperation is achievable, what Miller calls the "utopian element in Butler's work" (339), is nevertheless deeply "intertwined with dystopian thought" (339). If a glorious future in which humanity is no longer xenophobic and the Oankali value individual agency as much as biological determinism is possible, it is a utopian "unseen horizon that makes dystopian visions possible" (339). Given the near-obliteration of the human race, and the refurbished colonialism of the Oankali—with all its attendant ruthless control of human bodies—the world of *Xenogenesis* is nothing if not dystopian. For Miller, it is a post-apocalyptic landscape that we are "forced to make our way through" (339), and Stickgold-Sarah agrees, believing the main drive for Butler's imagination to be the "need to accept the material oppressions and limitations of the world in which we live, and yet to find room for change" (428-429). But this movement through dystopia in the hopes of approaching utopia is inherently a hopeful one, placing the trilogy in the realm of what Zaki terms "utopian pessimism" (244). Whereas, for Zaki, the pessimism of a dystopian story lies in its assumption that the dystopian elements are transhistorical, transcultural, and therefore inevitable, utopian pessimism "occurs when dystopian elements in a text are depicted as occurring in, and as being caused by, specific historical forces" (244). A more open-ended proposition that a pure dystopia, the dystopian aspect of utopian pessimism belies the "covert utopian hope that readers will change the trajectory of their society" (244). Such dystopias, then, are "intimately connected to

utopias in offering oblique hope to the reader" (244). The deeply ambiguous relationship Lilith, her children, and therefore the reader have with the Oankali and their plans for hybridization would seem to support the belief that Butler herself finds value in the Oankali and sees potential in the Oankali-human relationship. If that value is not immediately discernable given the severe mistreatment of all the human survivors, Lilith included, it is nevertheless a value that a renegotiation of the parameters of the human-alien relationship can uncover.

Xenogenesis, therefore, demonstrates the "utopian impulse that all problems are solvable" (Curtis 151), a concept that Claire Curtis explores when she writes of utopia's tendency to be "critical of current society" while positing "a direction in which we should go" (153). To term Butler's trilogy a dystopia would be, for Curtis, to do the novels a grave disservice (153), ignoring their engagement in the question of how "beings with disparate aims and interests are able to live together fruitfully, or at least peacefully" (148). Utopia, for Curtis, is not the attempt to "bring about heaven on earth" but rather the project of critically reflecting on the flaws of society and prescriptively outlining the possibility of a better future (148). Social perfection, always a subjective endeavour, is not the aim, and indeed there is "no reason to think that perfection and utopia are necessarily compatible" (148). Curtis's utopia is therefore much more a blueprint for possible, better futures that acknowledges the "dangers of positing an ideal" (148) and revels in the "attraction of ambiguity" (152). The utopian push of *Xenogenesis*, far from a return to human civilization or a perfect manifestation of the Oankali biocolonial venture, involves direct criticism of either outcome, and a privileging of fluctuating, amorphous

ambiguity to combat static identities and dystopian limitations.

In fact, Butler posits ambiguity as the primary tool for survival, her novels constantly "engaged with the possibility of transformation" (Stickgold-Sarah 416), suggesting "that ambiguity is both empowering and necessary" (Hampton 67). Malleability, according to Hampton, is "written as the desirable, if not perfect, state of the survivor" (68), and Stickgold-Sarah agrees:

> Butler's linkage of 'what we can become' with the question of 'what are we?' hints at the flexibility of her understanding of essential humanity. 'What we are,' for Butler, may include the farthest reaches of 'what we can become.' Butler is thus attempting to recuperate the human potential for change—which means she also needs to recuperate DNA and the relationship between the body and the self, heretofore conceived as fixed and unilateral. (Stickgold-Sarah 416)

The previous two chapters demonstrated, from both an ecofeminist and posthuman lens, the mutability of human identity. "Human" as an essential identity or ontological category quickly becomes porous and subject to constant change the more we consider the evolutionary and symbiogenetic potential of the human body, and the technologically mediated cyborg existence that defines life in the twenty-first century. The *Xenogenesis* trilogy, acknowledging the reality and power of this ambiguity, finds in Lilith's construct children "a bridge between two (or more) distinct identities," that suggests a "new way of thinking about the figure of a multiple referenced identity" (Hampton 67). That the trilogy ends with Jodahs' ascension into a multifarious, fluctuating being fully connected to the life around it,

a portrayal intimate in its use of first-person narration, is telling. Jodahs finds stability in literally embodying the ambiguity of its new species, changing form based on the needs of the moment and finding fulfillment and identity in that permanent state of flux. It is meaningful that it is human cancer that has allowed for Jodahs' shape-shifting abilities. Something uncontrollable, dangerous, and very human, cancer is what first attracts the Oankali's attention in their search for a new trade partner. The disease then functions as a metaphor both for the unpredictable danger posed by humans—as the Oankali see it—and for the Oankali appropriation of human corporeality. By fully harnessing the potential of human cancerous cell production while using its abilities in ways unsanctioned by the Oankali, Jodahs resolves within itself the rift between the two species. In Jodahs is reconciled all that is best in the human and the Oankali: an environmentally stable cyborg identity that transcends and subverts the borderlines of the human and alien, the male and female, the natural and the constructed.

And yet, Jodahs' ability to transcend and heal the conflict between its two parents species is made possible only through the groundwork laid by its brother Akin. Though very different—Akin, secure in his male construct identity even in utero, bears little resemblance to the existential threat of Jodahs' boundless, shifting corporeality—it is by working in tandem that the two siblings are able to bring about the necessary changes to the Oankali order. Where Jodahs uses its body to quite literally reconcile its two parent species, Akin works to ensure a space in which humanity can exist free of Oankali influence—a prerequisite for equitable trade, and a luxury the Oankali had previously only allowed for themselves. The

Oankali believe that the human contradiction manifests most clearly in men, and though it is unclear how much truth there is to that assumption, the circumstances of Akin's youth certainly make him far more human, and far more understanding of human concerns, than any previous construct. Taken from his family in infancy and left in the care of human resisters during his formative years, Akin continues to spend time among the resisters well into his adolescence. The relationships he builds with these humans eventually convince him of the necessity of setting up a human-only colony on Mars, a project he makes his life's work. It is work he will do "for the Humans and for the Human part in [him]" (Butler 458), and in Akin—whose name, appropriately, is Yoruba for "hero" (351)—the human resisters find someone able and willing to pierce Du Bois's veil for them.

For Hampton, Akin's identity as both Oankali and human puts him in a "dangerous yet potentially empowering state of duality" (75). He likens Akin's situation to the "state of the mulatto," a potent locus of "identity security" (79) and fitting position for a child of a space age La Malinche to occupy. The figure of the mulatto, for Hampton, is not something to be feared, for it is "something stronger and potentially more powerful than the 'normal body,' i.e. black, white, male, female, animal or homo sapiens" (79). Akin's twinned and collaborative identities are therefore a "tool of negotiation and collaboration among the humans and the Oankali," using the "ambiguity written upon his body to transcend both human and Oankali differences" (76). Hampton sees Akin as a "negotiator of difference" who is "multilingual on several fronts, namely body language, cultural moorings, and states of consciousness" (78). Indeed, Akin's ability to understand and be understood by

human and Oankali alike is clearly demonstrated throughout his dedicated novel, *Adulthood Rites*. He is capable of acknowledging and accepting the Oankali for what they are, as he does when an adult ooloi delicately controls his nervous system to reduce his fear, "stimulating the release of certain endorphins in his brain," and causing his body to refuse to "allow him to panic" (Butler 454). Though in this instance he accepts such actions as a matter of course, so too is Akin human enough to occasionally mirror Lilith's feelings of resentment and of being a manipulated pawn (432)—particularly when he later asks, "what lesson is condescension supposed to teach me?" (450). There is "a wholeness" to Akin that allows him to both understand the plight of the directionless, hopeless resisters (466), and to join into the Oankali consensus-making process as someone "too Oankali and too near adulthood to disregard" (470). Acutely aware of both the ease with which humans engage in violence, and the Oankali capacity for making mistakes (502)—his youth a testament to both failings—Akin occupies a space between the two species, though he remains very much a part of, and beholden to, both of them.

Though Akin understands human and Oankali differences—"Humans put animals in cages or tied them to keep them from straying…Oankali simply bred animals who did not want to stray" (446)—he remains deeply ambivalent when asked to privilege one point of view over another. Absolutely committed to the necessity of a Martian colony, sure that humanity deserves a chance to rebuild itself as a genetically distinct species, Akin remains nevertheless unconvinced that if given another chance humanity's "intelligence would be in balance with their hierarchical behavior, and they would not destroy themselves" (467). Granting

humanity the freedom to fail is, in Akin's eyes, the very least the Oankali can do, having set aside a portion of their own population as a non-hybridized safeguard (468). The chance for human survival without alien interference is likened to a genetic mutation: possible, though not likely. Nevertheless, Akin clearly sees the predatory potential of the Oankali, knowing that for all they retain of humanity, the constructs will be "an Oankali species [and] will grow and divide as Oankali always have" (443). "We will be Oankali," he proclaims. "They will be… something we consumed" (443). It is a certainty Akin feels deep within his own body, and it is telling that as he puts into motion his plan for a human-only colony, his broken, physically uncomfortable relationship with his paired sibling is slowly repaired (473). When making his case to the Oankali, Akin phrases the need for human independence thusly: **"**If your flesh knows you've done all you can for Humanity, [the constructs'] flesh should know as mine does that you've done almost nothing. …Their flesh should know that Humanity must live!" (471). That Akin's certainty is so physically rooted recalls the body as "crucial site for contestations and transformation" ("Skin Dreaming" 136). There is a sense of physical rightness to what he is doing; Akin's political work is as corporeal as Jodahs', demonstrating all the physicality of the Oankali's "certainty of the flesh" (Zaki 242).

The survivors—Lilith, Joseph, resisters alike—express similar sentiments but their protests do not make the Oankali reconsider. No tactic, from Lilith wryly comparing humans to experimental animals (Butler 60) to the resisters' hostility as they declare their settlement "a human place! …It's off limits to you" (227), is successful. Only when Akin begins questioning the wisdom of Oankali

decisions, asking "what are we that we can do this to whole peoples?" (443), is progress made. Akin's dual, cyborg identity, connected as it is to both human and Oankali subjectivity, makes all the difference. In many ways, both Akin and Jodahs embody Braidotti's Nomadic Subject, a "postmetaphysical, intensive, multiple entity, functioning in a net of interconnections" (*Nomadic Subjects* 36). The nomad here is less a physical traveler, referring instead to a kind of "critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior" (5). It is the "subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state" (5), creating a transgressive identity "whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all" (35). Both Akin and Jodahs, in their respective struggles, demonstrate that "nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections" (35). Just as Jodahs proves its worth, and its ability to control its powers, by finding mates and settling into a stable three-fold partnership, Akin must fully avail himself of the Oankali consensus-making process, joining together with an overwhelming number of his peers in order to enact the change he wishes to see. Lest this seem like a surrendering to Oankali modes of being, Jodahs and Akin using these interconnections in unanticipated ways to subvert and move beyond what the Oankali want or with which they are comfortable, is precisely the sort of "transitory" political motion Braidotti discusses: "Nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly; as such they are structurally opposed to fixity and therefore to rapacious appropriation" (35-36). Beholden not only to the Oankali's acquisitive nature, a biological urge that pushes them to take into themselves and appropriate all new forms of life, Lilith's construct children understand the utterly human need

for independence and individual agency. They are, in effect, much closer to the nomad, with its "sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it" (36), than the previous Oankali generation could ever be.

Jodahs and Akin's journeys, struggling as they do against both their parent species and the dramatically differing expectations placed upon them by those two subjectivities, clearly show that for all that the Oankali might believe themselves free of hierarchy, the constructs' main concern will always be one of power and control. They will be nomadic subjects coming into conflict with forces unwilling to allow for their particular brand of ever-changing, multi-faceted transformation; the tools learned by both Akin and Jodahs will likely be required again. After all, cyborg politics are always about power, and to "live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others" (*Undoing Gender* 39). That the constructs will ultimately, as Akin believes, become the new Oankali matters little: it is not possible to live life outside of power, outside of its influence and control, outside of one's ability to exert it. For Judith Butler, acknowledging this power allows for the "act of assuming responsibility for a collective future…not to know its direction fully in advance" but to accept a "certain openness and unknowingness" (39). This power may be what Bordo terms "non-authoritarian"—and in the Oankali's quiet and patient intractability it can certain be seen as such—but it "nonetheless produces and normalizes bodies to serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination" (26). In Akin's bone-deep certainty that he must do what is right for the resister humans, and Jodahs' confidence in its own biological urges and capabilities, their bodies rebel against this "network of non-centralized

forces (26), a power that is unlike humanity's hierarchy, but is nevertheless "dynamic" (26), "always spawning new forms of culture and subjectivity" (27) to which individuals will be beholden. But in this particularly Oankali form of control, there exists "new opportunities for transformation" in which "dominant forms and institutions are continually being penetrated and reconstructed by values, styles, and knowledges that have been developing and gathering strength, energy, and distinctiveness 'at the margins'" (27-28). Akin and Jodahs, subjects formed by their marginalization and coming into their power as dual, empowered cyborg beings with access to the traditions and subjectivities of both their parent species, are precisely the life forms needed to begin reconciliation between human and Oankali. With their Oankali pacifism but human need for self-determination, the key to helping humanity transcend their contradiction, and to temper the Oankali's unstoppable colonial consumption of all other life, may very well lie with Lilith's brood.

Conclusion

"Science fiction writing, and science fiction writers, become not illustrations of arguments or illustrations of thinking but the thinking itself," says Donna Haraway in the documentary *Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival*. "Science fiction goes through a kind of metamorphosis, a kind of transmogrification, transmutation," she adds, becoming its own "theoretical practice" (*Donna Haraway* 00:33:44-53). Haraway is speaking directly to the camera, in her workspace piled high with papers, photographs, and reading glasses. Behind her, through the window, postproduction editing has added another Haraway, one reading quietly in the sunshine sunrrounded by a garden and the forest beyond it. This is the dual form in which Haraway presents herself to the viewer, one figure reading, a duplicate speaking, both intimately a part of the natural world, and of the world-creating legacy of science fiction literature. This is Haraway as her work has come to identify her, as a theorist exceedingly committed to the questions of who we are as a species, what our relationships to nonhumans can be, and what we ourselves are in the process of becoming. Speaking with only birdsong for background music, she declares that "some of the best thinking is done as storytelling" (00:36:44-48), and in this statement her commitment to science fiction is clear. In Octavia E. Butler's science fiction particularly there is transformative potential. Her novels, including the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, offer glimpses of alternative modes of being, ones perhaps not successfully achieved, but nonetheless possible.

The trilogy, in which the Oankali offer possible futures that inspire as much as they terrify, is rife with ambiguity. Butler never offers concrete answers with regard to these alien invaders, never categorically states whether they are saviours or threats, whether they offer transcendence or total annihilation. When speaking to the newly awoken humans, Lilith is unsure whether the Oankali will "blend with us or destroy us" (Butler 143). By the end of the novels, despite decades of communal living and dozens of half-alien hybrid children, Lilith is no nearer a definitive answer. Only the Oankali's assertion of "our children will be better than either of us" (247) proves demonstrably true. Together, Akin and Jodahs embody the twin promises of posthuman and ecofemist utopia in ways neither of their parent species could. Their intimate, protective relationships with the organic life on earth blend with their identities as decentered, marginal cyborg creatures. By valuing the life around them and helping to reformulate nature as more than the inert resource "development"-driven Western economies believe it to be, Lilith's construct children enter into tightly intermingled, symbiogenetic relationships, "embodied systems in environments where the system evolves with other entities [in] mutually sustaining" ways (Nayar 51). Though "interconnections, intersections, mergers and acquisitions with other genes, life forms and species" were already a feature of human life on earth (126)—and Lynn Margulis's theory of symbiogenesis would certainly argue as much—the Oankali invasion makes literal and undeniable this "multispecies citizenship and…species cosmopolitanism" (126). Much of what the Oankali promised the human survivors comes to pass in the form of construct children who seamlessly navigate their new ecofeminist and posthuman worlds.

The constructs, potent fusions of the organic and the artificial, the born and the built, are stable in their dual, hybridized identity. True to the Oankali's utopian ideals, they are organisms who function and are comfortable existing as at once individuals and nodes in a larger, always fluctuating system—whether machine or ecosystem. As Ytasha L. Womack writes, "technological achievement alone is not enough to create a free-thinking future. A well-crafted relationship with nature is intrinsic to a balanced future too" (104). The particular combination of ecofeminist and posthuman subjectivities in the Oankali and their construct children lays the groundwork for a forward-looking, equitable future for all of earth's residents. These are systems in which alterity is constitutive and life-giving, where rethinking "our relationship not only to machines but also to animals," of finding "new meanings for human animality [in] our struggle to find new ways of theorizing political responsibility" is of crucial importance (Vint 281).

The potential of this future, however, remains out of reach as long as the inequalities inherent in the human-Oankali relationship persist. The reconciliation of the two species rests solely on the shoulders of their shared children, particularly those, like Akin and Jodahs, who have keenly felt the pain of marginalization. With Akin's childhood spent with the resister humans away from a stable Oankali family group, and Jodahs disrupting the Oankali's carefully laid plans and subsequently going into self-imposed exile, the two construct children are, by virtue of their social isolation, able to empathize with their human progenitors more completely than any of their hybridized peers. This social distance, the "exclusionary matrix" invoked by Judith Butler and outside of which Akin and

Jodahs now find themselves (*Bodies That Matter* xiii), allows the two constructs the space necessary to clearly see the failings of both parent species.

Recalling W. E. B. Du Bois's double consciousness, Akin and Jodahs are, both interpersonally and inside of themselves, able to understand both sides of the human-Oankali dispute, and the ways in which each side misrepresents the other. Akin's certainty that a human-only colony is owed to the resisters despite his deterministic, Oankali-like belief in the human contradiction ably illustrates this paradox: He is simultaneously convinced of the truth of the human contradiction, the truth of humanity's need for self-determination, sure that humans underestimate the necessity for Oankali interference, and sure that the Oankali view human resistance as merely the petulance of a child-like race. As Jodahs says, the Oankali might attempt to understand humans, but failing to do so, are "pleased to see that we constructs understood" in their stead (Butler 555). For the humans, the effect of Akin's human colony on Mars in immeasurable. *Imago* sees a steady stream of resisters, finally given a purposeful alternative to the Oankali's coercive hybridization project, pass through the Lo village on their way to the colony. Even Lilith and Tino are able to accept their place in their Oankali family, able to "find what pleasure they could find in their lives" (562), once they have another option. Staying then becomes a choice rather than imprisonment.

So much of the Oankali existence, from their incontrovertible biological urge to seek out new life to the ways in which pleasure is passed from organism to organism, is rooted in the body. It is therefore logical that resistance in the face of the Oankali order would also be an embodied, corporeal experience, and

that so much of Jodahs and Akin's political work would also occur in the body. By virtue of their Oankali transcendence of the human contradiction, the constructs have been freed of humanity's worst impulses. Similarly, in their very human need for individual agency, Akin and Jodahs now recognize how utterly the coercive power of the Oankali's biochemical manipulations can fail prospective trading partners, as well as the Oankali's own ideals of equality and respect. In their stable, powerful hybridity, the constructs can temper the exploitative aspects of the Oankali's colonial venture, adding a much-needed respect for agency to the aliens' "genetically-encoded instruction to become other" (White 403). In their respect for human values, the constructs are able to make Oankali trading much more about cooperation and care, bringing the process closer to Vandana Shiva's conception of Prakriti, and to Oankali ideals.

It is the complex and mutually constitutive interplay between Oankali and human values that gives the *Xenogenesis* trilogy its science fictional potential. Recalling Haraway's assertion that the act of writing science fiction is in and of itself a theoretical practice, André M. Carrington examines speculative fiction—a term encompassing the interrelated genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror—as an "exemplary venue for understanding how the production of literature and culture fits within the structure of societies in which it takes place" (1). The alternative worlds imagined by science fiction authors, Butler included, will always reflect back on the worlds in which they were created. That the journey toward ecofeminist and posthuman subjectivity embarked on by Lilith and her construct children remains relevant and inspiring to critics and science fiction fans alike says

much about our current global situation, characterized as it is by the biotechnological push of the twenty-first century, and the continued environmental devastation wrought in all parts of the world. Such is the "potency and relevance of the imagination, of myth-making," that Rosi Braidotti defines it as a "way to step out of the political and intellectual stasis of these postmodern times" (*Nomadic Subjects* 4). The afrofuturist character of Butler's science fiction particularly lends a forward-looking power to the narrative, imagining as it does a world in which the blend of nurturing and pragmatism found in Lilith is privileged, and is indeed the only hope for humanity's continued survival. In this way, afrofuturism "unchains the mind" (Womack 15), allowing for "imagination, hope, and the expectation for transformative change" that some use as a template to create their very way of life (42). For Womack, then, afrofuturists act as "social change agents" (17), and Butler is no exception. Over the course of the trilogy, Butler "stares into the abyss of the dystopian future" that is all too likely, reinventing as she goes the "desire for a better world" (Miller 336). And as Haraway discusses as she sits in her dual, overlapping roles, at once a critical theorist and merely one of innumerable organisms living together cooperatively in the forest, there is nothing so crucial as "the story of this earth, the arts of living on a damaged planet…the absolute obligation to become capable, to render each other capable of changing the story" (*Donna Haraway* 00:42:19-26). Navigating the parameters of the human, the possibilities of cross-species kinship, and the responsibily we all have toward our planet and home is the only story worth telling, and one in which *Xenogenesis*, singular even among Butler's astounding body of work, excels.

Works Cited

Adams, Carol J. *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals*. New York: Continuum, 1994.

– – –. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

– – –. "'Skin Dreaming': The Bodily Transgressions of Fielding Burke, Octavia Butler, and Linda Hogan," *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 123-138.

Balsamo, Anne. "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*. Ed. Jenny Wolmark. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 145-156.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th Anniversary Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

– – –. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

– – –. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Milton Park: Taylor and Francis, 2010.

Butler, Octavia E. *Lilith's Brood*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2000.

Candelaria, Cordelia. "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5:2 Chicanas en el Ambiente Nacional/Chicanas in the National Landscape (Summer 1980). 1-6.

Carrington, André M. *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Carrington, Leonora. "My Mother Is a Cow," *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*. St. Louis: Dorothy Project, 2017. 186.

Curtis, Claire P. "Rehabilitating Utopia: Feminist Science Fiction and Finding the Ideal," *Contemporary Justice Review* 8:2 (June 2005). 147-162.

Donna Haraway: Story Telling for Earthly Survival. Directed by Fabrizio Terranova, performance by Donna Haraway, Icarus Films, 2017.

Dowdall, Lisa. "Treasured Strangers: Race, Biopolitics, and the Human in Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," *Science Fiction Studies* 44:3 (November 2017). 506-525.

Du Bois, W. E. B. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," *The Souls of Black Folk*. Brooklyn: Restless Books, 2017. 7-16.

Esposito, Roberto. 'Politics and Human Nature," trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16:3 (2011). 77-84.

Federmayer, Éva. "Octavia Butler's Maternal Cyborgs: The Black Female World of the *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 6:1 (Spring 2000). 103-118.

Fukuyama, Francis. *Our Posthuman Future*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002.

Gane, Nicholas. "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 23:7-8 (December 2006). 135-158.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of the Body*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

– – –. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Hables Gray, Chris. *Cyborg Citizen*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Hampton, Gregory Jerome. *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires*. Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* London: Free Association Books, 1996.

– – –. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*. Ed. Jenny Wolmark. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 314-366.

– – –. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman," *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*.

Ed. Jenny Wolmark. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 157-173.

Jacobs, Naomi. "Posthuman Bodies and Agency in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*," *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds. New York: Routledge, 2003. 91-111.

Margulis, Lynn, and Dorion Sagan. *Acquiring Genomes: A Theory of the Origins of Species*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.

Miller, Jim. "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision," *Science Fiction Studies* 25:2 (1998). 336-360.

Morton, Timothy. *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People*. London: Verso, 2017.

Muñoz, José Esteban. "The Sense of Brownness," *Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms* special issue. Ed. José Esteban Muñoz. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:2-3 (June 2015). 209-210.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthumanism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

Osherow, Michele. "The Dawn of a New Lilith: Revisionary Mythmaking in Women's Science Fiction," *NSWA Journal* 12:1 (Spring 2009). 68-83.

Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. *Herland*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979. 60.

Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1976. 276.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zed

Books, 1989.

Slicer, Deborah. "Toward an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory: Bodies as Grounds," *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1998. 49-73.

Stickgold-Sarah, Jessie. "'Your Children Will Know Us, You Never Will': The Pessimistic Utopia of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," *Extrapolation* 51:3 (2010). 414-430.

Stone, Allucquére Rosanne. "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures," *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*. Ed. Jenny Wolmark. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 69-98.

Tucker, Jeffrey A. "'The Human Contradiction': Identity and/as Essence in Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37:2 (2007). 164-181.

Vint, Sherryl. "Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler's *Clay's Ark*," *Science Fiction Studies* 32:2 (2005). 281-300.

White, Eric. "The Erotics of Becoming: *Xenogenesis* and *The Thing*," *Science Fiction Studies* 20:3 (November 1993). 394-408.

Wolmark, Jenny. "The Postmodern Romances of Feminist Science Fiction," *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*. Ed. Jenny Wolmark. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. 230-238.

Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.

Zaki, Hoda M. "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler," *Science Fiction Studies* 17:2 Science Fiction by Women (July 1990). 239-251.