

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

FACULDADE DE LETRAS



**(UN)MAKING THE (POST)HUMAN:
BIOPOLITICS AND THE
CORPORATIZATION OF THE BODY IN
MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE***

SARA CATARINA MELO DOS SANTOS

Dissertação orientada pela Prof.^a Doutora Angélica Varandas e
co-orientada pelo Prof. Doutor Justin Johnston, especialmente
elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em ESTUDOS
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*Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or
that we are only that.*

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*

“As a species we’re doomed by hope, then?”

“You could call it hope. That, or desperation.”

“But we’re doomed without hope, as well,” said Jimmy.

“Only as individuals,” said Crake cheerfully.

“Well, it sucks.”

“Jimmy, grow up.”

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

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Resumo

Oryx and Crake (2003) de Margaret Atwood, o primeiro romance na trilogia *Maddaddam*, retrata um mundo pós-apocalíptico em que a espécie humana está praticamente extinta devido à disseminação de um vírus sintético, evento referido no texto como “o dilúvio.” Seguindo Snowman, o último homem à face da Terra, nos seus esforços para sobreviver num ambiente biológico e ecológico hostil, o romance produz uma narrativa fracturada que permite a Atwood comentar acerca de práticas sociopolíticas e económicas contemporâneas, bem como concepções tradicionais do sujeito presentes na cultura ocidental, ao mesmo tempo imaginando um futuro sem o ser humano.

Esta dissertação desenvolve o argumento de que a narrativa de Atwood reproduz uma rede de estruturas de vigilância, disciplina e controlo biopolítico dominadas por autoridades corporativas, que integram o indivíduo, simultaneamente, num contexto de apropriação científica e capitalista que resulta na comercialização e reificação do corpo do indivíduo. O biopoder capitalista exercido pelas corporações perpetua uma tradição patriarcal e antropocêntrica que coloca o indivíduo humano, branco, do sexo masculino, no seu centro, desta forma retirando ao corpo não humano, não branco e não masculino o direito à subjectividade, à agência política e, como consequência, o direito à vida, e assim o reduzindo ao estatuto de “disposable other” (Braidotti 2013:28). Nesta dissertação, defende-se ainda que, através de *Oryx* e do mundo pós-apocalíptico dominado pelos Crakers, Atwood fornece-nos formas alternativas do sujeito, formas estas liminares que, encontrando-se na fronteira do poder corporativo mas nunca a este pertencendo, têm a capacidade de se mover através destes espaços vigiados pelas tecnologias biopolíticas. Deste modo, estas personagens desestabilizam dicotomias discursivas e políticas aparentemente estáticas. Finalmente, proponho que estes sujeitos alternativos abrem um espaço na narrativa para questionar outras formas de “ser” que não serão talvez puramente humanas, mas poderão constituir um indivíduo pós-humano ou pós-antropocêntrico.

Começo esta dissertação com uma análise de género da obra de Atwood, com particular atenção à história genológica de *Oryx and Crake*, numa tentativa de situar o romance dentro um conjunto (mais ou menos flexível) de géneros literários. Tal análise é especialmente relevante para esta obra, visto que a bifurcação da narrativa, por um

lado, numa distopia biocorporativa, e, por outro, num futuro pós-apocalíptico, colocam o texto na fronteira entre géneros, apropriando várias tradições e temáticas literárias, mas nunca se comprometendo apenas com um. Este capítulo propõe que o hibridismo genológico do romance reproduz uma crítica presente em Atwood ao modelo binário, muitas vezes selado, que, durante muito tempo, tem dominado as tradições literárias e sociopolíticas das culturas ocidentais. Desta forma, as escolhas de género de Atwood permitem examinar e questionar estruturas socioculturais, económicas e políticas que dominam o discurso ocidental, e que se reflectem nas relações binárias entre humano/não humano, masculino/feminino, sujeito/objecto.

O Capítulo II examina a relação entre o laboratório biotecnológico e o mercado capitalista, com o intuito de iniciar a minha teorização da reificação e comodificação do corpo humano. Aqui, propõe-se que a representação de uma sociedade neoliberal e híper-científica dominada pelo interesse capitalista serve para Atwood criticar a realidade contemporânea marcada pela globalização de práticas político-económicas que concentram todo o poder político, jurídico, legal e económico nas mãos de corporações transnacionais, desta forma criando um fosso cada vez maior entre uma minoria privilegiada e as massas de cidadãos marginalizados. Este argumento é suportado por uma leitura do binário “compounds/pleeblands.” Este capítulo também teoriza o conceito de biopoder no contexto corporativo capitalista da obra de Atwood. Tomando como base de análise os conceitos originais de “biopoder” e “sociedades disciplinares” de Michel Foucault, identifico um conjunto de instrumentos de vigilância e controlo utilizados pelas corporações para conter e regular (e regularizar) os corpos dos “compounders” e dos “pleeblanders” dentro de uma rede de fronteiras e espaços rigidamente definidos. Concentro-me, principalmente, no uso dos corpos dos “pleeblanders” como cobaias insuspeitas no contexto de progresso e lucro biotecnológicos, analisando o modo como a utilização do corpo do “pleeblander” como espaço de experimentação o/a transforma, por um lado, em propriedade da corporação, e, por outro, num instrumento biopolítico utilizado contra si mesmo, desta forma impedindo o indivíduo de reclamar qualquer direito sobre si ou o seu corpo. Neste contexto, e adoptando alguns conceitos de Jacques Derrida, começo a avançar uma análise de Oryx enquanto presença intersticial que interrompe e subverte o discurso patriarcal e binário desta sociedade.

Finalmente, o Capítulo III produz uma leitura do corpo da mulher e do corpo do animal dentro deste contexto de biopoder corporativo. Este capítulo afasta-se um pouco do conceito de Foucault, de modo a dar mais atenção a outros discursos teóricos pertinentes ao estudo do binário humano/não humano. Concentro-me na relação estabelecida entre o humano e o animal dentro do laboratório, onde se identifica a predominância de uma hierarquia antropocêntrica que centra o poder sobre o corpo e sobre a vida nas mãos do cientista humano, desta forma retirando qualquer subjectividade ou agência ao animal. Esta relação dentro do laboratório está intimamente ligada a um medo de contaminação e desejo de contenção que vê todos os corpos não tradicionais, como o animal, como ameaças ao espaço puro e limpo do laboratório, e que precisam, portanto, de ser eliminados. O capítulo vira-se, depois, para uma discussão mais detalhada da reificação e capitalização do corpo do animal, através da análise da presença dos pigoons e dos ChickieNobs no texto. Associado a estes animais está o acto de comer a carne animal, que denota a presença de uma tradição “carnofalocêntrica,” termo concebido por Jacques Derrida (1991), que subjuga o corpo do animal e da mulher ao poder do “Homem.” Começo, então, aqui a analisar o corpo da mulher, que, como o do animal, é entendido como volátil, perigoso e que precisa de ser contido. Examino a reprodução de uma estrutura sociocultural patriarcal no espaço doméstico, que identifica a mulher com questões de maternidade, assim eliminando-a enquanto indivíduo e reduzindo-a à sua biologia. A relação entre o acto de comer e o corpo feminino também é aqui analisada, em particular com Ramona, notando-se assim uma identificação da mulher com o animal. Finalmente, o capítulo retorna a Oryx, cuja posição privilegiada coloca em questão a aparente estabilidade das hierarquias estabelecidas no laboratório e no âmbito doméstico. Proponho aqui que a objectificação do corpo de Oryx confere à personagem um maior controlo sobre o seu corpo, permitindo-lhe fugir ao discurso patriarcal e, conseqüentemente, abrindo-o ao escrutínio do “outro.”

Palavras-chave: *Oryx and Crake*, biopower, disciplinary societies, corporate capitalism, animal and woman.

Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the first novel in the *Maddaddam* trilogy, depicts a post-apocalyptic landscape where humanity has gone all but extinct by the dissemination of a man-made virus, referred to in the narrative as the "flood." Following Snowman, the last human on Earth, as he attempts to survive in a biologically and ecologically hostile environment, the novel produces a fractured narrative that allows Atwood to critique current sociopolitical and economic structures, and traditional Western conceptions of subjectivity, while imagining a future without the human individual.

This dissertation argues that Atwood's narrative reproduces a network of corporately-mandated structures of biopolitical surveillance, discipline and control that integrate the subject within a combined setting of scientific and marketplace capitalism, which results in the commodification of the subject's body. Corporate capitalist biopower perpetuates an anthropocentric, patriarchal tradition that positions the human, white, male subject at its center, in this way closing off subjectivity, political agency and, ultimately, the right to life, to nonhuman, non-white, non-male bodies, which are, as a result, reduced to the status of "disposable others" (Braidotti 2013:28). This project further argues that Atwood provides us with alternative or liminal forms of subjectivity with the character of Oryx and the Craker-ruled post-apocalyptic imagining. These liminal subjects stand at the borders of corporate power, and can move between and across surveilled biopolitical boundaries, in this way disrupting seemingly well-defined, static binary formations. Finally, these alternative subjects open up a space for thinking about subjectivity as perhaps not entirely human, but instead authorizing the emergence of a posthuman or post-anthropocentric self.

Keywords: *Oryx and Crake*, biopower, disciplinary societies, corporate capitalism, animal and woman.

Introduction:

Life Sucks and Everybody Dies

In early June 2016, after a meeting held at closed doors at Harvard University, a group of scientists, entrepreneurs and policy-makers announced the start of the Human Genome Project-Write (HGP-Write), a 10-year project aimed at producing, for the first time in scientific history, an entire synthetic human genome (Pollack). While the team involved in the proposal has claimed that the sole purpose of this undertaking is not to essentially create new “humans” from scratch, but to develop techniques and tools that will allow for scientific and medical advances, such as producing more virus and cancer-resistant cells in the human body (Boeke et al.), the project immediately excited an ethical debate around the possibility of fabricating human subjects without biological parents. In particular, this achievement raises important questions about the nature of the human and the biological and political gap that may arise out of a distinction between “natural” and “engineered” individuals, questions that dystopian and science fiction literature have been exploring for quite some time now.

With HGP-Write, we do not seem to be too far away from the world Margaret Atwood predicted in her 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*. Deeply attuned to the scientific advancements of her time – the Human Genome Project, aimed at reading and sequencing the entirety of the human genome, was completed in mid-2003 – Atwood envisions a narrative set in a near future society where genetic engineering, coupled with extreme neoliberal practices, leads to the near extinction of the human race and its replacement with hybrid human-nonhuman biological entities like the Crakers. Similarly to the a-genealogical new beings predicted by critics of HGP-Write, the Crakers are a hybrid human-animal species produced by Crake, the novel’s very own

Frankenstein, whose uniquely superior genetic makeup and complex relationship with the human world via Snowman, the text's last-surviving human protagonist, work to challenge the traditional and seemingly stable boundaries of human/nonhuman species affiliation and authority, calling into question previously assumed conceptions of the human as a unique and dominant subject. In *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood engages with the scientific and ethical discourses of the early 2000s, tapping into the anxiety felt over the increasing malleability and permeability of human biology – and, consequently, of human identity – to expose and critique the way in which the human body has become integrated within neoliberal structures of political and scientific control, in particular of the way in which the laboratory and the corporation, the space of scientific advancement and the space of capitalist interest respectively, merge into a single biopolitical entity, represented by the compound, that turns the human subject into an object of control and consumption. Through a formally complex narrative that combines features of the dystopian, post-apocalyptic and even coming-of-age genres, Atwood produces a series of fractured spaces, of physical borders that determine and reflect a set of biopolitical and economic hierarchies between the compounders, the wealthy scientists and entrepreneurs, and the pleeblanders, the “loose change” and unknowing test subjects of the biotech labs (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004: 27). Through these spaces, Atwood works to uncover the structures of surveillance, discipline and control that govern and oppress – politically and biologically – the human and nonhuman bodies that populate the novel's landscape. Most importantly, Atwood's novel allows us to question just what exactly we mean by “human subject” and how the structures enclosed in the novel determine different levels of “humanness” that leave nonconforming bodies outside of this spectrum.

This thesis, then, consists of a biopolitical reading of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, with a focus on the way in which the novel's socioeconomic and scientific forms of biological and geopolitical organization function to reshape and redefine traditional conceptions of the human, as the intricate connection between scientific achievement and marketplace capitalism in the novel, on one hand leads to the splintering of the "human" into different categories and levels of "humanness" that reflect, at the same time, a hierarchy between those who count as human and those perceived as "less human" or even nonhuman; and, on the other hand, exposes the frail boundaries between human and nonhuman species, as the practices of genetic splicing and the use of the Pleeblanders as test subjects work to undermine the biological divide between the human and the animal as both become commodities within the novel's biopolitical system.

So, this thesis will argue that Atwood's novel reproduces a network of corporately-governed structures of biopolitical surveillance and discipline that integrate the subject within a system of scientific and marketplace capitalism that result in the commodification of the subject's body. Corporate capitalist biopower perpetuates an anthropocentric, patriarchal tradition that positions the human, white, male subject at its center, in this way closing off subjectivity, political agency and, ultimately, the right to life, to nonhuman, non-white, non-male bodies, which are, as a result, reduced to the status of "disposable bodies" (Braidotti 2013:15). It is here further argued that *Oryx and Crake* produces alternative or liminal forms of subjectivity through the character of Oryx and the Craker-ruled post-apocalyptic imagining. These liminal subjects, which represent nonconforming biopolitical presences – Oryx as a non-white, non-western woman and the Crakers as human/animal hybrids – stand at the borders of corporate power, and can move

between and across surveilled biopolitical boundaries, in this way disrupting seemingly well-defined, static binary formations. Finally, these alternative subjects open up a space for thinking about subjectivity as perhaps not entirely human, but instead authorizing the emergence of a posthuman or post-anthropocentric self.

This thesis begins with a generic analysis of Atwood's body of work, in particular *Oryx and Crake*, in an attempt to situate the novel within a set of fluid, often contested genre boundaries. Atwood's work is particularly well-suited for this type of study, as it has been at the center of a heated debate about genre as a literary concept and as a form of commercial bookshelf categorization. As Chapter I will show, much has been written about the genre hybridity of Atwood's novels, in particular about the way in which the author appropriates seemingly disparate formal and thematic features to produce hybrid texts that challenge traditional generic boundaries. At the same time, Atwood's own resistance to subscribe to a specific genre has led many critics and authors, chiefly among them sci-fi author Ursula K. Le Guin, to criticize her for not wanting to be "pigeonholed" within what is still among literary circles perceived as the lesser genre of science fiction. In this context, Chapter I constitutes an attempt to understand how *Oryx and Crake* fits into this larger discussion of literary genre and how Atwood may be using the increasingly unstable boundaries between genres to critique the Western literary tradition. Similarly, this chapter also addresses issues of theoretical positioning of Atwood's novels, namely Atwood's contestation of the title of "feminist" author often ascribed to her by critics. Here, I engage those issues through a poststructuralist reading of Atwood's work as a means of understanding the larger sociopolitical underpinnings and implications of her work. This type of analysis becomes especially relevant in *Oryx and Crake*, where the narrative's bifurcation into a biocorporate dystopia, on one hand, and a post-

apocalyptic future, on the other, positions the text at the border between genres, drawing from a variety of literary traditions, but never fully committing to one. The novel's generic hybridity reproduces, I argue, Atwood's critique of the binary, often closed off structures that have tended to dominate Western literary and sociopolitical traditions. In this way, Atwood's formal choices open up a space for examining and questioning larger sociocultural, economic and political power structures that dominate discourse and bodily relationships between the human/nonhuman, male/female, subject/object.

Chapter II examines the relationship between the biotech laboratory and the capitalist marketplace, in an attempt to begin to theorize the reification and commodification of the human body. This chapter suggests that Atwood's portrayal of a neoliberal hyper-scientific society dominated by capital interest functions to critique contemporary globalized political-economic structures that concentrate political, judicial, legal and economic power in the hands of transnational corporations, thus creating a large socioeconomic gap between a corporate privileged minority and a mass of dispossessed citizens. This argument is supported with a close reading of the compound/pleeblands divide presented in the novel. Both Chapters II and III combine a poststructuralist analysis to better uncover the socioeconomic and political networks that function in the novel to subjugate and manipulate the human body to a series of mechanisms of discipline and control that delineate the several boundaries observed in the text between those who count as human and those to whom species membership and agency is denied by virtue of their racial, ethnic, sexual or even social makeup. A poststructuralist approach that combines French theorist's Jacques Derrida's discussion of linguistic and cultural binaries, in particular of the "interval," a third concept that undermines the stability of a binary relationship (Derrida 1982:42), and

Michel Foucault's discussion of how power is enacted onto the individual through a series of mechanisms or technologies of discipline (Foucault 1978:140), can potentiate an analysis of the frailty of the bio- and geopolitical boundaries that Atwood works to undermine in her novel. Here, Oryx provides an interesting example of a border character whose presence destabilizes the carefully constructed borders between compounds/pleeblands, privileged/dispossessed, humans/nonhumans.

Such an analysis may, in turn, allow a closer look at the way in which our current systems of political and economic governance work to delineate and solidify distinctions between different "types" or "categories" of the human by employing a set of biopolitical policies and practices that exclude specific racial, ethnic, gender and economic groups from the spectrum of who counts as human. In this context, this chapter also theorizes biopower within the corporate context of the narrative. Taking up Michel Foucault's original concept of "biopower" and "disciplinary societies," I trace the several tools of surveillance and control employed by the narrative's corporations to contain and regulate the bodies of compounders and pleeblanders with a set of rigid bordered spaces. The concept of biopower has been the object of much analysis in the last few decades, which have produced multiple reinterpretations, but, for the sake of brevity and theoretical cohesion, this thesis focuses solely on Foucault's original definition of biopower as the power of the modern nation state to "make live and let die" through the employment of a series of mechanisms and techniques aimed at "achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (*The History of Sexuality* 1978:140, 2003:241).¹

¹ For other readings of biopower, see Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998), Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003), Roberto Esposito's *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008) and *Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death* (2011), edited by Patricia Clough and Craig Willse.

Chapter II focuses, particularly, on the employment of the pleeblanders' bodies as unwitting test subjects for biotechnological progress and profit, with a close look at the way in which the use of the body as a site for experimentation turns it into, on one hand, corporate property, and, on the other, into a biopolitical tool against itself, in this way extricating the individual from any claim over his/her own body and subjectivity. In this context, I begin to theorize the presence of Oryx as an "interstitial" body that disrupts and subverts subjectivity within the narrative, which is then examined in more detail in Chapter III.

Finally, Chapter III produces a close reading of the female and the animal bodies within the context of the corporate biopolitical structures examined thus far. Here, I begin to move away from (but not entirely out of sight of) Foucauldian biopower, to focus on theoretical approaches to the human/animal binary, in order to analyze the relationship established between the human and the nonhuman animal in the biotech lab, where I identify the predominance of an anthropocentric hierarchy that concentrates power over the body, and consequently power over life, in the hands of the human, male scientist, in this way stripping the animal of any form of subjective agency or recognition. This economy of the lab is tightly connected, I argue, with a fear of contamination and desire for containment, which perceives all non-traditional bodies, like the animal, as threats that need to be eliminated in order to protect the purity of the scientific space. This chapter then moves on to a more detailed discussion of the reification and capitalization of the animal body, through a close reading of scenes involving the pigoon and the ChickieNobs. Closely related to this process is the act of eating the animal's meat, which denotes the presence of a carnophallogocentric tradition that subjects animal and female bodies to the power of "Man." Here, Derrida's deconstructivist approach becomes again important to

understand the increasing permeability and conflation of the human's biological "humanness" and the animal's animality, as the consumption of the animal's body, while representing the predominance of an anthropocentric, patriarchal system, suggests an autocannibalistic impulse that blurs the line between the human and animal genomes, thus threatening the biological "cleanliness" of the human body.

Chapter III, finally, turns to a close reading of the female body, which, like the animal, is perceived as volatile, dangerous and, therefore, in need of containment. I analyze the reproduction of a patriarchal sociocultural structure within the domestic space, which aligns the woman with motherhood and maternity, in this way erasing her subject status and positioning her as a disposable or reified biology. The relationship between eating and the female body is also addressed, in particular in relation to Ramona, which denotes an increasing identification of the woman with the animal. The latter section of Chapter III is devoted to a close analysis of Oryx, whose privileged position in the narrative challenges the seemingly stable structures of power in the lab and the household. Here, I argue that Oryx's self-objectification functions as a means of self bodily control that allows her to escape patriarchal discourse and to open up traditional Western discourse to the scrutiny of the "other," an "other" that is female, non-white and non-Western, whose almost total exclusion from the spectrum of neoliberal biopolitical subjectivity makes her presence within that system all the more relevant to understanding its means of sustainability.

Chapter I

Selling Your Children to the Salt Mines, Or How Atwood Crosses Genre

Boundaries

“It’s the same with any form. You have to understand what the form is doing, how it works, before you say, ‘Now we’re going to make it different..., we’re going to turn it upside down, we’re going to move it so it includes something which isn’t supposed to be there, we’re going to surprise the reader.’” (Atwood qtd. in Howells 2000:139)

The quote above is very telling of Atwood’s approach to form and genre in her prose fiction, as her work reflects the skill of someone who has been intellectually educated and informed within traditional – read ideologically conservative, colonial and patriarchal – generic conventions, but refuses to conform to and perpetuate them. Atwood has often been praised for “coloring outside the lines” in her novels, appropriating the conventions of specific literary genres to criticize, challenge and subvert the social, political and cultural structures underlying them. Linda Hutcheon has described this tendency of both respect for and challenge to the limits and conventions of genre as “that postmodern paradox of complicity and critique” (Hutcheon qtd. in Howells 2000:139). In fact, it is often difficult to inscribe Atwood’s work within a particular genre or theoretical framework, as her novels seem to occupy the border spaces between literary, rhetorical and generic traditions. This is, in part, a result of the increasing instability of generic definitions caused by the diverse and divergent perspectives of the literary criticism of the 20th century, particularly of the role of post-structuralism in complicating the functions of, and boundaries between, literary genres. At the same time, Atwood takes advantage of the unsteadiness of generic boundaries to convey her critique of, on one hand, a conservative, male

dominated literary tradition, and of economically driven, patriarchal political systems on the other. In Atwood's words, "[w]hen it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance" (Atwood 2012:7). In her novels, Atwood's action of slipping back and forth across generic boundaries appears as a rhetorical strategy that expresses the internal volatility and ultimate unsustainability of the bio-socio-political systems depicted in her narratives, as well as her characters' inability to comply or fully participate in those systems.

Atwood's generic fluctuation and refusal to subscribe to enclosing categories – causing much criticism among science fiction and feminist authors – becomes particularly important in the case of her non-realistic fiction, as the author combines elements of speculative fiction, a concept that will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis, and satire, and plays with canonical texts and tropes of Western culture, in order to make her poignant critique of the imperfections of current social, political and economic practices. *Oryx and Crake* can best be understood within this frame of generic and political criticism. The novel's structure parallels present and past events, a formal structure that echoes that of classical authors in English literature such as William Faulkner, creating a break in the text that gives rise to two narratives, the dystopia of a pre-flood heavily corporatized and scientific society, and the hostile and dangerous post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel's present, that, while culturally and contextually distinct, are both infused with thematic features of the genre that each seems to belong to. So, the pre-flood dystopia also appears as dangerous and as hostile, for very different reasons that will be addressed later on, as Snowman's post-apocalyptic world. Similarly, this post-apocalyptic scenario is also dystopian in that it appears to (re)produce alternative forms of political and cultural organization that

challenge and critique those of the pre-flood dystopia and, I would even argue, those of our day. So, this generic hybridity echoes what seems to be Atwood's underlying criticism of the binary systems that structure Western culture, as the author organizes her narrative within dichotomic systems which ultimately prove to be unsustainable, functioning then as a part of Atwood's "attitude of contestation" of dominant power structures (Howells 2000:140).

Nailing Jelly to a Wall: A Post-Structuralist Approach to Atwood

In an attempt to sort out the differences between science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy, three genres on whose boundaries few critics and authors seem to be able to agree, Atwood characterizes the process of defining genre conventions as "nailing jelly to a wall" ("In Context" 2004:513). The same goes, I would argue, for any attempts to pigeonhole Atwood into literary categories such as sci-fi, dystopian or feminist fiction (a title she does not subscribe to in literature or politics). In her essay "Transgressing Genre: A Generic Approach to Margaret Atwood's Novels," Coral Ann Howells discusses Atwood's generic and thematic pluralism by analyzing what she considers to be the most influential genres in Atwood's prose writing, "the dystopia, the *kunsterroman*, the fictive autobiography, the Gothic romance, and the historical novel" (2000:139). Yet Howells' analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride* and *Alias Grace* reveals the fragility of these labels, as each novel extends across several generic spaces. For instance, *The Handmaid's Tale* is usually enclosed within the label of dystopia, "a dominantly masculine genre" as Howells points out (2000:141), but seems to challenge the traditional patterns of dystopian novels by featuring a disempowered female protagonist, thus displacing the center of the narrative to the silenced, marginalized Other (*ibid* 142). However, the

same novel, Howells argues in her essay, can also be framed within the patterns of a variety of other genres, namely the fictive autobiography (as the protagonist provides an autodiegetic account of her life), a “prison narrative or survival narrative” (*ibid* 142), or even as a satire, as Lucy Freibert describes the novel as a “boldly political and darkly comic” narrative that seeks to expose the “absurdity of Western patriarchal teleology” (1998:280). One might even argue that the novel’s plot of human infertility, more recently adapted by director Alfonso Cuarón in his 2005 film *Children of Men* to critique current political practices in relation to immigration and reproductive rights, aligns *The Handmaid’s Tale* with the science fiction genre, thus further corroborating Howells’ argument about Atwood’s continuous move in between and across genres.

Similarly, Howells describes *The Robber Bride* as a Gothic novel, although it possesses features of the female romance and detective thriller, while also reading as “contemporary Canadian social history in its chronicle of changing cultural fashions in postwar Toronto” (Howells 2000:147-149). Even these generic categories, then, which Howells argues predominate among Atwood’s writing – as well as others not covered in her analysis, such as the survival narrative, the speculative narrative, the satire and the thriller – often overlap to complicate and multiply the possible literary, rhetorical and political readings of the narratives, so that the novels – and, by association, Atwood – cannot be encased within uncomplicated and unified genre boundaries.

The genre instability observed in Atwood’s prose work seems to be closely related to the political and ideological criticism which is at the foundation of her novels. Atwood’s inability – better yet, refusal – to fit into simple generic definitions is very much a reflection of her rhetorical, thematic and ethical destabilization of the

power structures that encase, among others, the human/nature (biological and ecological), the man/woman (sex and gender), and the colonizer/colonized binaries. In fact, Atwood claims she only writes about events that have already happened or may realistically happen in a near future (Atwood 2005:102). Atwood works with probability, not possibility, with actual current sociopolitical and environmental landscapes instead of devising impossible, alien scenarios. Her novels are, as a result, profoundly embedded in specific sociopolitical contexts; to understand Atwood's thematic choices and formal turns is to understand the real-world political, cultural and ideological structures functioning at the foundation of her novels. The author's "generic dislocations" (Howells 2000:141) can, then, be seen as attempts at destabilizing, deconstructing and reformulating the underlying sociopolitical and ideological charge of the genres at play in her novels.

Atwood describes herself as a political writer, defining politics as the way "people relate to a power structure and vice versa" (qtd. in Howells 1996:6). In fact, Atwood's novels seem to function as channels through which the author reflects on sociopolitical issues, particularly on current social, economic and political power structures that tend to suppress any voice that is not Western and male – or human, for that matter. Atwood has tended to focus her analysis on the power relations between men and women, often providing her novels with female protagonists whose agentive storytelling functions as a mode of resistance to patriarchal discourse and its appropriation of the female discourse about herself and her body. This is clear in *The Edible Woman* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the female body becomes an object of consumption and control within a male-dominated, consumer-oriented society (Hutcheon 1983:18). In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood presents two distinct types of female bodies, the one that is suppressed and oppressed by patriarchal values (visible

in Sharon and Ramona, Jimmy's mother and stepmother respectively, whose bodies are ultimately consumed by the patriarchal structure of corporate institutions) and the one that functions within male discourse to subvert it (Oryx, while integrated in a clandestine system of male satisfaction, refuses to allow Jimmy or Crake to speak for her) – an issue which I discuss in Chapter III. Atwood also reveals a deep concern for the preservation of human rights against institutional injustice (Howells 1996:7), as she explores the segregationist divide between the pleeblands and the compounds of *Oryx and Crake*'s pre-flood society, that keeps the poor and the uneducated, “the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:27) in a state of lawlessness and closed off by heavy security and surveillance from the seemingly idyllic environment of the corporate institutions that govern the economic and political systems. This social divide also serves as a gateway to Atwood's ecological concerns: the pre-flood physical landscape has become unsustainable as a result of an ultra-capitalist exploitation of natural resources and amoral scientific attempts to increase the wellbeing of the compounds' people. Environmental and ethical critique go hand in hand in *Oryx and Crake*, as Atwood designs a radically utilitarian community headed by Crake whose desire to perfect the human being ultimately reifies human nature and the human body, and brings them closer to the biology and status of nonhuman animals, calling into question the humanist notion of the individual as unique and superior to other lifeforms.

Atwood's concern with the political, in particular with gender and human rights issues, makes her work especially suited to a post-structuralist reading and analysis. In “Transgressing Genre,” Howells frames Atwood's “experimentation across genre boundaries” within post-structuralist discourse, highlighting the author's intertextual play on Western literary tradition and socio-historical rootedness

(2000:139). Indeed, Atwood's work around and within genre is very much in line with the subversive nature that post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault attribute to literary structures and conventions (Culler 2000:125). From a post-structuralist stance, literary meaning is created out of the identification and violation of a set of structures – of language, of consciousness, of material society – that both underlie the production of the text and govern the reader's understanding of it (*ibid* 124). Against the close reading and textual unity advocated by Russian Formalism and New Criticism in the early 20th century, post-structuralists argue that texts are “intertextual constructs,” that is, textual objects whose meaning and interpretation are dependent on the interpretation of other texts (Culler 1981:38). Post-structuralism tries to break away from a logocentric and humanist approach that encloses and essentializes textual meaning by arguing that all meaning is completely textual and intertextual, so that “there is no outside-text” (Derrida 1997:158). As a result, meaning and knowledge are constructed linguistically inside the text and in its relation to other texts “through filiation, allusion and repetition” (Lye 2008:n.p.). However, discourse arises here also as a material practice inscribed in a set of cultural and political structures that control and organize it and to which the reader has access. According to Lye, “[d]iscourse is regulated by rules of exclusion, by internal systems of control and delineation, by conditions under which discourses can be employed” (2008:n.p.). The intertextual nature of literary texts allows for oppositional readings which historicize and situate the text within distinct ideological spheres. Genre is, then, dependent on the reader's interpretation of intra and intertextual references at his or her particular moment in the socio-historical spectrum, as “different interpretations are different generic interpretations” (Culler 1981:58-59). In this context, Atwood's fluidity across genre boundaries can be seen as a result of the text's historical

situadedness and its textual interplay as a means to convey a particular literary and cultural reality.

Atwood's novels seem to be ontologically dialogic, as each establishes a double discursive continuum across Western literary tradition on the one hand, and with specific historical and sociopolitical contexts on the other. There is little doubt that Atwood relies on the reader's knowledge of specific generic conventions and Western literary tradition to convey the sociocultural critique that goes beyond the limits of the text. Intertextuality in her novels seems to function very much in a post-structuralist fashion, in that Atwood builds her narratives sometimes in compliance with, sometimes against, Western textual models in order to challenge the patriarchal and imperialistic structures of Western literary tradition and history. Howells points to the intertextual play in *The Robber Bride*, which she defines as a "postmodern Gothic romance" (Howells 2000:147), as evidence of the author's subversion of convention. In this novel, Atwood makes use of the thematic conventions of the English Gothic, bending and twisting them to fit a relatively contemporary context, 1990s Toronto. At the same time, Atwood alludes to other specific generic and thematic forms of the Western literary canon, among which are Grimm's fairytales ("The Robber Bridegroom" providing a basis for Atwood's appropriation and gender reversal), "folktales and popular horror comics about vampires and soul stealers," as well as "nineteenth-century Gothic fictions like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," to combine a feminist discussion with national political issues (Howells 2000:147-149).

Oryx and Crake is clearly inserted in this subversive intertextual game, as Atwood brings in, reformulates and challenges traditional narratives and tropes. The most obvious of Atwood's literary and rhetorical adaptations is that of the Creation

story of Genesis, a foundational narrative in Western Christian cultures. In the novel, Snowman appropriates the myth of Creation in order to give the Crakers their own origin story:

“What part would you like to hear tonight?” he says.

“In the beginning,” prompts a voice. They’re fond of repetition, they learn things by heart.

“In the beginning, there was chaos,” he says.

“Show us chaos, please, oh Snowman!”

“Show us a picture of chaos!”

(...)

Snowman has known this request would be made – all the stories begin with chaos – and so he’s ready for it.

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:102)

In the novel, Snowman appropriates the thematic of the Creational narrative in Genesis, blending fiction and historical fact to provide the Crakers with a foundation for their identity. In his story, Crake appears as a deity-like entity who has created the present world out of the chaos of the pre-flood landscape solely for the Crakers, “his children” formed in his human image (*ibid* 103). At the same time, this appropriation is also rhetorical, as Snowman recovers and recycles some of the features of the biblical narrative mode. For instance, Snowman uses the phrase “In the beginning,” the opening of Genesis, as the start of his own narrative. Similarly, he roots the narrative in chaos to emphasize Crake’s constructive god-like powers. On a formal level, the repetition of the Crakers’ fictitious origin story throughout the novel echoes the repetitive structure of the Creation myth and other biblical narratives, suggesting a

revisionist impulse on Atwood's part to recreate, and through this recreation to question, the foundational narratives of the Western world.

Atwood's replication of this episode of Western Christian mythology seems to function, then, as a way of challenging humanist and religious conceptions of the individual, of calling into question a definition of human in opposition to the nonhuman animal. The creatures who receive this story – who are at least in part linguistically created through Snowman's appropriation of a biblical narrative – are hybrid in nature, a combination of human DNA and genetic material of several nonhuman animal and plant species (*ibid* 305). The inheritors of the new world are only superficially made in the image of their creator, the human scientist, a fact that immediately challenges Man's superior status among other creatures, as human nature and biology appear flawed and undeserving of the new world. At the same time, the presence of the hybrid Crakers at the basis of a new biological hereditary chain and sociopolitical structure, coupled with Snowman's own increasing animal living and inevitable extinction from this "new world" narrative (after all, Snowman leaves the Craker camp at the end of the novel, leaving the creatures to thrive on their own), seems to call into question the very humanity of humans. With the Crakers, Atwood seems to be asking: how human is the individual, ontologically and materially? – and how clear is the boundary between human and nonhuman animal nature? At the heart of this literary and rhetorical parallel between the Bible and the Crakers' origin seems to be, then, a poignant critique and desire to erode the boundaries between human/nonhuman subjects, as humans and Crakers now share a similar cultural and literary basis. At the same time, this quick erosion of boundaries denotes a profound uncertainty about the liberal humanist subject as the center and measure of all things, an idea that is further explored in Chapter III.

Throughout the novel, Atwood brings in other literary texts from the Western canon with a similar intent. Her use of the title of Milton's epic poem and her respelling of "Paradise" to "Paradice" are an intentionally ironic linguistic and thematic play on the Christian narrative of the Fall of Man, mediated by and reformulated through the scope of the English literary tradition. Paradise in the novel is equated with the lab where Crake produces the humanoid hybrids. This compound seems completely isolated from its surrounding environment, its high security level and Crake's paranoid desire for secrecy making it a pristine and almost impenetrable fortress. Nobody comes in or out without Crake's authorization. This lab also evokes images of the biblical Garden of Eden, as Jimmy/Snowman first encounters the Crakers playing in an artificial – itself already a subversive turn on the biblical natural garden – green landscape, naked but not self-conscious, he notes, as Adam and Eve had not been before they had sinned:

Crake led Jimmy along and around; then they were standing in front of a large picture window. No: a one-way mirror. Jimmy looked in. There was a large central space filled with trees and plants, above them a blue sky. (Not really a blue sky, only the curved ceiling of the bubble-dome, with a clever projection device that simulated dawn, sunlight, evening, night. There was a fake moon that went through its phases, he discovered later. There was fake rain.)

That was his first view of the Crakers. They were naked, but not like the Noodie News: there was no self-consciousness, none at all. At first he couldn't believe them, they were so beautiful. (*ibid* 302)

The seemingly idyllic façade of this "garden," however, hides a darker purpose, as it is later revealed that Crake had been simultaneously working on the virus that

ultimately wipes out most of the world's human population. In this context, the changed spelling "Paradice" reveals an ironic subversion of the Christian and literary trope of the Garden: the fertility and perfection awarded to the Crakers comes at a heavy price, the death of humanity. Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden is echoed in Jimmy and the Crakers' departure from the Paradice dome, only their departure is not an involuntary punishment, but a means of survival, as the lab and the Crakers' green home are no longer sustainable environments. One might also read "Paradice" as a play on the word "dice," suggesting that Crake's endeavor, as minutely planned as it appears to have been, is ultimately a game of chance and odds: although Crake has engineered his creatures to have only an instrumental knowledge of the world and no capability for artistic production – because, as he states "as soon as they start doing art, we're in trouble" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:361) – the Crakers inevitably defy their genetic predispositions by developing symbolic thinking at the end of the novel, as they build a statue to represent and communicate with the now absent Snowman, in this way completely subverting Crake's ideal of the post-flood, post-human world. Such a reading suggests, once again, the instability and unsustainability of the humanist subject and the structures that govern his society, as they ultimately collapse.

At the same time, Atwood plays with the trope of the "last man" in the post-flood section of her narrative, placing Snowman as the protagonist and sole human survivor of this apocalyptic event. Snowman's presence as the "last man" seems to evoke Nietzsche's philosophical concept of *der letzte Mensch* in opposition with the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's "last man" arises out of Western society's resignation to seeking only comfort and security and lack of higher aspirations, which results in a stagnant world where "[e]verybody wants the same thing, everybody is the same"

(qtd. in Ferreira 2006:142). In the context of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman-as-last-man emerges out of the unsustainability of a utilitarian, ultra-corporatized and highly technologized society whose goals are, not unlike Nietzsche's Modern Society, profit and longevity (*ibid* 143). It is also interesting to note that Nietzsche's last man is also "more of an ape than any ape" (qtd. in Ferreira "The *Übermensch* in the Laboratory" 144). This comparison, in the context of *Oryx and Crake*, seems to further call into question the human's biological status as superior beings. On the other hand, the "last man" trope also brings to mind Mary Shelley's apocalyptic novel *The Last Man*, where the protagonist, Lionel, much like Snowman, becomes the sole human survivor of a plague, as well as Samuel Coleridge's "The Rhymer of the Ancient Mariner," whose tormented story-telling hermit finds an echo in Snowman's role as guide and oral teacher to the Crakers.

Reading Atwood is, then, never only reading Atwood; it requires the reader to tap into his or her own repository of Western cultural and literary references. If we are to take the post-structuralist approach, Atwood's texts are always in close communication with other texts – as they "cite, parody, refute, or generally transform" them – as well as with the sociopolitical space they inhabit, as the message they convey can only be decoded if the reader has knowledge of a set of culturally inscribed conventions (Culler 1981:38). Reading Atwood entails being able to invoke these texts in order to understand what is being alluded to, changed and parodied. This approach puts, then, the interpretive weight on the reader, who becomes the decoder of the relationships between textual, linguistic and sociopolitical systems (Culler 2000:124). According to Culler, "the structures of the systems of signification do not exist independently of the subject..., but are structures for subjects, who are entangled with the forces that produce them" (*ibid* 125). Atwood recognizes the fundamental

role of the reader when she argues that reading entails a process of reconstruction which is carried out by the reader: “every reading of every text is always a reconstruction. *The reconstructor is the reader*, who reads the text and then rearranges the elements of it in his or her mind according to his or her own priorities” (qtd. in Howells “Transgressing Genre” 2000:143, emphasis added). The reader has, then, an agentive role, as he or she not only reads, but interprets and redeploys a specific text within his or her own structures of knowledge. The genre instability caused by the texts’ inscription in particular socio-historical contexts, combined with the readers’ own interpretations, complicates the commentary enclosed in Atwood’s novels. The non-realistic pieces become especially interesting, as they cross boundaries and raise debates on the value and accuracy of genre categorization.

Against the Clumsy Martian: Between Sci-Fi and Spec-Fic

In the early 2000s, Margaret Atwood became the object of discussion and criticism among the Science Fiction community when she denied being a SF author and identified her non-realistic novels – *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* specifically – as speculative fiction, a statement which has led many among the SF and Fantasy sphere to accuse her of having “forsook the term *science fiction*, as if [she’s] sold [her] children to the salt mines” (Atwood 2012:5). The SF community’s reaction to Atwood’s statement seems symptomatic of a bigger issue, the instability of genre definitions in general and the concept of “science fiction” in particular. The multiplicity of definitions provided for the genre – which tend to echo the diverging opinions of those who write within/around it – complicates an attempt to define *Oryx and Crake* within particular generic boundaries. At the same time, Atwood’s refusal to accept the title of science fiction author, and of *Oryx and Crake* as a science fiction

novel, opens up a space for questioning not only genre boundaries, but also the validity and purpose of these boundaries in the first place. The novel's fluidity between the borders of science, speculative, dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction, seems to mimic the ultimate unsustainability of the dichotomic structures which are at the foundation of Atwood's future society in the novel, while at the same time putting forward Atwood's own argument about the limiting nature of genre classifications in the current literary context.

In an essay about the dystopian elements in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood provides a definition for SF into which, she claims, her works can never possible fit. She defines "science fiction as fiction in which things happen that are not possible today – that depend, for instance, on advanced space travel, time travel, the discovery of green monsters on other planets or galaxies, or which contain various technologies we have not yet developed" (2005:102). In her novels, she argues,

nothing happens that the human race has not already done at some time in the past, or which it is not doing now, perhaps in other countries, or for which it has not yet developed the technology. *We've done it, or we're doing it, or we could start doing it tomorrow.* Nothing inconceivable takes place... (*ibid* 102-103, emphasis added)

Atwood's definition of the genre seems, then, to establish a clear boundary between the possible and the impossible, and fits her own works into the realm of the possible, what has happened – is happening – can happen. The simple fact that all her non-realistic novels are set in a near, indeterminate future in no way, Atwood argues, bonds them, immediately and permanently, to the genre of science fiction. Instead, they earn the title of speculative fiction, as they are rooted in a particular socio-political-historical context.

This opinion is not, however, shared by Ursula K. Le Guin who, in 2009, in a review of *The Year of the Flood*, attempted to claim the novel and author back into the SF genre: “To my mind [Le Guin’s], *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* and now *The Year of the Flood* all exemplify one of the things science fiction does, which is to extrapolate imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that’s half prediction, half satire” (Le Guin). Le Guin, herself a renowned SF and Fantasy author, attributes Atwood’s rejection of the title to an attempt to escape being pigeonholed into a literary niche. In Le Guin’s words, Atwood “doesn’t want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto.” Canadian SF author Peter Watts had made a similar criticism in 2003, accusing Atwood of being “so terrified of sf-cooties that she’ll happily redefine the entire genre for no other reason than to exclude herself from it” (2003:4). His criticism is specifically directed at Atwood’s refusal to include *Oryx and Crake* in the realm of science fiction and her description of the genre as a source of escapism (*ibid*), which is a reflection of Atwood’s clear dichotomic demarcation between the possible and the impossible mentioned above. Le Guin and Watts’s assumption that the Canadian writer would swear off SF so she can play in the big literary leagues comes off as perhaps a little bit condescending and circumstantial. As Atwood states in *In Other Worlds*, a defense she has since reiterated in other texts, if she were writing in order to receive recognition and awards, she would have steered clear of non-realistic fiction to begin with (2012:6). For Atwood, instead, her need for a new genre distinct from SF stems from an acknowledgment of an ontological spectrum of realism, as the author establishes a clear divide between what can never transpose the literary medium (sci-fi) and what serves as a mirror, allegory or (re)presentation of a physical world outside the text

(spec-fic) (*ibid*). In her distinction, Atwood ascribes two different points of origin for both genres:

What I [Atwood] mean by “science fiction” is those books that descend from H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacled, blood-sucking Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters—things that could not possibly happen—whereas, for me, “speculative fiction” means plots that descend from Jules Verne’s books about submarines and balloon travel and such—things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books. I would place my own books in this second category: no Martians. Not because I don’t like Martians, I hasten to add: they just don’t fall within my skill set. Any seriously intended Martian by me would be a very clumsy Martian indeed. (*ibid*)

For Atwood, SF (re)presents an unattainable landscape, rooted in H.G. Wells’ deadly aliens, while Spec-Fic stems from the works of Jules Verne, whose narratives seem to fall much more within the realm of the possible. As Atwood’s non-realistic novels do not attempt to be accurate and perfect depictions of 20th century socioeconomic and biopolitical systems and practices, but instead (re)present potential and hypothetical outcomes, they would, then, constitute speculative fiction. In fact, Atwood refers to the future depicted in her novels as *a* future and not *the* future “because the future is an unknown: from the moment *now*, an infinite number of roads lead away to ‘the future,’ each heading in a different direction” (*ibid* 5). But Le Guin’s definition of science fiction, unlike Atwood’s, functions as an umbrella term that encompasses impossible scenarios as well as satirical futures. According to Atwood, “what she [Le Guin] means by ‘science fiction’ is speculative fiction about things that really could

happen, whereas things that really could not happen she classifies under ‘fantasy’” (*ibid* 6). Thus, for Le Guin, *Oryx and Crake* or Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are as much science fiction as Wyndham’s *The Day of the Triffids* or Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Le Guin’s definition of science fiction seems to signal the genre’s own formal and thematic complexity, as she merges the probable and the improbable, the submarine travels and the clumsy Martians, into one larger literary category. In fact, Le Guin’s distinction between science fiction and fantasy very much aligns with the more widely acknowledged definitions of these genres, such as the one put forth by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, in which fantasy is described as “the construction of the impossible whereas science fiction may be about the unlikely, but is grounded in the scientifically possible” (2012:1). Science fiction seems to operate, according to general criticism, within the realm of both the scientifically probable and improbable, within present and future timelines. In this context, then, Atwood’s definition appears somewhat limiting of what science fiction can represent, as it leaves out of its scope important SF texts like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* and Philip K. Dick’s “Minority Report,” which, if the work in this thesis is any indication, is not too far from becoming a reality.

This raises important questions, which may be worth exploring elsewhere, about the purpose and validity of generic definitions in the current literary and publishing landscape, as well as the qualitative value attached to specific genre categories. Atwood’s resistance to being deemed a science fiction author may perhaps not be due to wanting to win acclaim and awards – for she has both coming out of her ears – but it may signal the author’s (not so) quiet protest against a traditionalistic

form of categorizing literature that encloses and delimits the value and political significance of the text within a specific literary “box,” at the same as she works to dissolve distinctions between “high” and “low” art by exploring science fiction themes within other literary genres.

Antigravity Ray and Marshmallow Toaster: *Oryx and Crake* as a Hybrid Text

This discussion becomes especially complicated as we consider the contesting and intertextual nature of Atwood’s work, as she borrows from a multiplicity of texts, tropes and genres to create complex worlds that seem to challenge all attempts at classification. Atwood’s speculative fiction fuels and further complicates the genre debate among authors of non-realistic fiction, as it combines elements of dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives, themselves unstable generic categories that share similarities with science and speculative fiction. In this context, *Oryx and Crake* has often been compared to Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as both depict societies set in a near future that serve as satirical commentary to current sociopolitical trends.

Although *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* are considered by many critics to be dystopian novels – and here one must question whether dystopian fiction figures under the SF umbrella, as Le Guin and Watts would argue, or if it merits a category of its own as Booker defends (Monty 2006:17)² – they invariably differ rhetorically, thematically, and even more so generically, as *Oryx and Crake* seems to break apart into two narratives with interlaced but distinct features. These novels can, indeed, be categorized as dystopian narratives, as they both present a critique of existing political systems – or systems that have existed in the past – by depicting

² As noted before, the boundaries between sci-fi, spec-fic and dystopian literature are highly contested among authors and critics, some identifying dystopian fiction as a branch of science fiction (Moylan 2000), while others claim them as distinct genres (Stableford 2016). Because the goal of this chapter is not to examine the history of these genres, I refrain from addressing this debate and instead take on the interpretation of sci-fi and dystopian fiction as distinct genres.

societies set in an indeterminate future where the present sociopolitical, cultural, economic, or bioenvironmental conditions have become unsustainable and threaten the existence of the humanist subject (Monty 2006:10). However, while *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a critique of theocratic and patriarchal systems where women lose their status as subjects and become “two-legged wombs” (Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale* 1998:136), *Oryx and Crake* questions the viability of an ultra-capitalist, corporatized society motivated by profit and scientific improvement at the cost of language and culture, at the same time providing a posthumanist discussion of the human/nonhuman animal binary. Furthermore, both novels focus on a single dissident perspective, that is, on a character who is somewhat of an outsider to the society's ideology, a typical feature of dystopian protagonists also seen in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*: in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred rebels against the physically and ideologically oppressive Gileadean patriarchy by secretly engaging in a sexual affair with Nick, a member of an underground resistance movement to overthrow the regime; Jimmy/Snowman, the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, struggles to fully be a part of his surrounding social environment, as he seems unable to adopt its predominantly detached mindset, utilitarian values and amoral practices; after the flood, he becomes truly an outsider, as he is the only human survivor in a landscape where only nonhuman hybrid life forms can thrive. In this way, the ideological and sociopolitical structures of both novels are undermined by the individual's agentive discursive presence from the outset (Howells 1996:2). Once again, however, they differ as, while Offred's account is an autodiegetic one, meaning that she is responsible for narrating her own truth about the systems of oppression at play in Gilead, Jimmy/Snowman's is mediated by

a heterodiegetic narrator that provides only loose fragments of the character's life, leaving it up to the reader to interpret the significance of that information.

The relative interpretive subjectivity afforded by Snowman's outside narrator seems to be, in a way, reflected in the much open-ended thematic argument developed by Atwood in *Oryx and Crake*; for, whereas in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the female protagonist voice makes clear that the central discussion is the female body and one's embodied self as a source of political and humanist empowerment – which is emphasized by the character's ultimate liberation from Gilead – in *Oryx and Crake*, aside from a clear critique to simplistic dichotomic systems, it becomes extremely difficult to tell whether Atwood sees a way out of the unsustainable binaries that structure Snowman's bioengineered society – and, by association, our society – where humans and their culture do not have to be wiped out of history for the world to heal (and whether even history survives, for that matter). In line with much of Atwood's work, Snowman's decision to leave the Crakers at the end of the narrative resists, as Howells argues, “conclusiveness, offering instead hesitation, absence or silence while hovering on the verge of new possibilities” (1996:10).

Another point of divergence between these two narratives has to do with the way Atwood chooses to combine past and present timelines. Both narratives feature an alternating chronological structure, balancing present and past action through frequent use of flashbacks that reveal the characters' lives up until the present narrative moment. However, while Offred's memories are seamlessly intertwined in her account of her current struggle – she chooses when to relate what – the same does not happen with Snowman's, where the flashbacks, as a result of the heterodiegetic narration, create a jarring divide between past and present that cause a radical break in the narrative. This break causes the narrative to split into two distinct storylines, a

divide which is further reinforced by the fact that the protagonist adopts a different identity for each of the timelines (he is Jimmy in the past and Snowman in the present, while Offred remains Offred throughout the narrative), as well as the sudden shift observed in the cultural and material landscapes, with the decimation of human life and its systems of organization, and the obsolescence of its technological and architectural landscape. The narrative observed in the post-flood sections and the world depicted in them are so radically distinct from the pre-flood environment that one may question whether the conventions of dystopian fiction still apply here or if, instead, a new category is needed to define it – perhaps that of post-apocalyptic fiction. According to professor and scholar M. Keith Booker, post-apocalyptic fiction is concerned with the extinction of human civilization (a trope that is also used in dystopian and science fiction, which only goes to show how tightly connected these genres are), often displaying disaster scenarios where humanity has been wiped out by an environmental catastrophe, nuclear warfare, or alien invasion (Booker and Thomas 53). Booker includes *Oryx and Crake* in Sontag’s “imagination of disaster” aesthetic, identifying it as a post-apocalyptic narrative that warns against the irresponsible use of science and technology (Booker and Thomas 2009:61; Sontag 1965). The post-flood environment of the novel seems, then, to fit into the post-apocalyptic conventions, as Snowman appears as the “last man on earth” after humanity has been annihilated, attempting to survive (mostly) alone in a hostile environment, among a community of genetically engineered hybrid creatures and with little means of sustenance.

This creates, then, an image of *Oryx and Crake* as itself a hybrid generic form – a “combination antigravity ray and marshmallow toaster,” as Atwood puts it (“In Context” 2004:517) – melding two distinct genres to create a narrative that echoes its

own internal/thematic conflict. The “waterless flood,” that is, the virus devised by Crake that wipes out the majority of the human population, creates a caesura in the novel, breaking the narrative plot into two intimately connected, yet generically and thematically disparate, subplots, one depicting what Ferreira identifies as a biodystopia (2013:49), from which the second, a post-apocalyptic world, will emerge. This narrative fracture renders every existing structure and organism obsolete, eliminating all previous forms of sociopolitical organization and challenging the position of the human as the biopolitical authority. As a result, new forms of thinking and being in the radically changed landscape must be devised, something that Snowman is incapable of doing because he remains attached to the archaic structures of the pre-flood world. This binary divide echoes a fundamental problem addressed by Atwood in the novel, which is the instability of binary systems of knowledge and organization in Western cultures.

This is an entry point to what I think is the foundational concept on which Atwood builds her criticism in *Oryx and Crake*: the unsustainability of closed and unified dichotomic structures. Throughout the novel, Atwood establishes what seem like uncomplicated binaries that regulate social, cultural and biological modes and structures which confine individuals within finite systems of identification and organization, only to reveal their permeability and volatility, as subjects (humans and other living organisms) leak through the boundaries (both physical and ontological) from their assigned environments into the opposite space. In the novel, Atwood articulates and challenges binary constructs such as individual/society, human/animal, biological/artificial, male/female, privileged/dispossessed, which ultimately fall apart, as they cannot sustain themselves in a state of seeming hermetic closure. As with genre conventions, Atwood seems to work from within these dualistic systems in

order to challenge them, producing as a result what Canadian professor Sherrill E. Grace calls a “space between,” “a third way of being out of the either/or alternatives” of the systems at play in the narrative (1983:3-4). This alternative route does not require, I would argue, a radical breaking apart of these binary constructions; instead, this “space between” consists of an integration, a tying together of opposite sides into a complex and dynamic whole or, as Grace puts it, of “embodying dualities” which are interdependent (*ibid* 13).

Language plays an important role in the articulation of the tension within these binaries, as it exposes their presence and mediates the individual’s relationship with these governing structures. Grace refers to language as having the role of “recognizing and healing the polarities and divisions of a ‘cartesian hell’” (*ibid* 4). While I would not go so far as to argue that Atwood eventually solves the binary problematic – the ending of *Oryx and Crake* provides few answers as to how successfully the binaries have been (dis)solved – it seems that the dichotomic battle occurs on the level of language and discourse in *Oryx and Crake*. Language seems to have a fracturing function in the novel, as Jimmy/Snowman’s increasing linguistic and discursive fragmentation – his multiple identities and fading memories – reveal his deeper schism as a social and human subject, as he struggles to navigate his interactions and relationships with others both before and after the flood. As a “words person,” Jimmy cannot empathize with the logical and utilitarian behavior of his male counterparts, his father and Crake specifically. As the last human on earth, Snowman finds that the linguistic signs he once used to recognize and function socially have become obsolete in the new and strange post-flood cultural and material landscape. As a result, instead of enabling communication and genuine connection, language

seems to function as a source of isolation for the protagonist, gradually abstracting him from the surrounding social universe.

At the same time, Atwood provides a posthumanist discussion of gender and species binaries by articulating the body as a *locus* of identitary and political tension. On the one hand, communication and discourse function as a route through which Atwood channels her critique of patriarchal politics and female discourse within predominantly male power structures. This is particularly clear in the way the female body is defined as a volatile vessel in male discourse, the woman sometimes being stripped of her biological humanity as she is compared to animals and aliens, as well as losing her discursive agency by having her personal narrative channeled through male perspectives – a practice which Oryx seems to transgress through her surreptitiously subversive appropriation of both linguistic and bodily agency (see Chapter III). On the other hand, Atwood uses language, in articulation with the body, to question the validity of the superiority of human over nonhuman animals. The notion of the humanist subject whose consciousness and intellectual superiority demarcates him/her from the instinctual nonhuman animal is radically shaken in *Oryx and Crake*, as Atwood gives self-awareness and symbolic abilities to nonhuman (the pigoons) and humanoid genetic hybrids (the Crakers). Biology and scientific discourse become deeply entwined in Atwood's argument, as scientific initiative blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman entities, thus calling into the question the entire notion of what it means to be human.

Margaret Atwood positions herself, then, in the intermittent and fluid spaces between the binary constructions that structure the literary and sociopolitical traditions of the West, flowing back and forth between generic and thematic borders. Atwood's appropriation and adaptation of generic conventions, canonical texts and

tropes, functions as a rhetorical strategy to contest and subvert conservative patriarchal power structures, and reveals the permeability and unsustainability of Western dichotomies. In this context, the genre hybridity of *Oryx and Crake*, recalling a variety of genres and subgenres, combined with intertextual modes of reading, reflects Atwood's concern with dissolving the hard and fast barriers that restrict individual forms of being within cultural and ideological structures.

Chapter II

“Domains of Objects and Ritual Truths”: The Corporatization of the Subject and Societies of Control in the Binaries of the Pre-Flood

Economy and science are tightly connected in the pre-flood society of *Oryx and Crake*, as profit and progress feed each other in an endless loop, capital flowing back and forth from the global markets into the scientific and technological compounds. The ruling corporations are mainly concerned with developing biotechnological commodities that will, at once, improve living conditions and regulate norms and beliefs of desirable lifestyles. For this purpose, corporate institutions channel exorbitant amounts of money into labs and advertising strategies to offer the promise of beauty, youth, health and sexual potency. The job that Jimmy lands at one of the compounds, AnooYoo, feeds right into this capitalist system, as he is entrusted with writing self-help ads to promote their alternative medicines and equipment (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:245-246). The majority of the population, however, while playing a vital role as unknowing manufacturers and swayed buyers in this economic wheel, is mostly excluded from any economic gain.

The emphasis on scientific and technological progress to the detriment of sociopolitical or ethical boundaries has led Ferreira to identify the pre-flood section of the novel as a biodystopia, as she argues that it “[dramatizes] the implementation and ramifications of the widespread and frequently unethical use of biotechnologies” (2013:49). At the same time, however, this title seems to leave out the deeply marked presence of corporations as globally regulating structures. While the pre-flood environment may indeed be described as a biodystopia – especially for its depiction and blurring of the boundaries between human and nonhuman bodies – Atwood’s portrayal of such a scientifically inclined, deeply dichotomized society seems to

contain a deeper critique to the globalized political-economic structures that, echoing the contemporary conjuncture, concentrate power over government, law enforcement, consumer markets, and biotechnological ethicality, in the hands of a corporate minority whose economic and technological interests are safeguarded to the detriment of a dispossessed majority (Irwin 2009:45; Kouhestani 2012:171). Corporations appear as all-(over)seeing, all-regulating infra-structures that integrate individuals within their capitalist system of supply and demand, and distribute them within socioeconomic spaces according to their function inside this system. In this way, the pre-flood society melds features of the Foucauldian disciplinary society³ with Deleuze's society of control,⁴ to ensure the success of the corporations at the cost of the natural landscape, and the perfectibility and longevity of the human at the cost of nonhuman lives. The dominant corporate power seems to take over the landscape, absorbing and integrating individuals, human and nonhuman, into what Rosi Braidotti calls a capitalist "spinning machine" fueled by scientific advancement and economic profit (2013:58). This system of control and organization results in the deep dichotomization of the social and architectural landscapes, which is particularly visible in the deep binary division established between the compounds, the center of economic growth and home to the scientific elite, and the pleeblands, inhabited by the poor, uneducated classes.

This leads to an increasing commodification and mechanization of the individual and his/her body, as he/she becomes entangled in the webs of control and

³ Foucault defines "discipline" in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) as a set of techniques employed by the modern nation state to regulate the behavior of individuals within the social body (1995:138). A disciplinary society, therefore, employs systems and tools of surveillance and organization of the movement of the individual within specific spatial and temporal limits so as to "normalize" any abnormal behavior and better regulate society as a whole (1995:141, 184).

⁴ Deleuze's society of control is defined in his "Postscript on the Societies of Control" (1992) as a network of open, undetectable systems whose control over the individual is tightened by the invisibility of the tools and techniques of surveillance and regulation (1992: 7).

consumerism spun by the corporations and their affiliated institutions, namely the labs and the CorpSeCorps, the novel's privatized replacement for a state police force, whose acronym ironically suggests the protection, surveillance and maintenance not of the living, but of the dead, the "corpses" or the "soon-to-be-corpses" (Appleton 2011:65), the acronym serving as a foreshadowing for the future of compounders and pleeblanders alike. Oryx is perhaps the most interesting depiction of this, as she becomes a tradable, malleable, even disposable body in the hands of her handlers, but whose nature as a commodity allows her to move between the tightly sealed borders of the binary spaces. However, not only do bodies become inscribed in the corporate wheel, but language and culture are also appropriated by the scientific and corporate bodies, who manipulate and regulate the use of language to suit their purposes and market their (bioethically questionable) products. Another binary is drawn in the use of language, as Atwood establishes a divide between the "numbers people" and the "words people," the prestige of the former over the latter being reflected in the structural fracture observed within the compounds, where the Humanities institutions resemble the conditions of the pleeblands. In this context, language and "words people" have been subordinated to the sciences and "numbers people," culture and art having been reduced to advertising spots. The Arts and Humanities seem to have fallen into a state of crisis, language and literature having lost all value and eventually becoming obsolete referents in the post-flood environment.⁵

Ultimately, however, Atwood exposes the unsustainability of this dichotomized, corporately controlled, capitalist system, as individuals seem to move outside the mechanized structures set for them and begin to leak between the cracks.

⁵ The Arts/Science divide observed in the text seems to enclose a critique of the current position of the Humanities within academia. Particularly, Atwood seems to point to the decline of the value of the Humanities with the rise of the STEM sciences in many Western educational institutions, a subject that is, I think, very much worth discussing. However, for the sake of argumentative cohesion, this thesis does not go any farther in addressing the issue, as seen in Atwood's text or outside of it.

A look at the post-flood world reveals a complete dismantlement of this society and, along with it, its structures of control. The linguistic and material referents of Jimmy's world have become useless in Snowman's post-apocalyptic environment. Not only has the world changed, rendering his previous knowledge of literature and nature obsolete, his new interlocutors, the hybrid humanoid Crakers possess no knowledge of the pre-flood society, their practices and objects. Quickly, the language of the corporatized, humanist subject begins to give way to a new posthuman reality, governed by the hybrid, nonhuman Crakers.

Like Kings and Dukes: Binary Oppositions and Corporate Capitalism Before the Flood

In his *Course in General Linguistics*, linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure defines language as a system of binary oppositions where a linguistic sign gains meaning and value only when put in relation to – against – other signs (2004:70). In this linguistic perspective, a sign is defined as such only because it is not something else, so that meaning becomes the result of a system of difference: “‘cat’ is ‘cat’ because it is not ‘cap’ or bat” (Eagleton 1996:110). This binary notion influenced the structuralist argument that cultural objects/concepts can only be understood in a binary relation to other cultural objects/concepts (Culler 2002:16). Structuralism established a mechanism of classification based on the presence or absence – itself already a binary construction that tends to favor the present over the absent – of a particular feature (*ibid* 17). This notion received wide criticism from post-structuralist thinkers, for whom these oppositional structures, at the root of Western thought, represented a “closing off” of the production of meaning and subjectivity (Derrida 2005:351-352). By serving an order-imposing center, these

oppositional dichotomies set up, instead of “the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*” of concepts, “a violent hierarchy” where “[o]ne of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (Derrida 1982:41). Both Derrida and Foucault regarded this binary structure as insufficient and essentializing, functioning to create and perpetuate cultural binaries such as man/woman, rich/poor, civilized/uncivilized, white/black, which tended to subordinate the latter to the former, thus closing off meaning within unsurpassable hierarchies (Eagleton 1996:114). While Foucault argued for a relationship of interdependence instead of hierarchy, particularly at a political level, where he there would be no hierarchical binary between ruler and ruled, as the latter would have the power of resistance on their side (1978:94), Derrida called for a deconstructive move that would reveal the flaws in, and collapse, the binary, thus allowing for the creation of new concepts – the “intervals” – “that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime,” and exposing the indeterminacy or “undecidability,” and ultimately the unsustainability, I would argue, of these binaries (Derrida 1982:42).

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood seems to work from a post-structuralist perspective, as she predicates her narrative universe on binary structures that attempt to organize all sociobiological bodies into closed-off, predetermined categories which are managed and maintained by a patriarchal, exclusionary corporate system. Throughout the novel, Atwood establishes several dichotomic structures and relationships that echo each other in their distribution of individuals in relation to structures of power and of power within social and biological relationships (Farshid and Moradizadeh 2013:26). While these binaries are ideological in nature, as, for post-structuralists, “ideologies like to draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not ..., central and marginal, surface and depth” (Eagleton

1996:115), they translate architecturally into seemingly airtight borders designed to keep everyone in an assigned space, thus avoiding the dislocation of bodies or even the contamination of one side by the other. Atwood's society seems to function, as Lawn points out, as a two-tiered system (2005:390) that favors the corporately integrated (male) scientist to the detriment of an uneducated majority whose role is to fuel the global economy of consumption.

The pre-flood world of *Oryx and Crake* has become entirely regulated by a globalized, neoliberal economic system that integrates all aspects of sociopolitical, economic, cultural and even domestic life within the interests, purposes and procedures of the corporations who operate and control the systems of production and the markets of consumption. Power is concentrated in the hands of a scientific elite dispersed in compounds, scientific and habitational infra-structures funded by competing corporations. This corporatized elite fuels "a decentralised commercial culture devoted to the preservation of youthfulness and convenience" and thus perpetuates the system of economic and social inequality revealed in the compounds/pleeblands divide (Lawn 2005:391). According to Beth Irwin, this social and architectural binary is a result of and functions as a critique to the current structures of economic globalization (2009:45). The author argues that the utopian concept of a global community connected by economic markets and made more equitable and inclusive by technological progress has been replaced by a grimmer and more accurate depiction of global economy as the control over socioeconomic, political and technological structures of organization and production by a socioeconomic minority (*ibid* 44). The novel's sociopolitical and economic divide between the compounds and pleeblands seems to parallel the current political and economic relationships between developed and developing countries, as, much like in

Oryx and Crake, unregulated Western-based corporations make use of the ecological resources and labor power of Third World nations to create profit that is never channeled into the improvement of these nations' economies. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon identifies these practices as a trend of current practices of neoliberal capitalism, that result in the increasing invisibility and disposability of Third World citizens for the benefit of a few Western corporate hands (2011:4). This culminates in an extremely hierarchical power structure that ensures the safety and success of the minority through a radical exclusion of the majority from sociopolitical and economic agency. For Irwin, "[t]he myth that abundant technologies will deliver a great and unified world is disproved" in the novel, as technological might and the power that comes with it only serve the walled-in scientific elite of the compounds (*ibid* 45).

This causes the deep division observed between the wealthy compounds and the decaying pleeblands, the landscape being severed by layers of human and technological surveillance that attempt to suppress any undesired intrusion from one socioeconomic space into another. It is interesting to see the discrepant description of the compounds and the pleeblands by the elite. In one of Jimmy's conversations with his father, the latter makes an analogy between the compounds and castles:

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy's father, and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside.

"So are we the kings and dukes?" asked Jimmy.

“Oh, absolutely,” said his father, laughing.

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:28)

Jimmy’s father’s recovery of feudal titles to classify the compounds people and explain the social and architectural dichotomy to his son reveals a deep social inequality that seems to have become engrained in the social fabric of this world. The compounds appear as castles, the high walls and drawbridges replaced by a human line of defense, the CorpSeCorps agents, as well as several other technological ones, such as the fingerprint identity cards and video surveillance, and their inhabitants resemble the aristocratic elite, living like “kings and dukes” within their unbreakable walls (*ibid* 28). The pleeblands, on the other hand, are described by Crake as “a giant Petri dish: a lot of guck and contagious plasm” where the immune system of a compounds’ inhabitant’s becomes “a feast” for the disease-ridden atmosphere (*ibid* 287). While the image of the castle evokes a sense of protection and impenetrability, the Petri dish appears as an open space of experimentation and microscopic observation. In opposition to the kings and dukes who rule their homes and lands, the Petri dish is an observed and controlled environment over which a subject, the biologist, stands, with a microscope, to look at his/her cellular work. It becomes, then, a place of testing and unpredictability, but also a place of hierarchy, as the biologist can be none other than a member of the elite.

But in this binary, Atwood reveals an acute awareness of contemporary politics of division and exclusion. The pleeblands provide an accurate portrayal of life in the slums of contemporary developing countries, as the squalid conditions observed by the compounds people on their commute echoes the problems of overpopulation, poverty, lack of adequate health and public services – hospitals and police stations are completely absent from the landscape – and growing criminal violence (Marx, Stoker

and Suri 2013:187). Although Atwood provides no explanation as to how these spaces have emerged historically, the pleeblands resemble the slums that have come out of the mass migration that followed rapid urbanization in developing countries like China, Bangladesh and Nigeria (*ibid* 199). Made up of the urban spaces of the landscape, the pleeblands house the lower classes, the poor and uneducated, as well as the unwanted, “the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:27). Having been “abandoned to the masses by the elite,” in Ingersoll’s words (2004:165), they are both visually and politically chaotic. The “endless billboards and neon signs and stretches of buildings” and the “countless vehicles of all kinds” overpower the senses of the outsiders who peer in through television feeds or from the windows of bullet trains during work commutes (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:27). The “dingy-looking” and overcrowded streets also pose several biological threats: the “thousands of people, hurrying, cheering, rioting” who share the same polluted air, carrying and propagating viruses and contagions (*ibid* 27). Arranged in semi-autonomous neighborhoods, the pleeblands are loosely controlled by the CorpSeCorps agents who keep them from transposing the border to the compounds, and by the street gangs who regulate and profit off the prostitution and pornography businesses. This is clearer in *The Year of the Flood*, where the female protagonists Toby and Ren are pleeblanders whose employment is dependent on these socioeconomic structures. This type of almost anarchic organization also echoes slum life, particularly that of Brazilian favelas, where power is disputed between “non-state armed groups who control drug-dealing and use violence to enforce contracts and maintain power,” but also where, unlike the fictional pleeblands, the government has made efforts to better police these areas (Ferraz and Ottoni 2013:1). The danger afforded to pleeblands territory is strikingly obvious in Jimmy’s first visit beyond the

CorpSeCorps borders. Before leaving the compound with Crake, Jimmy is given an all-purpose vaccine to combat potentially contagious bioforms (later revealed to be an immunization against the virus that wipes out the human species) and a nose cone to filter and purify the polluted air of the pleeblands (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:287). The fear of human bodies is also visible, as the young men are transported from and to the compounds by “an official Corps car with an armed driver” and remain shadowed by CorpSeCorps agents for the entirety of their visit (*ibid* 287).

In contrast, the compounds are gated communities owned by multinational corporations to house the scientific elite and their families. They are the center of scientific and biotechnological progress, as they direct all resources towards developing cures for diseases – or developing diseases themselves, – beauty and anti-ageing products, and enhanced medical treatments where they play with both human and animal biology. At the same time, their state-of-the-art schools and labs such as the Watson-Crick Institute educate future generations of brilliant, yet apathetic, scientists, among whom is Crake, the designer of the “flood.” Without an architectural style of their own, the houses in the compounds are eclectic representations of a past that has become foreign territory for Jimmy’s generation. Jimmy recalls living “in a Cape Cod-style frame house” before moving to “a large Georgian centre-plan with an indoor swimming pool and a small gym” (*ibid* 26). Each house is luxuriously composed of “reproductions,” pieces of furniture that, like the infra-structures they fill, recall to a distant historical place, denoting what is perhaps a deliberate sense of nostalgia aimed at perpetuating the current socioeconomic divide or, better yet, a way to ignore that such divide exists by pretending that nothing has really changed. The tension between reality and the fiction manufactured by the corporations is clear in Jimmy’s parents’ conflicting opinions about the legitimacy of this type of replicated

life: while Sharon denounces the compounds' undeniable artificiality – “it was just a theme park,” Jimmy recalls, – her husband defends that everything is just “the way it used to be” when he was a kid and appreciates the safety and luxury the compounds afford them (*ibid* 27). Completely sealed off from the decomposing cities by layers of biotechnological security, the compounds appear as a bright and clean idyll amidst the dust and darkness of the pleeblands.

When Jimmy visits the pleeblands for the first time, Crake takes him to the “Street of Dreams,” the wealthier part of the city that sells the products churned out by the compounds. Jimmy is immediately attracted to the elaborate displays and enticing slogans that promise to make people's dreams of physical perfectibility true at even a genetic level. “Blue Genes Day? Jimmy read. Try SnipNFix! Herediseases Removed. Why Be Short? Go Goliath! Dreamkidlets. Heal Your Helix. Cribfillers Ltd. Weenie Weenie? Longfellow's the Fellow!”, Jimmy reads as he walks down the street (*ibid* 288). Prompted by his friend, Crake reveals that not all of these actually work – his reply “Quite a lot of it” seems to suggest a certain astonishment at the success rate of these products from Crake himself. However, the slogans are catchy enough that people “come here from all over the world” to shop for “gender, sexual orientation, height, colour of skin and eyes,” and thus keep the economy of the pleeblands turning and Crake's compound, RejoovenEsence, at the top of the corporate ladder. Jimmy, in turn, wonders if this is where his father and Ramona came to custom-order his half-brother (*ibid* 289).

In this scene, the economic wheel of the pre-flood society is revealed to be almost singled-handedly controlled by corporations. Not only do they regulate the global markets of consumption, but they also own the scientific and biotechnological systems of production. Most of the corporations' investments are channeled into

either manufacturing luxury and beautification products or developing biomedical strategies to improve and prolong life that the advertising companies then turn into life essentials. Myths of perfectibility feed into a consumerist attitude that keeps the markets functioning and the corporations profiting. As Irwin points out, the science of the compounds creates “myths of sex, beauty, and motherhood and myths about how people should eat, make love, breed, live, and dream,” – made evident by Crake’s emphasis on the genetic malleability afforded by the products and procedures developed by RejoovenEsence – and develops an “obsession with fictions” that feed the wealth of the corporations (2009:45). As a result, consumers are engaged in a system that creates its own demand by constantly marketing new and (questionably) improved products that keeps people constantly buying similar products that they did not ask for in the first place in what Sarah Appleton calls a “self-perpetuating industry” (2011:65). This cyclical movement echoes Braidotti’s criticism of global economy, as she points out that interaction is framed by the loads of goods and data circulating across the world, individuals being confronted with “multiple choices...at every step, but with varying degrees of actual freedom of choice” (2013:59). In the novel, the freedom of choice afforded to consumers is as much as what the corporations decide to capitalize on the following week. At the same time, the corporations “are locked into murderous competition for hegemony” that makes “the American ‘robber barons’ of the late 19th century look like the philanthropists many of them mutated into once they had made their killing” (Ingersoll 2004:164) and, consequently, fuels the constant reproduction and commercialization of new products. This gives rise to a climate of tension and suspicion that ultimately affects non-corporate entities (Kouhestani 2012:173) – the Happicuppa bean crops lead the smaller growers out of business and spark up riots across the globe, among which is a

reenactment of the Boston Tea Party with crates of coffee beans being thrown into the harbor (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:179) – and seeps into even familial and romantic relationships, giving rise to what Johnston calls a “corporate domesticity” (2012:18) – Sharon, Jimmy’s mother, is accused of and eventually executed for corporate treason; similarly, Crake’s father is killed, and his death is then covered up as an accident, to keep him from divulging secret information.

The increasing control of the corporations over what is available for consumption and how much of it people consume widens the gap of power between the compounds and the pleeblands. In fact, Jennifer Lawn roots the discrepancy of economic and political power between the corporately owned compounds and the anarchically organized pleeblands in a double logic of “corporate tribe” and “erratic excess” designed to eradicate the delay between desire and pleasure (2005:390-392). However, both desire and its satisfaction are manufactured by the corporations for economic and scientific purposes, as the compounds keep coming up with new beauty products, anti-ageing treatments, pills to increase libido, among others, which tend to emphasize, and engrain in the population, a concern with the functionality of their bodies and an even greater awareness of life as a purely physical and finite event. In this double logic, the corporations run and entrap the population in a never-ending, ever growing machine of consumerism where individuals become both consumers and objects of consumption. While the scientific elite and their families are allowed to live in the luxury of the compounds, sealed away from the dirt, the disease, the decrepit bodies and morals, the people down in the pleeblands serve as experimental subjects for these new scientific avenues, which they afterwards consume, unbeknownst to the fact that they play a part in their development and commercialization (Lawn 2005:391). The consumers, especially the pleeblanders, play into a double process of

ingestion/consumption, serving first as testers for the product or even as a vehicle for the dissemination of products – viruses, diseases, contagions – and then as consumers of the new products – the treatments and the cures – they have helped to develop.

In this context, corporations emerge not only as owners of production and marketing structures, but also as regulators of the social body, ideologically and biologically speaking. As corporations increasingly extend their authority over economic and state matters, the population must subject to the corporate structures and techniques of control and organization, which go from the sociopolitical gap that concentrates power and wealth in the hands of the 1% to a biological constraint and distribution of individuals throughout the socioeconomic landscape. In the novel, the corporations enact what Foucault has termed biopower, that is, they deploy a set of “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (1978:140), as they regulate and subdue individuals through a capitalist politics of consumerism and immediate satisfaction. For Foucault, the biopolitical control of the individual emerged in the 18th century as Western societies began to look at the human being as a species, and consequently, as an organic body manageable through mechanisms of surveillance and discipline (2007:16-20). This new focus on the human as a biological object of study and supervision gave rise to an “anatomy-politics of the human body” focused on the demographic control of the population, now on a mass instead of an individual scale, through “an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls*” (1978:139). A similar deployment of “power over life,” as Foucault puts it (*ibid*), occurs in *Oryx and Crake* through the techniques of surveillance and containment employed by the CorpSeCorps, the corporations’ management of their employees’ lives in terms of what education and entertainment they receive, or what profession they practice, and the rules of the capitalist market

which determine what, when and how people own and consume. This allows the corporations to control individuals at a biological level, as their bodies become fields of discovery and experimentation for the corporate scientists and outlets for the consumption for their products. Through this “controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production” (1978:141), the corporations are able to continually increase their profit and influence over individuals as consumers. At the same time, they have control of the population as a sociobiological whole: through the deployment and integration of individuals within this capitalist “machinery of production,” corporations are able to maintain the *status quo*, “guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony” between the compounds’ elite as manufacturers and the pleeblanders as testers and consumers (*ibid* 141), which is architecturally accomplished with the barrier of security that divides both spaces. Furthermore, echoing Foucault’s concept of biopower, human biology appears as an “object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (2007:16), as corporations target the bodies of pleeblanders as testing grounds and as a means of demographic control. This is evident in the corporations’ biomedical endeavors, where demand and supply are actually forced onto and spread around the population without their knowing through the development of new diseases and their treatments. After spending a few days with Crake at the Watson-Crick institute, Crake lets him in on a “hypothetical scenario” which he then reveals to be more than a hypothesis:

“Now, suppose you’re an outfit called HelthWyzer. Suppose you make your money out of drugs and procedures that cure sick people, or else – better – that make it impossible for them to get sick in the first place.”

“Yeah?” said Jimmy. Nothing hypothetical here: that was what HelthWyzer actually did.

“So, what are you going to need, sooner or later?”

“More cures?”

“After that.”

“What do you mean, after that?”

“After you’ve cured everything going.” (...)

(...) “But don’t they keep discovering new diseases?”

“Not discovering,” said Crake. “They’re *creating* them.”

“Who is?” said Jimmy. Saboteurs, terrorists, is that what Crake meant? It was well known they went in for that kind of thing, or tried to. So far they hadn’t had a lot of successes: their puny little diseases had been simple-minded, in Compound terms, and fairly easy to contain.

“HelthWyzer,” said Crake. “They’ve been doing it for years. There’s a whole secret unit working on nothing else. Then there’s the distribution end. Listen, this is brilliant. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills – their HelthWyzer over-the-counter premium brand, you know? They have a really elegant delivery system – they embed a virus inside a carrier bacterium, *E. coli* splice, doesn’t get digested, bursts in the pylorus, and bingo! Random insertion, of course, and they don’t have to keep on doing it – if they did they’d get caught, because even in the pleeblands they’ve got guys who could figure it out. But once you’ve got a hostile bioform started in the pleeb population, the way people slosh around out there it more or less runs

itself. Naturally they develop the antidotes at the same time as they're customizing the bugs, but they hold those in reserve, they practise the economics of scarcity, so they're guaranteed high profits."

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:210-211)

As Crake explains, the pleeblanders become necessary casualties of carefully planned disease outbreaks in the corporations' path to increasing their own wealth. Wealth and health flow, then, unilaterally into the compounds, the pleeblands functioning as a sacrificial ground for what is hailed as global progress and the improvement of humanity. In fact, Appleton argues that the capitalist system of *Oryx and Crake* runs on the marketing of death, "a death that compels the soon-to-be corpses to pay everything for the privilege" (2011:65), as consumers are persuaded into acquiring the products that, under the guise of progress, will kill them. In this context, the populace is integrated in a scientific-economic circuit that turns them into a doubly-purposed body that is accompanied by this type of double consumption, as they first – and unknowingly – consume the disease and then must also consume its treatment. The capitalist wheel in the novel seems, then, to distribute its people in what looks like a fordist assembly line, for the individual is both a station worker – or, in this case, the pleeblander *becomes* the station – in the manufacturing and testing of the product, and the economic outlet for the said product he/she has helped to engender. Corporate capitalism in the novel, then, to borrow Braidotti's words, "both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives" (2013:59). Prefacing Crake's plan to exterminate the human species and create a clean slate for the Crakers to develop a new, more perfect society, one may even question whether the dissemination of viruses such as the E. coli splice were, in part, also an attempt at culling human population to a more manageable number, the pleeblanders

being, in this case, the most obvious and practical choice of elimination, as they represent the “loose change” of this world (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:27).

The barrier between the two distinct socioeconomic landscapes proves to be, however, “leaky” (*ibid* 27): in spite of the seemingly airtight security systems that surround the compounds and attempt to seal them off from the infectious pleeblands, characters are able to move in and out, infiltrating the opposite field and thus undermining the possibility of a perfectly delimited binary. This is visible with Crake’s father and Jimmy’s mother, whose smaller or greater success crossing into the pleeblands can be interpreted as an act of sedition and attempt at disrupting the static status quo: while the former’s intentions can only be assumed from Crake’s account of his father’s death, it seems clear that he makes his way to the pleeblands in order to reveal corporate secrets to either a competing corporation or an anti-establishmentarian faction like the Maddaddam group, in this way fomenting his own compound’s corrosion from the inside out; however, he dies before being able to accomplish his task. More successfully, Sharon flees to the pleeblands, where she becomes involved with an animal liberation group, and in this way embodies the threat of the “other side,” but ultimately meets the fate of other corporate dissidents, death. Interestingly, both Crake’s father and Jimmy’s mother’s attempt at flowing between the boundaries is one of opening the sterilized idyll of the compounds to the contamination from the “outside” – note how the CorpSeCorps and compounds people, including Jimmy’s father, blame Sharon’s escape on either depression, her own debilitated mental state, or human persuasion from rebel groups. Both characters reveal the stifling traditionalist artificiality of the compounds, as they, especially Sharon, bust open an escape tunnel that simultaneously allows them to get out and invites other things in. In this way, these characters embody Derrida’s “undecidables,”

the concepts that “inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without ever* constituting a third term” (1982:43), as they move in between the borders and open the binary up for discussion. Although both are ultimately killed, these characters open up a space through which the novel’s biopolitical structures begin to erode, eventually collapsing with the death of the humans.

But while these characters only seem to move unilaterally, as they leave the compounds permanently to die in the pleeblands, Oryx flows in and out of the borders and fully penetrates the social tissue of both spaces, destabilizing the static binary. Much more than any other character, Oryx trumps any attempt at a simple dichotomic categorization, as she inhabits but does not originate in any these spaces. Oryx is first brought into this Western binary by “Uncle En,” a sort of modern-day slave trader who buys her and several other children from their starving families in an unnamed third world country in Asia. Her uncertain place of birth makes Oryx a wildcard from the outset, as she is not immersed into this binary culture from birth. Having thus been born outside this system, Oryx possesses a third party perspective that allows her to learn and adapt, to move in and out of different roles and, therefore, in and out of the spaces that should be barred to her. Throughout the novel, Oryx adopts a multiplicity of identities, engaging in child pornography, then as a sex slave, a teacher for the Crakers, a corporate sales representative and, finally, becoming a creational goddess for the humanoid survivors of the flood. These different roles locate her in an intermittent space, as she moves through, but never really belongs to, either the pleeblands or the compounds, at the same time denoting a strong agency in face of the socioeconomic system into which she is integrated, which most characters, Jimmy included (or perhaps Jimmy most of all) seem to lack. Interestingly, Jimmy tends to perceive her as a helpless victim, despite her clear acknowledgment to have always

done everything, the pornography, the prostitution, the Crakers' education, of her own free will. On the other hand, Oryx integrates the capitalist wheel of consumerism as a commodity, an object of consumption, and is mostly defined to her consumers by her sexuality and what pleasure she can provide them. Her tradable nature as a commodity adds to her social and physical fluidity. Oryx appears, then, as a liminal character, moving between the binary fields to undermine their stability and rearrange them, while at the same time resisting being swallowed by them, much like Derrida's "interval" (1982:43). Ultimately, Oryx's interstitial position in the binary causes it to crumble, as she plays an active role in the propagation of the virus: consciously siding with Crake's utopian desire "to make the world a better place," but unaware that his plan requires the extinction of the human race, Oryx uses her intermittent nature, her role as an "interval," to first teach basic botany and zoology lessons to the Crakers, thus building the first blocks of their identity and material knowledge (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:309), and then uses her experience in the pleeblands to market the BlyssPlus pills, thus ensuring the success of Crake's plan. As humans die, so is the binary illusion shattered.

Everything in Its Right Place: Foucauldian Biopower and Technologies of Discipline

With few to oppose them, corporations become naturalized structures of power: without a narrative account of the historical circumstances that have culminated in Jimmy's sociopolitical context, corporations appear as pre-existent and ubiquitous institutions whose power and authority stretch beyond the scientific and commercial fields into sociopolitical structures of control. Democratic governments and equitable law are completely absent from the novel and any form of centralized

rule has been replaced by the anarchic governance of the corporations that operate within and around the law without supervision from public government institutions, and compete amongst themselves, to safeguard their capitalist and commercial interests (Kouhestani 2012:172). The cyclical nature of the capitalist market is echoed in the corporations' battle for control over social, political and legal issues, as power shifts from one organization to another based on market trends, which tends to result in the increase of wealth and authority for the corporate elite to the detriment of the majority of the population, the pleeblanders, who, as mentioned earlier, become tools in this political-economic apparatus. According to Appleton, "the government is controlled by corporations," giving rise to what she calls a "Corpocracy" or "Corp(Se)ocracy" (2011:64). In fact, in line with Atwood's critique of globalized economic structures of power, democracy in the novel seems to give way to a political system of "corporatocracy" that echoes the criticism of the economist Jeffrey Sachs to the corporatized American system in *The Price of Civilization*, where, according to the author, as the American government could not respond effectively to the phenomena of globalization, ecological crisis and rise of immigration observed in the 1980s, "the instruments of federal power were increasingly handed over to vested corporate interests to be used for private advantage" (2011:48). Similarly, the governmental structures of *Oryx and Crake* seem to have collapsed as corporate influence has broken state boundaries and collected all national economies under the banner of private interest. Ultimately, then, political rule, as well as all structures of science, commerce, law, education and health, become subordinated to the principles of corporate capitalism, as power is held by corporations and deployed for the corporations.

This all-encompassing corporate system takes control of the landscape, erasing the boundaries between public and private authority as it dominates both spheres. In this merging of borders under corporate rule, Kouhestani finds a parallel between *Oryx and Crake* and political theorist Fredric Jameson's concept of "late capitalism," as he argues that Jameson's work "[helps] to provide an explanation for how the novel represents the shift in hegemonic systems that coincides with changing economic conditions from modernism to postmodernism" (2012:172). In fact, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson's concept of late capitalism emerges from Mandel's three-stage definition of the capitalist mode of production: beginning with the "freely competitive capitalism" phase and evolving into the phase of "monopoly capitalism," it culminates in the era of "late capitalism," marked by the emergence of multinational corporations, globalized markets and mass consumption (Mandel 1975:62; Kouhestani 2012:172). Jameson's critique, however, delves deeper into the relationship between the cultural (and also social, political, etc.) and the economic spheres, especially as he was concerned with a dialectical analysis of Postmodernism and not necessarily a political discussion, although Jameson asserts that "every position on Postmodernism in culture...is...an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (1991:2). The author attributes the collapse of the limits between the several fields of intervention (social, political, economic, cultural) and the merger of different types of discourse into one to a process of "aesthetic colonization" by corporate capitalism (*ibid* 18). In this context, Atwood's society in *Oryx and Crake* appears as a literary embodiment of this late capitalist phase, as all structures of power – government, law enforcement, public services – have now merged under a corporate banner that transcends national and ideological boundaries, and subjects individuals to the capitalist wheel of

consumption and competition. At the same time, as previously mentioned, this subordination of the subject to corporate rule is “less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive” (Jameson 1991:xx), as the populace is persuaded to buy and consume the products churned out by the corporations unaware of the fierce rivalry going on between the organizations behind the glossy billboards and deceiving slogans.

As national infra-structures of authority, such as a democratically elected government and public law enforcement, have been rendered obsolete, the corporations deploy the services of the CorpSeCorps to regulate social order. As the name suggests, the Corp(orate)Se(curity)Corps are a private security company hired by the compounds to patrol the borders and make sure that no individual or information leaves the compounds. However, as they function in a border territory, their authority extends to both the compounds and the pleeblands, functioning above (and ultimately replacing) the faulty and mostly absent public police and leaking from the enclosed epicenters of the corporations to the chaotic cities inhabited by the lower classes. The absence of a government is paired with a similar absence of a fair and unbiased legal organ, as the power and responsibility of enforcing the law and administering justice seem to fall onto the CorpSeCorps, which fashion the legal system to satisfy the needs of their current employers. The CorpSeCorps appear, then, as “a system of paid mercenaries...outside the reach of public interest” (Irwin 2009:45), as they enforce the corporations’ law onto every aspect of people’s lives, trading allegiance for money and, thus, feeding and profiting off of the tense competition and increasing paranoia between the corporations.

This deployment of the CorpSeCorps to protect and control the institutions affiliated with the corporations denotes the decentralization of power in this globally

connected society, as one organization must pay another to protect its interests and monitor the competition from other similar organizations which, in turn, employ their own security companies to counter the opposition's surveillance. Power is, then, scattered around the corporate landscape, shifting from corporation to corporation, but must also be shared with parallel institutions of surveillance and protection such as the CorpSeCorps, on which their continued success is dependent. This process of decentralization and dispersal of power throughout more than one governing institution is reminiscent of Foucault's take on power as an omnipresent force flowing and leaking out of all – hegemonic or subservient – types of social and political relationships:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization...; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. Power's condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoint which permits one to understand its exercise, even in its more 'peripheral' effects, and which also makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms

would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. (1978:92-93)

In the same way that, for Foucault, power appears as an interchangeable force within relationships between groups, its omnipresence resulting from its dispersal across the social and political landscape, so does power in Atwood's novel derive from several institutions, especially from the several competing corporations and the CorpSeCorps, whose power of sociopolitical and economic intervention is similar, and also, perhaps to a lesser extent, the labs and advertising departments inside the corporations, which conceive the product and persuade the buyer to consume it respectively, and even the prostitution and pornography chains, which, working from the pleeblands, provide sexual gratification to both pleeblanders and compounders, and, thus, keep the social body in line with the consumerist culture of immediate satisfaction described by Irwin (2009:45) and Lawn (2005:392). According to Foucault, "power is everywhere... because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978:93). But it ultimately finds its representation in a pervasively dominant state apparatus and the hegemonic control of one social entity over another. In the novel, the state has been replaced by the corporations, which employ the surveillance services of the CorpSeCorps, and these become the ultimate hegemonic structures of control, especially as the latter help engender an increasingly repressive and constraining sociopolitical environment.

The pervading presence of the CorpSeCorps guards across the sociopolitical and architectural landscape reveals a process of commodification and privatization of law and order, as these become tools in the hands of corporately funded institutions for the perpetuation of corporate control over public and private affairs, and are enacted arbitrarily and unrestrictedly based on the corporations' interests. The

CorpSeCorps are everywhere, especially as they occupy, as I have mentioned before, a border territory, an intermittent space that both connects and contains the fields of the socioeconomic binary, thus allowing their influence and authority to carry over both sides, ultimately superseding even those of the corporations. As a liminal presence, the CorpSeCorps agents patrol the entrance to the compounds, keeping undesired visitors and potential conspiratorial threats out of the clean, sterilized labs and the anachronistic homes of the elite. However, they also integrate a tight surveillance system that tracks the compounders' every move and contains them within their assigned lab or habitational space for fear that one of them may be working with environmental activists or competing organizations to sabotage the precious biomedical work performed at labs like HelthWyzer, OrganInc Farms or RejoovenEsence. At the same time, the CorpSeCorps maintain and regulate (but never fully suppress) supposedly illegal markets of prostitution and pornography in the pleeblands, as they satisfy the need for entertainment and sexual release of the compounders and provide the pleeblanders with an economic avenue. Despite keeping the borders tightly secured, these guards facilitate openings through which bodies trickle from one space to the other, compounders often slipping through the checkpoints with temporary passes to find sexual release in the unstable bodies of female pleeblanders.

The CorpSeCorps' containment action becomes unequivocally repressive, as freedom and privacy are violated in the name of compound security. On top of the fingerprint identity cards necessary to circulate inside and outside the compounds and the ubiquitous video surveillance screening every corner of the compounds for potential threats, CorpSeCorps agents control the compounders' personal communication and even spy on their homes posing as housecleaners (Atwood *Oryx*

and Crake 2004:54). Framing *Oryx and Crake* within a post-9/11 context, Sutherland and Swan compare the suppression of individual freedom of the citizens under the corporations and the CorpSeCorps' grasp to the "loss of civil liberties in America, cloaked under the argument that it is necessary for Americans to surrender those rights in order to achieve national security" (2009:220). Indeed, in the novel's compounds, the "national security" argument no longer holds: the corporately-controlled global markets have dissolved state boundaries, almost eliminated national economies (although not entirely, as, in the Street of Dreams scene, Crake refers to his compounds' competitors by their nationalities instead of corporate affiliations) and, with them, any sense of national or patriotic loyalty from its citizens. Instead, it has been replaced by a local form of patriotism from the compounders, many of whom will freely relinquish their freedom for a "greater good," which, in this case, is the safety and prosperity of their employers. This is evident in Jimmy's father's defense of what Jimmy's mother perceives as excessive control: after moving into the HelthWyzer compound, Sharon complains "about the tight security at the...gates – the guards [are] ruder, they [are] suspicious of everyone, they [like] to strip search people, women especially" and has become convinced that their phones and e-mail have been bugged and that the housecleaners are CorpSeCorps spies (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:54). While Sharon feels "like a prisoner" inside her own house, her husband dismisses her concerns as paranoia and employs a rhetoric similar to the one observed by Sutherland and Swan in post-9/11 political discourse, as he first justifies the excessive security measures with a recent sabotage attempt by "some fanatic, a woman, with a hostile bioform concealed in a hairspray bottle" and then pins it on a desire to be safe, arguing that it is "For *our* own food. For us" (*ibid* 54). In Jimmy's father's discourse, a form of local loyalty is combined with a manipulative rhetoric of

both self and collective safety to justify the corporations and the CorpSeCorps' involvement in people's private lives and erasure of their individual rights. At some point, he even refers to the CorpSeCorps guards as "our people" (*ibid* 27), a phrase that denotes mutual loyalty between the compounders and the men – nowhere is there mention of female guards – designated to protect them, their families and their scientific achievements. According to Hall, "the citizens of the compounds are lulled into a state of trust" and "feel no real fear toward a system that punishes only those who commit major transgressions" (2008:42). However, this reciprocity becomes a naïve illusion, as the CorpSeCorps inevitable chase and persecute anyone, pleeblanders and compounders alike, who will threaten the safety of their employers. The CorpSeCorps, then, take over and employ the legal and law enforcement systems under the guise of keeping the compounders safe, but are, in fact, looking out for their own and their employers interests. At some point, Crake even suggests that they cover up crimes, namely the murders of corporate dissenters, in order to keep the corporations' reputations intact. Crake's father's death, for instance, is ruled an accident, but Crake believes and implies that he has, in fact, been murdered by corporate agents in order to keep their secrets from being exposed (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:183). Later on in the novel, Crake also implies he has gotten rid of several scientists who had refused to work with him in the BlyssPlus project – like Crake's father, they all "accidentally" fall off a pleebland overpass (*ibid* 299).

This becomes even more evident as the CorpSeCorps agents carry out criminal investigations in suspicion of conspiracy and corporate espionage, which, in the novel, are equated with terrorist acts, such as the case of the crazy woman who manages to carry a contagious bioform into the HelthWyzer compound, and then rule on and enact punishment without juridical regulation. Their legal reach is revealed in

their investigation of Jimmy's mother's disappearance. Sharon, a former microbiologist, flees the HelthWyzer compound after struggling with the ethical reasoning behind the biogenetic experiments that manipulate, splice and mutilate nonhuman animals for the sake of human progress, among which is Jimmy's pet rakunk Killer (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:61). Because of her status as a former scientist and wife to a HelthWyzer headhunter, she is immediately suspected of corporate espionage, thus integrating the rather arbitrary and biased legal system headed by the CorpSeCorps. Immediately after her escape, CorpSeCorps agents swarm Jimmy's now fractured household for "what coded messages she might have been sending, what information she may or may not have downloaded and taken out with her" (*ibid* 62), going through their belongings, interrogating his father, the guards at the checkpoint, and anyone else who may have spoken to her as she prepared to make her escape, coaxing Jimmy into revealing anything about his mother's behavior that might be construed as treacherous or subversive. For the rest of Jimmy's adolescent and young adult life, he is under the microscopic gaze of the CorpSeCorps, as they read his mail, track his whereabouts and interrogate him several times, playing on the assumption of a motherly bond to lead them to the criminal, and do not give up until they have finally found, apprehended and executed Sharon in live television, as they so often do, no trial needed. In the absence of a properly functioning legal system, the CorpSeCorps play judge, jury and executioner.

This climate of permanent surveillance and physical containment of the population is reminiscent of Foucault's "disciplinary societies," except that, in *Oryx and Crake*, the modern nation state has been replaced by corporate entities and their CorpSeCorps goons. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the evolution of mechanisms of punishment in Western penal systems throughout the modern age,

noting a transition from the ritualistic scenes of public torture and execution, designed to expose the crime and annul it by enacting violence onto the body that perpetrated it – the mutilation and disfigurement of one’s physical frame functioning as a means of penance as the “body [produces] and [reproduces] the truth of the crime” publicly (1995:47) – to systems of enclosure, observation and examination of deviant – and consequently criminal – subjects in prison, where the purpose is to reform or “normalize” the individual, that is, to make him/her conform to the dominant social norms (*ibid* 184). This process of normalization of deviant behavior – which, in the novel, are individuals and bodies who are unable to conform to and reside within the limits of binary constructions and, therefore, challenge its ideological and ontological boundaries – is echoed in the institutional structures of schools, hospitals and factories. These perform what Foucault calls the “art of distributions” of bodies through which individuals are assigned specific spaces according to task and rank in the disciplinary machine which, on one hand, allows them to more efficiently perform their duties within the economic structures they inhabit, and, on the other hand, facilitate observation and control on the part of the state (*ibid* 141). This process of normalization – read conformity to the dominant norms – would be achieved through disciplinary methods of observation examination. For Foucault, discipline becomes, then, a technology of control and correction through which a politically dominant group enacts its biopolitics onto a conforming majority. This seemingly “increasing leniency of punishment” (*ibid* 22), with the replacement of violence and torture with imprisonment, observation and a set of behavioral instructions, would give rise to a “disciplinary society” based on instruments of regulation and inspection.

The disciplinary society of *Oryx and Crake* relies on a twofold process of “normalization,” which involves the pervasive system of surveillance and control of

the CorpSeCorps, on one hand, and the entertainment and advertising media, on the other. With their CCTV system, spies inside and outside the walls of the compounds, and the technologies of identity verification at the borders, the CorpSeCorps perform the “art of distributions” by ensuring that people are kept in their assigned spaces: the scientific elite inside the compounds and the rest of the population in the pleeblands, the “numbers people” in the labs and the “words people” in Humanities schools like the Martha Graham Academy. Any attempt at breaking this organizational pattern is perceived as a threat to public safety and punished with persecution and death on live television. Every physical structure in the novel’s society functions like a Foucauldian prison, as the characters are under microscopic observation from the policing forces of the CorpSeCorps with only a vague awareness of the level of inspection taking place, as these security measures are not too invasive or even visible at times, the video surveillance going mostly unnoticed within the landscape, and are usually perceived by most compounders as necessary to their protection and safety from “the other side, or the other sides...Other companies, other countries, various factions and plotters” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:27). Bentham’s *panopticon*, a circular prison where the prisoners’ cells are arranged around a central well from which the guard can at all times observe the inmates and inmates are being observed by each other, which Foucault identifies as the ultimate architectural structure of discipline (1995:200), while not physically achieved, seems to have been ideologically accomplished in Atwood’s fictional society, with the CorpSeCorps functioning as the single supervisor over every inch of the landscape, like the prison guard at the center of the *panopticon*, observing and monitoring any type of deviant (like Sharon’s) behavior. Interestingly, however, the panoptic society in *Oryx and Crake* is achieved through a combination of concealed and transparent action: while Foucault’s

disciplinary society follows Bentham's *panopticon* in its full disclosure of the techniques of control – as the success of this society depends on the individual's complete awareness that he/she may be observed at any moment, without the certainty that he/she is actually being observed (1995:201) – the technology of discipline in Atwood's novel is enacted almost invisibly, as the population, especially the compounders, are only vaguely conscious of the system of surveillance that they integrate. In this society, the individual is constantly visible to the structures of power that observe and control them, but these are hardly noticeable to them, except for a few characters such as Sharon and, to an extent, Jimmy, who gradually become conscious of their state of permanent exposure (Hall 2008:42). In this way, the individual "is seen, but he [sic] does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault 1995:200).

The concealment of surveillance, however, is accompanied by a complete disclosure of punishment which, in the novel, instead of functioning as a disciplinary tactic, is turned into a means of entertainment. Executions of criminals and corporate traitors are transmitted live on television and websites such as "hedsoff.com" and "alibooboo.com," and there is usually a strong spectacle component associated with what once was the enactment of the law. As teenagers, Jimmy and Crake have become fed up with watching sports-event commentary and instead spend hours witnessing the deaths of dissenters and criminals halfway across the world:

There they could see enemies of the people being topped with swords in someplace that looked like China, while thousands of spectators cheered. Or they could watch alibooboo.com, with various supposed thieves having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds, in dusty enclaves that

purported to be in fundamentalist countries in the Middle East....Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com were the best; they showed electrocutions and lethal injections. Once they'd made real-time coverage legal, the guys being executed had started hamming it up for the cameras.

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:82-83)

Whereas public tortures and executions originally had a moralizing and disciplining effect (Foucault 1995:43-45), in the novel's society the violent display of the deviant, and therefore criminal, bodies, functions as a source of entertainment for the compounders who watch the executions in the safety of their homes when they are bored. This public disclosure of punishment can, in fact, be understood as a means of dissimulated discipline by the CorpSeCorps, as airing the executions of criminals and dissenters will instill a sense of safety and trust in the compounders (Hall 2008:42), and make potential dissenters think twice before going against them or the corporations they work for. On the other hand, spectators become integrated into this disciplinary technology, as they play the double role of objects of observation (by the CorpSeCorps technologies of security) and subjects who observe others. Having become so engrained in people's daily activities, this type of observation becomes a task they must perform, the task of legitimizing the CorpSeCorps' actions. As Hall points out, the compounders begin to "turn their gaze upon others out of habit" (2008:45). Even Jimmy as a child makes use of these technologies of observation by hiding mini-mikes around the house so he can eavesdrop on his parents' conversations (2008:56). In this way, the observed population perpetuates this system of concealed surveillance and disclosed punishment by becoming itself an instrument of observation and control.

Punishment as entertainment also feeds into the consumer culture of this society, as spectators are provided with a virtual network through which they can access live feeds of events and immediately know what is happening all across the world. Along with the public executions, Jimmy and Crake watch live surgeries, animal snuffing and even assisted suicides with a “this-was-your-life component: family albums, interviews with relatives, brave parties of friends standing by while the deed was taking place to background music” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:83). The spectacle component is once again essential to ensuring the maximum viewing experience: the more violent the executions or the more melodramatic the suicides, the more successful and wide-reaching become these live feeds. At some point, Jimmy reflects on the different quality levels of the several webcasts, as feeds like “alibooboo.com” usually provide low quality coverage of stonings of women in the Middle East, as filming is prohibited there, whereas “shortcircuit.com” and “brainfrizz.com” show real-time coverage of electrocutions and lethal injections, where you “[can] watch them [the prisoners] making faces, giving the guards the finger, cracking jokes, and occasionally breaking free and being chased around the room” (*ibid* 82-83). The population consumes these images in much the same way that it consumes the commercials and shiny slogans of the beauty and anti-ageing products manufactured in the corporate labs, and they immediately become an essential commodity towards their happiness. According to Hall, this consumption of violent imagery evolves into a voyeuristic fixation, as people “become obsessed with observation – overseeing one another and devoted to observing the behavior of others” (2008:45). To capitalize on the people’s voyeuristic desires, the corporations legalize these types of public broadcasts and, as Crake suggests, even stage their own executions to feed the viewers’ desire for drama and violence. At the same time, this

voyeuristic intent seems to further isolate the characters: although Jimmy and Crake spend many hours together as teenagers, they often play videogames and watch the blood and gore of surgeries and executions with their backs turned to each other, gazing into individual computer screens. Like the prisoners in Bentham's *panopticon*, the boys inhabit the same infrastructure, but their interaction is mediated by the two-dimensional feed coming through the computer screens, much in the same way that the prisoners in the *panopticon* inhabit the same prison but are separated from each other by the walls of their cells (Hall 2008:46).

This voyeuristic obsession with the mutilation and death of people and animals denotes a commodification of the body, as it becomes a useful and subservient object in the capitalist wheel of consumption. Embedded in the websites streaming live executions are "spot commercials, for things like car batteries and tranquilizers, and logos painted in bright yellow on the background walls" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:83), which seem to reduce the human body to a consumable good. Combined with the globalized consumer culture of this corporate society, the Foucauldian technologies of discipline and surveillance – the cameras, the news feeds, the physical distribution and separation of individuals across the landscape – create a new ontology of the human as what Foucault calls "Man-the-Machine," that acts upon and turns the individual into a biological entity, a "body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (1995:136). By displaying the individuals' bodies as commodities to satisfy the consumers' needs – the use of the female body for the pleasure of the male voyeur, for instance – the corporately controlled media create an emotional and moral detachment between the observer and the observed, the consumer and the consumed, as living matter becomes

a source of capital (Braidotti 2013:7). In this context, the observed bodies become less than human, even less than alive.

Chapter III

A Carnivorous Relationship: Eating(,) the Animal and the Female Body

By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of a soldier’ (ordinance of 20 March 1764).

(Foucault 1995:135)

In Foucault’s disciplinary societies, the individual’s body becomes the object and target of the regulatory structures and devices of control of whoever holds power (*ibid* 136): institutions such as schools, prisons, hospitals and the military, have a “normalizing” function, as they employ techniques of observation and examination to create “docile bodies” that “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (*ibid* 136). This concept bounds the individual in a political and also economic context, as his/her body must be both productive and subjugated, that is, it must be a useful source of labor and force of production “caught up in a system of subjection” that shapes and subordinates the body to the needs and objectives of the dominant governmental structure (*ibid* 26). In this way, discipline divests the body of any power over itself, as it increases its economic utility and, consequently, increases its political obedience (*ibid* 138). The individual’s body becomes, as a result, an object – a product – of the political and economic structures in which it is integrated.

In Atwood’s novel, the body becomes the corporations’ prime target for scientific and economic exploitation, serving as a biological ground for

experimentation, manipulation and consumption. This society is deeply marked by a utilitarian and scientific mentality that perceives all life forms, human and nonhuman, as mere cells and tissue that can be studied and manipulated in a lab to create new cosmetic products and biomedical procedures to enhance human anatomy and improve human lifestyle. The body appears as purely biological material, detached from consciousness or individuality, that can be shaped, transformed and integrated within capitalist market structures to consume and be consumed by others. Individuals become trapped in these globalized market structures as sociopolitical agents – in this case, they are not so much agents as they are subjected to the structures of control and distribution of a corporately owned political system – but also as exploitable organic matter that functions as the root and testing ground of progress. This denotes the ontological shift in the understanding of the human pointed out by Foucault from “man-as-body” to “man-as-species,” which has an opposite effect to that of the surveillance techniques of the disciplinary society: while the technology of discipline promoted the individualization of bodies to enable their surveillance, what Foucault now calls “technology of power” or “biopower” has a massifying effect that perceives the human and the human body as a set of biological processes “such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population” (2003:242-243). This biopolitical approach allows for the control and organization of the population at a mass scale, as well as their relationship with other species and their surrounding environment. Once regarded as an individual, the human has now become integrated into a larger body which is both biological and political and must be, therefore, controlled through scientific and political means.

This conception of the individual as a biological object of experimentation denotes an increasing commodification of the individual, as his/her anatomical,

biological and genetic makeup are organized within the rules of demand and supply of the corporate markets. According to Braidotti, “advanced capitalism reduces bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources” and subjects them to testing and monitoring techniques such as “DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection and iris or hand recognition” (2013:62). These techniques also function as surveillance strategies and sterilization devices in Atwood’s novel, as they mediate the characters’ movements across the landscape, as well as their contact with each other and nonhuman animals. At the same time, this process of biological reification works to break the barriers of distinction between human and nonhuman species, which become similarly rated commodities within the structures of corporate capitalism. In *Oryx and Crake*, all organisms are, then, fair game: the biomedical compounds splice human and nonhuman genetic material to develop cutting edge procedures and products to prolong human life and profit from it in the process. The pigoons project is a good example, as scientists implant human cells into pigs to grow human organs for transplants, thus turning the pigoons into living organ incubators (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:22). Other genetic experiments include the splicing of the DNA of several animals to create hybrid – some of them useful and others a product of scientific curiosity – creatures such as the spoad/gider (a combination of spider and goat DNA) and the rakunk (a combination of rat and skunk DNA), one of which Jimmy later acquires as a pet. In this context, global economy becomes, according to Braidotti, post-anthropocentric, as the human is perceived as a scientific and economic commodity, in much the same way as animals are. The bio-genetic approximation of human and nonhuman animals ultimately leads to “if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction

between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them” (Braidotti 2013:63).

However, in *Oryx and Crake*, the reification of the human body and its increasing scientific and economic identification with nonhuman organisms becomes, paradoxically, a means for species amalgamation and species differentiation. On one hand, the splicing of human and nonhuman animal cells, observed in the pigeons project for instance, seems to reveal a process of equalization between human and nonhuman animals at a biological level, whereby human and animal biology are no longer perceived as fundamentally different, but as possessing similar traits which allow the latter to be used with and for the benefit of the former. The use of pleeblanders as guinea pigs for new products and the dissemination of newly manufactured diseases as a means of population control also suggest that human biology has somehow become a malleable and useful resource, much like that of nonhuman animals. At the same time, this relationship seems to reinforce the hierarchical bond between human and nonhuman animals, as the human subject still holds authority and possession over the animal’s body without an acknowledgement of their biological and biomedical interdependence. In the novel, there is still a clear attempt from the scientific elite to keep the borders between human and nonhuman species tightly sealed, despite the equalizing effects of the corporate markets. The species hierarchy is rooted in a traditional humanist intellectual and identity ontology that perceives humans as superior to nonhuman animals due to the possession of unique mental faculties such as reasoning, language and, above all, an individual consciousness, which allows the scientific elite to continue to play with the genetic traits of pigs, goats, rats and chickens, all in the name of science and progress and all for the benefit of the human species. In this way, the pre-flood corporatocracy

of *Oryx and Crake* perpetuates a system of difference that tends to value the human, as body and mind, over the nonhuman animal, perceived as inferior and, therefore, expendable.

The ontological differentiation between human and nonhuman animals – and, by association, male and female subjects – suggests a larger problem that ultimately pervades the entire sociobiological landscape of the novel: parallel to her critique to the regulatory and exclusionary structures of globalized corporate economy, Atwood seems to find herself at odds with the legitimacy of the liberal humanist subject as the “measure of all things” in contemporary interspecies and gender relations. In his analysis of posthumanist thought, animal studies expert Cary Wolfe argues that the classical humanist interpretation of the subject as a self-reflexive individual with unalienable rights is, in fact, “replete with its own prejudices and assumptions” (2010:xiv), masking an anthropocentric, racist and patriarchal politics of exclusion centered on the subject as exclusively human, white and male (Braidotti 2013:24). Wolfe and Braidotti’s criticism echo Derrida’s own critique of theoretical discourse on subjectivity in his interview “Eating Well.” In this text, Derrida identifies the tendency in Western ontologies and epistemologies to continue to link subjectivity to “Man,” in this way producing a naturalizing discourse that closes off subjectivity to all other bodies, and reduces them to the status of objects (1991:109). As Derrida states, the perpetuation of an anthropocentric subjectivity represents “a closing off – the saturating or suturing – of identity to self, and a structure all too narrowly fit to self-identification” (*ibid* 108). This definition opens up a space for a system of binary differentiation that closes all nonhuman, non-white and non-male bodies off to and outside of the spectrum of subjectivity and positions them as “others.” This otherness is, according to Braidotti, a negative otherness: these bodies are different because they

do not meet the biological requirements to embody the concept and role of “subject” (similar to saying that an animal is not a subject because it does not master human language). In Braidotti’s words, individuals that are not male, white and human “are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” (2013:15).

Jimmy’s pre-flood society functions on the basis of this principle of negative difference and otherness, as biopolitical power is reserved for the male scientific elite only. In the novel, not only is there a process of “otherness” turning animals into expendable bodies, but this process is also directed towards women. As this chapter will show, the hierarchical divide between humans and animals is reproduced in the corporate domestic environment to perpetuate a patriarchal structure that attempts to enclose and suppress the female body by constricting it within a set of traditional gender roles. The female body is perceived as unstable and leaky, a volatile vessel that may break at any point and contaminate the pristine space of the corporate laboratory, and needs, therefore, to be contained. This practice denotes a gendering of the human/animal divide, which reduces both the animal and the woman to a similar status as an abject – and object – “other.” This is particularly clear in Atwood’s treatment of Jimmy’s mother figures, as both Sharon and Ramona are closed off from the labs to perform their maternal duties inside the household. Oryx, on the other hand, seems to resist this system of difference, as she makes use of her sexualized body to subvert the prevailing male order.

Little Spoad, Who Made Thee?: Decomposing Biopolitical Boundaries by Eating the Animal

Jimmy's first memory is of looking at a large bonfire at the age of five. Standing in a muddy field in November, the boy watches as diseased cows, sheep and pigs brought into the compound by competing agents burn in a pile of limbs and flames, "yellow and white and red and orange" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:16). The sight of the burning animals causes conflicting feelings in Jimmy. Believing the animals to be alive, he fears that they may be suffering and feels somehow responsible, as he was not able to rescue them from such an agonizing end. As he stares into the bonfire, he thinks he can "see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes" (*ibid* 18). At the same time, Jimmy becomes engrossed in the light show, which reminds him of a Christmas tree on fire, and jumps onto his father's lap in order to see it better. He keeps expecting an explosion just as the ones he sees on television, but it never comes. In this way, there is an element of spectacle to the bonfire: it is not only about getting rid of diseased animals, it also becomes a source of entertainment for Jimmy and the compounders; families gather around it to watch the fire show, while the family men discuss compound security and policy issues. The animals are already dead by the time they are thrown into the pyre, and their bodies could have been done away with inconspicuously. Instead, the compounders choose to turn the animals' cremation into a public spectacle, which opens up a space for a social gathering and also makes the danger these citizens have escaped and the economic blow they have been dealt visible and unforgettable – so much so that it becomes imprinted in Jimmy's mind as his first memory and Snowman still recalls it in the post-apocalyptic world. This adds a ritualistic component to the event, as the bonfire sterilizes the tainted environment by reducing

the biological threat to charred bones, and also has a reassuring effect on its viewers, who are reminded of the need to protect themselves from the “big bad wolf” blowing at the foundation of their homes from the outside.

There is a clear fear of contamination from outside of the compounds’ limits. The walls surrounding this environment and the CorpSeCorps’ heavy security are not only aimed at keeping people and corporate competition out of the compounds’ business, but also at preventing any biological threat from invading its clean, unpolluted air. The compounds function as artificial Edens uncontaminated by the dirt and diseases of the pleeblands. Here, the only infectious bioforms allowed to exist are the ones created by the compounds’ scientists themselves and disseminated outside the Compounds’ walls. For this reason, when the scientists detect a dangerous bioform inside the diseased animals, they must contain it at all costs and keep it from infecting the compounds’ pure air by burning the bodies of the animals. The animal bodies in this scene appear as a means through which corporations carry out their wars for political and economic power: both a consumption product and a test subject for biomedical experiments, livestock are a valuable commodity in the compounds and, as a result, are targeted by the competing corporations, that use them as containers for the dissemination of contagious and deadly diseases inside the compound and the depletion of their supply. Animals become, in this context, a threat to the cleanliness and safety of the compounders, as they help spread contagions across all animal life forms, human and otherwise. As Justin Johnston points out in his analysis of *Oryx and Crake*, animals become “a diseased threat to human self-possession” (2012:87) and must therefore be eliminated from the clean, contained space of the compound and the lab. Perceiving animals as a biological threat allows

the compounders to feel more indifferent towards them and, therefore, to be more inclined to put them to death, an idea I examine below in more detail.

The weaponization of the animal, the turning of the animal into an object of biological and economic destruction, establishes a binary opposition between the human individual and the nonhuman animal through which subjectivity becomes closed off to the latter. In his Foreword to Wolfe's *Animal Rites*, professor and author W.J.T. Mitchell states that human identity is established always in opposition to the animal (2003:xii). In other words, the human is human because he or she is not an animal. This negative definition of human and nonhuman animal closes off both categories to any possibility of permeation between biological and ontological boundaries and gives rise to what Wolfe later calls a speciesist discourse that favors the former to the detriment of the latter (2003:6). In this way, human and nonhuman animals are kept within a very rigid system of classification and differentiation that prevents either one from accessing the opposite side and whatever possibilities it may afford. Within this system, the concepts of subject and object – the acting entity and the entity that is acted upon, respectively – also become closed off categories inaccessible to the outside other. As Wolfe points out, Western humanist thought “[takes] for granted that the subject is always already human” (2003:1). Keeping within the boundaries of the human/nonhuman binary, the designation of “human” and “humanity” is contingent on the sacrifice of the animal as the opposite “other” but also as the animalistic root inside the individual which he/she must eliminate in order to become a rational, superior entity. In this context, the nonhuman animal tends to be inscribed in spaces that prevent it from ever achieving subjectivity: in the “domesticated economy of the pet,” the philosophical sphere as a non-thinking, unfeeling mechanical body, and in psychoanalytical thought as the monstrous “other”

(*ibid* 5). As Wolfe puts it, the animal is “the one who can’t really ever be a subject at all” (*ibid* 5) and must, as a result, function as an object through and against which the human perceives and defines himself/herself. In Atwood’s society, the animal “other” is framed as a disease or contagion, an outsider, abject body that breaches geographical and biological boundaries, carrying the virus both into the corporate scientific space and into the body of the subject. This fear of the weaponized animal body makes visible the porosity of human biology, which is vulnerable to contamination by the animal “other” via the consumption of the animal’s meat.

In *Oryx and Crake*, animal biology represents, then, at the same time a threat to human safety and a rich source of biocapitalist product, turning animals into abject bodies, but also valuable commodities. The hermetic space of the lab reproduces an anthropocentric hierarchy that positions the scientist, human, male and white, as the source and wielder of biopolitical power. In this context, the scientist becomes a “creator” in a very Christian sense: through the splicing of DNA from multiple lifeforms, he produces and then names new and unique (and often completely pointless) species, which will go on to coexist, mate and eventually take over the natural landscape in the post-flood narrative. Crake embodies the novel’s conception of the corporate scientist perhaps best of all. He takes on the role of the sovereign – one that is biopolitical and later becomes a god-like entity – as the narrative progresses. Not only is Crake responsible for the fabrication of a new humanoid species later identified as the Crakers (in an homage to their creator), but he also dominates human biology wholly and completely by regulating the pleeblanders’ reproductive capabilities and ultimately dictating who will survive the “flood.” Manufactured by Crake at the Paradise labs with the intent of reproducing the mating tendencies of the bonobo chimpanzee in the human, the BlyssPlus functions, among

other things, to protect its consumers against sexually transmitted diseases, to increase libido and prolong youth; most importantly, the pill functions as “a sure-fire one-time-does-it-all birth-control pill” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:294), a chemical compound which renders anyone who takes it immediately sterile and later is revealed to contain a deadly agent that causes the mass extinction of the human species. Crake embodies, then, the ultimate corporate biopolitical sovereign, as he determines, through the dissemination of the BlyssPluss pill and its inoculation, who is allowed to live, reproduce and prosper, and who must die. Echoing here Foucault’s definition of biopower, Crake very literally “make[s] live and let[s] die” (Foucault 2003:241). Crake’s actions also raise important questions about consent and reproductive rights, which, for the sake of brevity, will not be discussed in full in this thesis: the sterilizing agent disseminated within the BlyssPluss pills is never made public to the consumers, so that they are invariably castrated without their knowledge or permission. The BlyssPluss functions, then, as the ultimate form of institutionalization and mass biopolitical control: the reproductive organs of the consumer have become tools for demographic control, first sterilizing and then eventually killing them, so that the consumer’s body has become fully integrated into the corporation’s biocapitalist structures of control. Ultimately, Crake’s control over the human population becomes, then, somewhat of a divine power, as he extinguishes the humans and, in this process, produces a new world for a new species, the Crakers. This notion is cemented in the novel by Crake’s insertion into the Crakers’ mythology as one of their two deities, the most important one, as he has created the world and the people who now inhabit it.

In this context, then, any form of life, human or nonhuman, becomes indebted to the corporate scientist. In particular, the hybridized animal forms like the rakunk, the spoad and the pigoon, owe their existence to scientific curiosity and capitalist

endeavor. Because profit and progress are so intimately interwoven, the interior of the lab reproduces the hierarchies observed in the corporate markets across the narrative's geopolitical landscape, with the animals residing at the bottom of the chain of power or, as Johnston calls it, the tree of life (2012:11). In the same way that the pleeblanders have become integrated within the corporate-scientific structures of power as oblivious test subjects, as analyzed in Chapter II, their bodies serving as spaces for the incubation and dissemination of deadly bio-agents, the animal becomes, in the lab, a body that is completely and absolutely subjected to the desire and power of its human owner.⁶ In his essay "The Animal that Therefore I Am," Derrida goes back to Christian mythology to define this hierarchal relationship between the human and the animal, pointing out that "God destines the animals to an experience of the power of man, in order to see the power of man in action, in order to see man take power over all the other living beings" (2002:386). As mentioned above, a similar creationist discourse takes place in the corporate-scientific spaces of Atwood's novel, where the animal is always already an object in the hands of the human subject. Without any form of legislative or political protection, the animal's genetic makeup and, ultimately, the animal's life, belongs to the scientist, who is free to maim, splice and kill in the name of profit and progress. Animal life becomes patented property of the scientists and the corporations for which these scientists work. As Johnston states, "[e]ach invention, no matter how hybridized, must constitute a patented, proprietary species" (2012:79). Bodies no longer belong to themselves and, as a result, life becomes commodified and trivialized. In one of Snowman's childhood flashbacks, we learn that Jimmy had once owned a rakunk, and are given a history of this animal's inception:

⁶ I am here equating the status of the pleeblanders with the status of the animal, which will play into my argument about the increasing commodification of biological life, which blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals.

The rakunks had begun as an after-hours hobby on the part of one of the OrganInc biolab hotshots. There'd been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God. A number of the experiments were destroyed because they were too dangerous to have around – who needed a cane toad with a prehensile tail like a chameleon's that might climb in through the bathroom window and blind you while you were brushing your teeth? Then there was the snat, an unfortunate blend of snake and rat: they'd had to get rid of those. But the rakunks caught on as pets, inside OrganInc. They hadn't come in from the outside world – the world outside the Compound – so they had no foreign microbes and were safe for the pigeons. In addition to which they were cute.

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:51)

Here we see that life – the production of life, the right to exist and live – becomes a game in this corporately-owned world: scientists “fool around” with the animals’ DNA simply for the sake of curious experimentation, giving rise to hybridized lifeforms which afterwards have to be destroyed because of the danger they pose to human life, like the toad/chameleon hybrid that can “blind you while you [brush] your teeth” (*ibid*). Feeling like God, the scientist creates and extinguishes life as he sees fit, incurring in a form of corporate artificial selection, wherein the animal is only allowed to live if it is either harmless, in this case becoming a household pet like the rakunk, or it can function as a profit-making tool, such as the pigoon, an abnormally large pig spliced with human DNA that works as an incubator for human organs. Animals become, then, “useful tools for enhancing human well-being,” but only as

“degenerate samples of life for experimenters, and not as fully constituted human beings” (Johnston 2012:86).

The privatization and commodification of the animal’s genome, and in turn its life, has become so integrated within the novel’s scientific and capitalist structures that there is no longer a concern for the animal’s well-being or even its capacity to suffer. As Derrida points out, the well-being of the animal has become wholly subordinated to “the service of a certain thing and the so-called human well-being of man” (2002:394). Similarly to the pleeblander, the animal has acquired an object status, serving to satisfy the needs – alimentary, scientific, medical, economic – of the enclosed, privileged minority of the compounds. In the pre-flood world of Atwood’s novel, the animal is at the same time a test subject, a food group, a medical tool and a bioweapon. The ChickieNobs present a radical, though perhaps not so far-fetched, representation of what Derrida had diagnosed in “The Animal that Therefore I Am” as “the reduction of the animal...to production and overactive reproduction...of meat for consumption” (2002:394). In a tour of the “wonders” of the bio-tech labs of the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute, the corporately-owned location where Crake develops the virus that wipes out humanity, Jimmy is introduced to the ChickieNob, the company’s most profitable creation. The ChickieNob is described as “a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:202). At first, Jimmy does not understand what he is looking at, and is confused when Crake reveals that the bulblike installation is in fact a web of live chickens. Aside from its head and the “mouth opening at the top” through which the animal is fed, the chicken possesses no other biological features. This allows, the scientist responsible for the ChickieNob informs

Jimmy, for a quicker production of chicken breasts – “a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised” (*ibid* 203) – without the need for growth hormones and at a much cheaper price than any of their competitors. Faced with the disembodied living form in front of him, Jimmy shares in the shock and horror of the reader, as he states “This is horrible...The thing was a nightmare” (*ibid* 202). However, as Crake and the other female scientist explain, the ChickieNob is the perfect form of meat production: not only does it compete in the marketplace as the cheapest, equally tasty chicken takeout franchise, it also wards off any criticism from “the animal-welfare freaks” who may argue for animal cruelty (*ibid*) 203. Because the ChickieNob has no brain functions other than digestion, assimilation and growth, it does not think or suffer, thereby justifying the less than human conditions to which the animal is subjected.

Here, the female scientist reproduces a traditional humanist argument used in Western cultures and philosophy to explain the difference between the human and the animal, and to justify, in the 1800s, the use of animal vivisection as a scientific and medical practice, which is the now scientifically disproved belief that animals cannot feel pain (Mayer 2008). The knowledge that animals suffer and feel pain, as Johnston remind us, functions on one hand, to bridge the ontological gap between humans and animals, as it introduces a common affective bond “that makes animal life similar enough to human life to arouse an ethical response,” but, on the other, makes the difference between the human and the animal all the more evident, “[situating] animal life as dissimilar enough from human life to justify the treatment of animal suffering as if it is less-than human” (2012:77). Both Derrida and Johnston identify a deeply anthropocentric, humanist way of thinking about the relationship between human and nonhuman animals, which resides in the need for the animal to in any way resemble

the human, in this case to share the ability to feel physical pain. The animal becomes more like the human because it can feel pain, in this way making us more accountable for its life. This notion establishes, once again, a form of negative difference between the human and the animal: the animal is inferior to the human because it does not possess human qualities. The opposite is also true: the human is not an animal because it possesses qualities and abilities that the animal does not. In the Watson-Crick laboratories, however, any moral ambiguity is dispelled by the erasure of the biological traits that allow the animal to feel pain, in this way pushing it farther and farther away from the spectrum of human resemblance. In fact, with no face, eyes, beak or limbs, the chicken can no longer be recognized as a chicken, or a living animal for that matter, in this way allowing scientists and consumers to perceive it as less than alive. At the end of the tour, even Jimmy begins to cede to Watson-Crick's capitalist acumen: having initially compared eating a ChickieNob to "eating a large wart" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:203), Jimmy now considers that perhaps "as with the tit implants – the good ones – maybe he wouldn't be able to tell the difference" (*ibid*). Later in the narrative, we find Jimmy as a ChickieNob convert, gobbling chicken wings and breasts from a bucket, his integration within the anthropocentric structures of corporate power complete.

In this context, the mutilation and commodification of the animal's body is justified by the rules of corporate capitalist markets which rate the life and well-being of the animal as inferior to that of the human, in this way functioning to "cover up" and decriminalize the violence and cruelty inflicted on the animal. For Johnston, this unequal relationship between the human and the non-human animal in the lab reflects an attempt at "re-mapping 'core...humanity' within a larger 'evolutionary' narrative of branching hierarchical speciation" designed to perpetuate the traditional order of

humanity at the top of the tree of life (2012:73). The biotech laboratory functions simultaneously to disrupt the natural evolutionary chain and to perpetuate anthropocentric hierarchical structures. On one hand, we witness this form of corporate artificial selection, where the hybrid or genetically modified animal like the pigoon, the rakunk and the ChickieNob, represents a radical break with natural evolution, as each experiment increasingly distances the animal from its original genome, to the point where, like the ChickieNob, the animal no longer resembles a living thing. Species evolution becomes dictated by market demand and profit gain. In this way, the lab resembles an artificial womb that gives birth to the hybrid lifeforms that will ultimately replace the species from which they derive – note that Snowman’s landscape is punctuated by wolvogs, rakunks and pigoons, but no naturally evolved species is ever mentioned.

On the other hand, the biotechnological experiments perpetuate what Derrida calls “carnophallogocentrism,” which he discusses in both “Eating Well” and “The Animal That Therefore I Am” as the privileging of the human and the masculine in discourse and meaning, so that all other nonconforming bodies, namely the nonhuman animal and the woman, are excluded from the right to speak and, consequently, the right to subjectivity (1991:114). While the gender implications in carnophallogocentrism will be examined in more detail later in this chapter, here I want to stress the relevance of this concept in human/nonhuman relationships. The predominance of the male human subject in discourse results, Derrida tells us, in a violent and cruel homogenization of “animals” – emphasis on the plurality of the word as recognizing distinctions and uniqueness between species – into “*the* animal,” a generalization that completely eliminates any subjectivity that the animal – singular animal – may have (2002:400-402). In his commentary on Derrida’s work, Wolfe

reiterates this idea when he says that “the Word, *logos*, does violence to the heterogeneous multiplicity of the living world by reconstituting it under the sign of identity, the *as such* and *in general* – not ‘animals’ but ‘*the animal*’” (2003:66). The amalgamation of animal identity into one single indistinct species group – the animal which is animal because it is not human – allows for the emergence of a “sacrificial structure” in Western discourse by which “Man” can only achieve material transcendence by killing off or disavowing the animal, “the bodily, the materially heterogeneous, the contingent” (Wolfe 2003:66; Derrida 1991:113). Violence against the animal, the killing off of the animal, become, in this way, justified by a superior human endeavor, resulting in what Derrida calls the “non-criminal putting to death” of the animal (1991:115).

This same anthropocentric sacrificial structure is reproduced in Atwood’s novel to justify the killing of both the animal and the pleeblanders, whose bodies, while physically extricated from the enclosed spaces of the compounds’ labs, are also subject to similar experimental procedures and forms of population control (see Chapter II). The homogenization of the animal pointed out by Derrida and Wolfe extends to the human species as well, erasing any subjectivity that is not white, male and able-bodied – and does not live in the compounds. In this way, any body outside of the carnophallogocentric spectrum becomes an animal or animalized other.

As corporate capital and carnophallogocentrism become increasingly enmeshed, with life acquiring the status of an object or commodity, the boundaries between human and animal difference begin to wear away. Atwood complicates the seemingly simple and airtight traditional humanist hierarchy by subjecting both human and animal bodies to the same biopolitical and biocapitalist rules that make both “Man” and “Animal” “objects and targets of [biocorporate] power” (Grosz

1994:116). The commodification of both human and nonhuman bodies threatens to collapse both species and individual identities under the same banner of corporate capitalist consumption, in this way completely erasing the possibility of a non- or post-anthropocentric subject. Rosi Braidotti shares a similar concern in *The Posthuman*, where she claims that “bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting between them,” a position that “ultimately unifies all species under the imperative of the market” in a negative form of what Braidotti calls a “pan-human bond of vulnerability” (2013:63). In *Oryx and Crake*, as Johnston points out, “the corporations treat life as an undifferentiated force, represented by a totalizing tree truck [sic] that gathers all species into a single vital family, marketplace and laboratory” (2012:79). In this context, in the same way that the diseased cows are killed and burned on a bonfire in front of little Jimmy, enacting a process of both ecological and psychological purification of the compound, so are the bodies of the polluted and diseased pleeblanders subjected to similar forms of elimination. Stripped of any right over their bodies, biologically and politically, those who live outside of the clean, privileged spaces of the compounds have become individual and massive sites of biocorporate experimentation. The pleeblanders have become disposable bodies.

One of the sections of the novel where the crumbling of biopolitical boundaries becomes apparent is Jimmy’s introduction to the pigoons. More than any other animal form present in the novel, the pigoon destabilizes the notion of a clear biological distinction between human and nonhuman animals, as this hybrid creature harbors, in its genome, in its stomach, human genetic material. In a visit to his father at the OrganInc Farms labs, a young Jimmy comes across and eventually develops an

affective bond with the pigeons. Described as “pig hosts” for the production and maintenance of these human organs, the pigeons are seen by their scientist-creators as extremely valuable test subjects and profitable medical devices, as they provide a legal alternative to human “cloning for parts” and “baby orchards” in the process of prolonging human life for those with financial means to acquire an endless source of genetically enhanced, virus-resistant “spare parts” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:23). The pigeons function, essentially, as organic incubators for the sick, old and dying wealthy citizens. As a result, copious amounts of money go into making sure these creatures are protected “in special buildings, heavily secured” (*ibid* 25) from corporate competitors who may attempt to steal or damage the new technology, and activist groups who regard genetic manipulation and animal experimentation as a violation of God’s design of natural life. In order to see the pigeons, Jimmy has to wear a biohazard suit and face mask, and wash his hands with disinfectant soap so as to not contaminate the animals with any external bioform (*ibid* 26). The pig, commonly perceived as a filthy animal, becomes, in this pristine biocorporate environment, a highly sanitary being, an almost sacred creature that must be protected at all costs from any potential harm.

This overprotective behavior toward the pigeon may seem to come into contradiction with, on the one hand, the animal’s life purpose – which is to reproduce human organs and then die – and, on the other, the anthropocentric tradition reproduced in the novel’s biocorporate labs. In fact, the pigeon is apparently treated better than the pleeblanders, whose lives represent only a number in a demographic scale. However, the procedures to keep the pigeon safe, healthy and sheltered from outside threats is not brought out of respect for the animal’s life, nor is it residual empathy for a common genealogical branch (for the pigeon is, after all, part pig, part

human), but instead it represents a capitalist move to protect the company's investment and product. After reaching full growth, the pigeons are kept on life support so they can continue to produce as many human organs as possible, and, when they have successfully fulfilled their role as organic incubators, they are put to death and their meat is used to feed the OrganInc Farms employees. In this way, the pigeon's value as a commodity, as observed with the ChickieNob, determines its treatment by the scientists.

The relationship between the scientist and the pigeon, which stands here for the "animalized other," reproduces the hostage relationship examined by Derrida in "Eating Well." The relationship between the hostage and his/her/its taker, Derrida explains, is not simply one of possession over the life of the other, but also of recognition and responsibility over that life (1991:112). The hostage appears, as the pigeon appears to the OrganInc Farms scientists, as someone – in this case, something – kept against their will, whose biopolitical personhood is violated, but that the scientists must also protect and keep alive in order to achieve their goal, the ransom or, in the case of the pigeon, the profit. As Derrida points out, "[t]he subject is responsible for the other before being responsible for himself as 'me.' This responsibility to the other, for the other, comes to him, for example...in the 'Thou shalt not kill' (*ibid*). What is important to point out in Derrida's theory is that this responsibility towards the other requires the recognition of the other as an entity with consciousness, and that our subjectivity is in part constituted because of the presence of this "other" (*ibid*). The subject is defined by *différence* or alterity, meaning that the self is defined always in relation to the "other" (*ibid* 100). For Derrida, the self always has a responsibility to answer to an "other": "It is a singularity that dislocates or divides itself in gathering itself together to answer to the other, whose call somehow

precedes its own identification with itself, for to this call I can only answer, have already answered, even if I think I am answering ‘no’” (*ibid* 100-101). At the same time, however, this responsibility to reply to the other empowers the latter, as it implies the acknowledgment of his/her presence, in this way erasing the negative difference that previously determined the other’s inferior stance. We observe here a process of displacement of the subject from the center of biopower, which opens up a space for questioning the place and nature of the liberal humanist subject in relation to nonhuman lifeforms.

Derrida is here responding to the traditional humanist “grammar of the subject” which has denied the “other,” in this case the animal, the ability to speak, as well as reduced the subject to a unified “who” that excludes the “what” or “which” usually attributed to the animal (*ibid* 101). More importantly, Derrida is critiquing philosopher Martin Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, which denies the possibility of an animal subjectivity by setting it into opposition with the human subject (*ibid* 108). For Heidegger, the animal has no existence outside of itself, like a “man enshrouded, suffering, deprived on account of having access neither to the world of man that he nonetheless senses, nor the truth, speech, death, or the Being of the being as such” (*ibid* 111-112). While the human possesses *Dasein* (being-in-the-world) and *Mitsein* (being-with), making him aware of himself/herself and aware of and accountable to the other, animals possess no self-aware consciousness, so that any duty that we might have towards them is immediately erased. In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood reproduces this traditional binary discourse in the biocorporate setting in order to critique the long anthropocentric history of Western culture and point out the flaws in the system. Atwood’s narrative suggests that such a divisive and exclusionary biopolitical and discursive structure cannot possibly work and that concepts like subjectivity need to

be reworked to respond to the current emergence of the fractured voices of “others,” others that are neither male nor white, and that may not even be human. In Atwood’s novel, the dissolution of the boundaries between the liberal humanist subject and the “other,” between the human and the animal, becomes particularly evident in the author’s treatment of the pigoon.

Oryx and Crake seems to play out Derrida’s “hostage” situation in a couple of different ways that begin to call into question the human/animal divide. While there are definite traits of a hostage relationship between the scientist and the pigoon, with the scientists caring for and keeping the pig alive, the pigoon is never recognized as a conscious presence in the laboratory. Derrida’s concept of responsibility is here turned into self-interest: the scientist must only keep the animal alive for as long as it can fulfill its function and produce profit; once it stops generating organs, it becomes eligible to be killed and eaten. Once again, Atwood’s scientist enacts a form of “non-criminal putting to death” of the animal wherein the death and eating of its body becomes justified by, on one hand, the fact that the animal has been treated well, or as well as humanly possible, and on the other, by the fact that the animal is no longer needed.

Jimmy’s interaction with the pigoons, however, is markedly different from the scientists’, and it incites a deeper reflection on Derrida’s discussion of self-consciousness and subjectivity. As a child who can never really connect with those around him, Jimmy immediately empathizes with the pigoons, as he acknowledges a shared sense of imprisonment and powerlessness. In the pigoon, Jimmy does not see an irrational animal that will soon be put to death, but a trapped, passive creature who, like him, is permanently detached from his socioenvironmental space. Watching the small pigoons in their pens, he relates to the way these creatures are both inside and

outside the human sphere, whose human DNA deems them valuable hybrid living commodities and their animality deems them less than human. Jimmy thinks “of the pigoons as creatures much like himself” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:24) and forms an affective bond that suggests a psychosocial identification between the boy and the pigs. He is quick to regard the hybrid animals as his friends (*ibid* 26) and immediately assumes that the “pigoonlets,” as he calls the small pigs, will not harm him, as they recognize him as one of their own. He goes so far as to ponder the possibility that these animals can think. Looking at the adult pigoons in their pens, Jimmy believes he can see reason and intent in their eyes, “as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later” (*ibid*). There seems to be a sort of recognition or sense of familiarity between them at this point, prompting Jimmy to momentarily put himself in the pigoons’ place and to acknowledge that these animals share with him more than just genetic material. After the flood, trapped in the Paradise Dome, Snowman once again thinks that these creatures have developed enough of an intellect to plan a strategy to kill him (*ibid* 271). In the post-flood landscape, the human, Snowman particularly, has been relegated to the bottom of the biological hierarchy, now ruled by the hybrid animals. The pigoon, a transgenic species designed with a very practical purpose and once kept under strict confinement, has become the predator and the human, Snowman, its prey.

Here, we begin to see the anthropocentric hierarchical structures of biopower begin to crumble: the traditional humanist distinction between human and nonhuman animal based on the latter’s lack of a rational, free-thinking mind and inability to produce human language, is here questioned by the fact that the pigoons appear to have highly developed brains, being able to communicate with each other (inciting the assumption that they have developed their own language) and to recognize the human

as a biological threat. In the pigoon, we witness the extrication of the animal from a philosophical tradition of object status and onto-biological inferiority, evolving as “autopoietic systems that elude the control of their supposed ‘creators’” (Mitchell 2003:xiii). Mitchell suggests that we learn to look at and think of animals as “humanimals,” hybrid lifeforms which no longer conform to the traditional conception of “the animal,” but instead refuse the human/animal binary (*ibid*). The animal in the novel seems to have become perhaps more than animal: the pigeons – the animal, the other – take over the landscape and redesign the rules of survival and Jimmy/Snowman, the last man on Earth, reverts to a position of “animalized otherness,” not only with the pigeons, where he essentially becomes food, but also with the Crakers, where his biological makeup ejects him to the outskirts of the new hybrid world order. The animal’s nature as more than animal, perhaps more close to the human, leads us, in turn, to question the nature of the human subject himself/herself. If the animal is no longer only animal because its biology has been tampered with, then can we still say that the novel’s humans, whose genome has become so malleable and easily controllable, are still fully human?

The Jimmy/pigoon relationship in Atwood’s novel becomes, then, an important literary and philosophical space for thinking about species identity, in particular for questioning the traditional carnophallogocentric discourse of Western culture and devising new forms of subjectivity that reject a hierarchical, speciesist binary that excludes not only nonhuman, but also human, non-white, non-male individuals from biopower. The crumbling and dissipation of the biocorporate dystopia in *Oryx and Crake* seems to suggest an opening up, as opposed to the traditional closing off, of the subject status to the “animalized other,” to the “disposable other,” as a way to address and do away with the binary structures that

organize Western thought and culture. In fact, the last few years have witnessed an increasing focus on questions of subjectivity, anthropocentrism and speciesism in materialist and environmentalist philosophies. Two philosophical strands that have focused on the relationship between human and nonhuman subjects are New Materialisms (see Coole and Frost 2000, Grusin 2015) and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) (see Bogost 2012, Morton 2013), which have picked up on the environmental and ecocritical discussions of the Anthropocene⁷ to argue for a shift of subjectivity onto nonhuman, and even nonorganic, entities, in this way displacing the Anthropos from the center of biopolitical power and allowing for the emergence of new forms of subjectivity outside of the human sphere. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* appears, then, at an important moment in literary theory of ontological and epistemological questioning of the place of the human, socially, politically, economically, biologically and ecologically, in the world.

Jimmy Eat Woman: Corporate Domesticity and the Animalization of the Woman

Eating takes on an important place in the biocorporate setting of the novel, as it reproduces and disrupts the narrative's biopolitical structures and hierarchies examined thus far. *Oryx and Crake* is punctuated by references to and scenes where characters eat, where eating becomes a metaphor for more complex relationships between subjects and bodies, between human and nonhuman, man and woman. In fact, as we shall see, the process of eating, in particular of eating meat, functions, along with the corporate structures of surveillance and containment, to reify, consume

⁷ The term "Anthropocene" has been used in recent years to refer to the global impact of human activities onto the Earth's geology and ecosystems.

and suppress the female body, thus positioning her outside of human subjectivity with the animal.

Jimmy's childhood memories are marked by scenes surrounding eating, with eating functioning to regulate his understanding of the world around him and, especially, of the domestic space he inhabits. An early instance where consumption of meat comes into play is the bonfire scene analyzed earlier in this chapter. When little Jimmy watches the bodies of the cows and sheep burning in the bonfire, one association he makes is that of eating meat: the smell of charred flesh and burning reminds Jimmy of his father's barbecues in the backyard and later his father equates the dead animals with "steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:18). The smell of the animals' burning hair triggers two domestic memories, his father's backyard barbecues and the one time little Jimmy had cut off his own hair with his mother's manicure scissors and set it on fire with his mother's cigarette lighter (*ibid* 17). The event of the bonfire is later brought up again during a Sunday breakfast. In all instances, the burning animal and the eating of the animal's flesh become directly linked with the domestic space, reproducing scenes of "family time" and opening up the hierarchical structures of yet another closed off environment to the scrutiny of the reader. The association of the burning cow with Jimmy's father's barbecues and Sunday breakfast give the reader a look into the domestic relationships going on in the protagonist's household. These traditional American activities immediately invoke the image of a Western white affluent nuclear family, with the father acting as the head of and provider for the household. This is further noted in the breakfast sequence:

"Why were the cows and sheep on fire?" Jimmy asked his father the next day. They were having breakfast, all three of them together, so it

must have been a Sunday. That was the day when his mother and his father were both there at breakfast.

Jimmy's father was on his second cup of coffee. While he drank it, he was making notes on a page covered with numbers. "They had to be burned," he said, "to keep it from spreading." He didn't look up; he was fooling with his pocket calculator, jotting with his pencil. (*ibid* 19)

It is interesting to note that Jimmy's ability to remember the day of the week reveals a domestic routine that reproduces traditional social hierarchies that position the white male at the center of power within the corporate home: not only is Jimmy's father not usually home for breakfast (here lies the assumption that he must be elsewhere, at his job), but when he is, he is busy working, "making notes on a page..., jotting with his pencil" (19). Jimmy's mother, on the other hand, is associated in the narrative with the kitchen and cooking: this is the space she inhabits for most of Jimmy's memories of his childhood, and her categorization as a "good" or "real" mother is determined by whether or not she makes lunch for him, or pays attention to him. We learn that Sharon is a former OrganInc Farms employee and that, just like Jimmy's father, she had been a scientist devoted to the pigoon project, where her job was to "to study the proteins of the bioforms unhealthy to pigoons, and to modify their receptors in such a way that they could not bond with the receptors on pigoon cells, or else to develop drugs that would act as blockers" (*ibid* 29), and that she would have quit to spend more time with her son, a theory that Jimmy finds suspicious as she never really shows much affect for him. In this way, Sharon's identity within the narrative is determined by her role as a mother and caregiver within the household. After the flood, Snowman still

has a clear image of his mother...sitting at the kitchen table, still in her bathrobe...She would have a cup of coffee in front of her, untouched; she would be looking out the window and smoking...As a rule there would be no lunch ready for him and he would have to make it himself, his mother's only participation being to issue directions in a flat voice...She sounded so tired; maybe she was tired of him. Or maybe she was sick. (*ibid* 31)

As a young boy, Jimmy has been educated to perceive his mother's behavior as abnormal, so that he interprets it as some form of emotional detachment or illness that makes her act differently from other mothers, and he often tries to bring out a more "motherly" and caring side by attempting to make her laugh, often to no avail (*ibid*). Sharon's status, in the narrative and in the household, is then solely determined by how well she can play the role of devoted housewife and mother, a role that she is ultimately unable to fulfill.

Sharon's domestic role denotes a larger biopolitical web that entangles the domestic space and corporate capital within a patriarchal reproductive system that presents masculinity as rational and uncomplicated (and therefore superior) and femininity as an unstable force that needs to be contained and sealed lest it contaminate the surrounding pristine space of corporate science. The space of the biotech lab is completely dominated by the masculine body, while the female body is pushed aside, excluded from the space of biopolitical and capitalist control and confined to the household. As Johnston points out, reproduction, motherhood and domesticity become collated into a naturalized concept of the woman as mother, "which depoliticizes domestic labor as a biological extension of maternal nature" (2012:89). Pushed out of the professional sphere, the woman's biopolitical role in the

corporate society is always already determined “as outside and prior to the formation of political questions” (*ibid*), and becomes, in this way, almost inescapable.

The domestic space appears in the novel as another closed off and hermetically sealed environment controlled by the structures of corporate capitalism. Like the labs and the compounds/pleeblands borders, the household is integrated within a system of biopolitical surveillance that blurs the lines between the private and public spheres, so that the private interior of the family – and the members of that family – becomes the property of the corporate institution that set it up in the first place. We see several instances in the novel where surveillance comes into play. Jimmy alludes to the compound’s gardeners really being spies for the owners of the compounds. According to Jimmy, not only are they there to observe the family, but they have also set up listening and recording devices all around the house. Atwood’s extension of the biopolitical structures and devices of control into the domestic sphere creates a network of interior environments easily penetrable by the corporation, where private becomes public and personal becomes corporate property.

The boundary dissolution between interior and exterior, private and public, in the novel’s biocorporate society brings to mind French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s discussion of “societies of control.” In his “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” Deleuze detects in the twentieth century a “generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure,” in particular in the domestic space, as he states “[t]he family is an ‘interior,’ in crisis like all other interiors” (1992:4). This “crisis,” Deleuze argues, is symptomatic of the “society of control,” which has evolved from the Foucauldian “disciplinary society”: instead of containing the body in an enclosed structure, the society of control moves outward into a web of entangled open systems that, through the use of surveillance tools like the hidden cameras and microphones in

Jimmy's house and the CorpSeCorps' ubiquitous, yet not always visible, presence, confines the individual even further while giving him/her the sense of freedom. In a society of control, "the corporation is a spirit, a gas," an invisible, all-encompassing structure that controls "masses, samples, data, markets" (*ibid* 5). Later in an interview, Deleuze gives the example of the highway as one such system of the society of control: "You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and 'freely' without being confined while being perfectly controlled" (2007:327). Whereas in the disciplinary society the individual is physically and geographically linked to its structure of control – the assembly line in the factory, the prison cell, the hospital room – the society of control provides a sense of physical freedom, allowing the individual to move around and across systems and spaces, but in fact perfectly tracking his/her every movement.

Interestingly, *Oryx and Crake* does not seem to fully realize the society of control, but instead reveals a combination of discipline and control to achieve the illusion of freedom described by Deleuze. Indeed, the narrative reproduces the structure of the society of control in its depiction of the biopolitical landscape as a network of permeable, violable interiors that are made both private and public by the overarching authority – the "spirit" or "gas" – of the corporation, whose structures of surveillance keep tabs on markets and laboratories, but, most importantly, have inserted themselves into the domestic existence of the compounders. At the same time, however, the feeling of freedom afforded this privileged population is a limited one, as there is a clear awareness and acknowledgement of the presence of borders that cannot be crossed. The individual must move through and across biopolitical spaces that are simultaneously closed off and vulnerable to external invasion. While

entangled in the same corporate network, the labs, the home and the pleeblands remain distinctly separate spaces whose borders are heavily policed against a potential leak or spill from one side into another, and that can only be crossed by “interstitial” or hybrid bodies like Oryx’s. The illusory freedom of the highway is, then, absent, as the citizens integrate more or less willingly the cages they inhabit: leaving one’s interior, be it the lab, home or even the vast interior-exterior of the pleeblands, is dangerous because it can expose the individual to biological threats, so it is best to stay in the relative safety of the interior. The invisibility of the society of control is replaced in Atwood’s novel by a sort of hypervisibility motivated by a fear of contagion and disease between spaces, which is put into place in order to achieve a similar purpose of control. In Atwood’s corporate society, then, this visibly limited freedom of movement and action becomes “marketed” as an individual desire for safety instead of a corporate maneuver for global control.

In this context, the domestic space becomes literally linked into the corporation to create what Johnston calls “corporate domesticity” (2012:83). The same hierarchical system of control used to manage the relationships between humans and animals in the laboratory is reproduced in the household to manage the characters’ sociopolitical roles in the family, engaging, as we have seen above, a traditional patriarchal structure that positions rational and “uncomplicated” masculinity as the source of authority and imbues the woman with a set of culturally produced, pre-established maternal duties. Johnston defines corporate domesticity as the set of “social regulations employed within the bio-tech compounds that are, in turn, exported to the global pleeblands as biotechnological products and prosthesis” (*ibid* 84). While I am not entirely sure we can call the power structures set in place in the pleeblands as “domestic” – Atwood establishes a striking contrast, as we have

seen in Chapter II, between the sterilized and enclosed nature of the compounds with the polluted and seemingly anarchic set up of the pleeblands – we do observe the extension of corporate structures of organization, focused on the (re)production of bodies of capital onto every single sociopolitical environment in the novel. It is especially important to note the way in which the domestic sphere, the household and consequently the familiar relationships reproduced in its interior, fall under the authority and control of the corporation, so that not only does the private become public, but also the social and even the biological networks established in the domestic space – between man/woman, adult/child, husband/wife, mother/son, father/son – become entirely regulated by the corporation.

As discussed above, this regulatory action is achieved physically through the use of permanent and ubiquitous surveillance tools, but also through a recreation of a patriarchal social structure. This allows the corporation to protect its product and capital by dispelling any instance of corporate espionage and dissidence. As Johnston states, “[t]he biotech compounds seek profit by regularizing social desire, ensuring a patriarchal and humanist construction of the marketplace” and, I would add, of the family (2012:89). This is evident in the fact that even Jimmy engages in a sort of unwitting corporate surveillance: as a teenager, he hides “mini-mikes” he has put together in his Neotechnology class around the house in order to spy on his parents’ private conversations and intimate moments, which he then reenacts to his colleagues at school, grossly exaggerating his representations of “Evil Dad” and ovaries-bursting “Righteous Mom,” in an attempt to become popular (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:56). Jimmy is aware that his actions represent “a major piece of treachery against them” and even sometimes feels guilty (*ibid* 60). However, a capitalist mindset leads him to continue to put on these shows for the kids at school: the more

he acts out his hyperbolic version of his parents' lives, the more applause and popularity he gains. The relationship between Jimmy and his parents and Jimmy and his friends becomes dominated by a set of capitalist market rules of demand and supply: the kids "[egg] him on" to satisfy their need for a new puppet show (demand), so Jimmy sells them a version of his family's life (supply) in order to gain social capital (profit). In this instance, we observe the way in which the corporation has found its way into familial and social relationships, and exerts "hegemonic control not only over new product inventions, but also over the domestic ordering of family structures" (Johnston 2012:80).

In the ever confined, ever accessible space of the home, the woman becomes almost completely consumed by these structures of "corporate domesticity," on both a sociopolitical and even a biological level. As mentioned above, the patriarchal system set up in the corporate society of the compounds completely rejects any female presence within the biotech labs, which become a site for the proliferation of male authority, thus marking the domestic space as inherently female. This sociobiological structure echoes Elizabeth Grosz' analysis of traditional western discourse on gender in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, where she states that "[t]he private sphere remains sexually polarized insofar as sex roles, especially reproductive roles, remain binarily differentiated" (1994:15). This corporate society promotes, then, the "discursive colonization of female bodies as the embryonic core of domestic norms" (Johnston 2012:91). This is visible with Sharon, Jimmy's mother, but made even more evident and inescapable with Ramona. Ramona is first introduced to the reader as a lab technician and a friend of Jimmy's father, and is described as a "tech genius" who "talked like a shower-gel babe in an ad" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:25). However, as with Sharon, she is immediately pushed out of the lab environment and

sent off into the domestic sphere once she marries Jimmy's father, where she becomes a housewife and, ultimately, a mother.

Once again, marriage is equated with motherhood and domesticity. Sexual reproduction, in turn, becomes associated with bodily volatility and leakage, in this way calling for the containment of the female body. As Johnston puts it, "the maternal body is reduced to the image of a corporately owned egg sealed and sterilized by a patriarchally controlled domesticity" (2012:90-91). This impulse to enclose the female body denotes yet another concern with contamination: the female body is an over-productive and leaky vessel always in danger of spilling out and must, therefore, be sealed off, kept away from the clean space of the lab. This fear of a "female infection" reproduces, again, a traditional patriarchal discourse that has for a long time represented the female body "as frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control" (Grosz 1994:13). While masculinity is equated with logic and reason, the female body is "judged in terms of a 'natural inequality'" as being "weaker, more prone to (hormonal) irregularities, intrusions, and unpredictabilities" (*ibid* 14). In this biocorporate society, the female body becomes completely reified, as it is described in terms of internal biological functions and bodily temperatures. As Jimmy notes, masculine physiology goes unaddressed, as "men's body temperatures [are] never dealt with" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:17), while the female body is perceived as "mysterious, important, uncontrollable" (*ibid*) and is defined by what goes on under the collars, as Jimmy's father loosely explains that "[w]omen always get hot under the collar" (*ibid* 16), thus making them more incomprehensible and difficult to control. As Grosz states, "Here, the specificities of the female body, its particular nature and bodily cycles...are regarded as a limitation on women's access to the rights and privileges patriarchal

culture accords to men” (1994:15). In fact, Sharon’s body is often described in terms of its temperature: one minute she is “hot under the collar” and needs to “cool down,” and the other she is “not so hot” (*ibid* 24). As Johnston points out, the female body is figured as a “humid space” that is simultaneously mysterious and penetrable “that can only be safely assimilated if it is ‘collared,’ clothed, colonized, or otherwise ‘dealt with’ by corporate domesticity” (2012:88). In this way, the woman becomes reduced to a series of complex and incomprehensible physiological responses and identified in the biocorporate context of the narrative as strange and potentially infectious bodies that must be confined, contained and suppressed from the “manly” and “clean” space of the lab.

The reification of the female body positions the woman in the same discourse of otherness previously observed with the animal. Woman and animal are figured in the narrative as, on the one hand, proprietary biologies that belong to the corporate network, and on the other, dangerous, unstable and leaky bodies which threaten to contaminate the clean corporate space and must therefore be expelled from the biopolitical order. As Johnston states, they constitute “[h]ot, permeable bodies [that must be] burned up and expelled because they were always already too warm and too full of violent, revolutionary creativity” (2012:89) to fit into the tightly controlled corporate structure. This results in what Johnston calls “a distinctly gendered conceptualization of the human/animal divide” (*ibid*). Femininity and animality become conflated into one same concept of difference that positions the woman and the animal at the bottom of the anthropocentric, patriarchal chain of biopolitical authority. As a result, these bodies are pushed out of the narrative via domesticity or death. Sharon and Ramona’s retreat into the home after marriage can be seen as a way to sterilize the biotech lab in order to prevent the porousness of these bodies to spread

outward to other products and inventions, in the same way that the diseased cows and sheep are burned at the bonfire in the beginning of the narrative. This identification of the woman with the animal as similarly dangerous and disposable bodies is depicted in the empathetic bond developed between Sharon and Jimmy's pet rakunk Killer. The product of a hobby of no consequence, and with little scientific or capitalist value, the rakunk is ejected from the lab as yet another disposable body and relegated, like Sharon, to the domestic sphere as a house pet. Interestingly, the pet rakunk is gendered as a female animal, thus further consolidating the woman/animal identification. Both become, in this way, prisoners to corporate domesticity and the only way to escape it is to further extricate themselves from the corporate-scientific environment by crossing the border onto the anarchy of the pleeblands. So, when Sharon escapes the compound, she takes Killer with her "to liberate her, as...she will be happier living a wild, free life in the forest" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:61).

Another way in which Atwood further establishes an identification between the woman and the animal is through the act/process of eating. The narrative is punctuated by scenes where eating, in particular the eating of meat, becomes the element that ties the animal to the woman, the woman to the home, the home to the corporation. As we have seen above, Sharon's maternal quality is associated, in Snowman's memories, with meal times, especially lunch, which she often failed to prepare for him, thus denoting her inability to be a "good" mother. (In fact, Sharon's inability to fulfill her domestic role reveals the first signs of the character's resistance to conform to the corporate biopolitical narrative, and introduces yet another crack in the biocorporate society's armor.) However, the most revealing scene is perhaps the lunch at OrganInc, where Jimmy and his father are joined by Ramona, and where the hybridity of the pigoon is coupled with the "alienness" of the female body to further

cement the woman/animal parallel. In one of his visits to OrganInc Farms, Jimmy eats lunch with his father and Ramona. This is the first mention of Ramona in the narrative, and we learn that she often eats lunch with them, so that the character becomes, right from the beginning of the narrative, associated with eating. It is important to note that, in this first and most substantial encounter, Jimmy interconnects Ramona's physical appearance with her eating habits:

Ramona was one of his dad's lab technicians. She often ate lunch with the two of them, him and his dad. She was young, younger than his father and even his mother; she looked something like the picture of the girl in the haircut man's window, she had the same sort of puffed-out mouth, and big eyes like that, big and smudgy. But she smiled a lot, and she didn't have her hair in quills. Her hair was soft and dark. (...)

Ramona would always have a salad. (...)

Jimmy watched Ramona eat. She took very small bites, and managed to chew up the lettuce without crunching. The raw carrots too. That was without crunching. The raw carrots too. That was amazing, as if she could liquefy those hard, crisp foods and suck them into herself, like an alien mosquito creature on DVD.

(Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:24-25).

Jimmy begins by noticing Ramona's attractive facial features, which remind him of a poster of a woman at the barbershop. This first description of Ramona, and her association with the image of a cosmetically enhanced woman, denotes a clear, if naïve, sexualization of the female body. Despite her intelligence, Ramona's character is, right from the beginning, determined by her beautiful and attractive body, in the same way that Sharon's is marked by her unstable biology. However, as Jimmy's

observations progress, this physical description becomes centered on her mouth and the way that she eats. Not only does she adopt a vegetarian diet, eating salad while everyone else in the café eats some variation of a meat plate, she also seems to process food in an abnormal way: her mouth does not shred or crush the lettuce and the raw carrots; instead, it liquefies those foods and then sucks them into her stomach. Faced with this description, one cannot help but be reminded of the ChickieNob. The ChickieNob possesses no body parts other than a mouth opening through which the food enters the animal's stomach, functioning as an "animal-protein tuber" (*ibid* 202). Here, Ramona is also described as just a mouth that processes food in a strange way, the liquefying process reminding us here the way in which the nutrients are "dumped" into the ChickieNob without a proper digestive process. Not only is Ramona's biology animalized in this comparison, but we also observe an identification of the mouth with a reproductive organ. The ChickieNob's digestive capacity is here directly related to its ability to reproduce, as it channels the protein into the ChickieNob in a more efficient way that allows the chicken to grow more quickly, so that eating and reproduction become invariably entangled in what Johnston calls "a form of cannibalistic reproduction" (2012:75). Similarly, the sexualization of Ramona's body and Jimmy's focus on her mouth associate her biology, in particular this orifice, with her reproductive abilities. Once again, however, the abnormal way in which Ramona swallows and digests her food reveals the strangeness or abjectness of the female body and a need to contain it.

Ramona's final exclusion from the human species comes, however, at the end of this description, where Jimmy compares her to "an alien mosquito creature on DVD" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:25). Finally, Ramona has gone from woman to animal and, more particularly, from a woman to an "alien" animal, a creature out of

this planet, the reference to the DVD suggesting a fantastical being only seen in fiction. If Sharon's body is unstable and leaky, Ramona's has become abject to the corporate scientific setting of the lab. The alienation of Ramona's body positions the woman as more animal than human, and that therefore must be subjected to the same treatment as the animal, in her case the complete and permanent seclusion into the home.

Female biology is also tied into animal biology in this scene: encompassing the entire interaction between Jimmy, his father and Ramona is a previous concern with eating pigoon meat and issues of (auto)cannibalism. In this corporate society, while eating animal meat is no ethical quandary, eating pigoon meat is regarded with disgust and moral ambiguity. This is because the pigoon's genetic makeup contains human DNA, in this way creating a bond of biological similarity between the human and the pigoon which is not strong enough to respect the animal's life, but is obvious enough to disincline people from eating it – because, as Atwood puts it “no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own” (*ibid* 23-24). Eating the pigoon becomes problematic in the narrative because of its biological resemblance to the human, so that eating the pigoon becomes the equivalent of eating oneself, of incurring in a form of inadvertent auto-cannibalism, an idea that is both nauseating and morally appalling, because eating people is “wrong” (while, it is implied, eating animals is not a moral problem). This process of inadvertent cannibalism resembles the plot of the 1973 science fiction thriller *Soylent Green*, directed by Richard Fleischer, which depicts a near future dystopia where, due to overpopulation, pollution and resource depletion, people are fed “Soylent Green,” a green wafer advertised to contain “high-energy plankton,” but that is, in fact, made up of human remains. Whether Atwood purposely drew inspiration from this classical

film reference in the conception of the pigeons, this similarity positions her narrative within a discourse of biopolitical and environmental issues framed within the dystopic genre, thus tying Atwood into a, if relatively recent, discourse of ecocriticism, animal rights and the right to life.

In this way, Atwood takes up the pigeon's hybrid genetic makeup to once again question the biopolitical order that presides over life in the compounds, and to question who is allowed to live and who must die (and be eaten afterwards). Once again, the animal body appears as both a contaminated and contaminating body: it is contaminated by human DNA, which makes it improper for consumption; at the same time, there is the fear that the ingestion of one's own DNA (now diluted with pigeon DNA) may also infect the human body with some sort of disease. As a result, once it has fulfilled its purpose, the pigeon must be killed and its body must be burned and done away with, so as not to contaminate the human body. Jimmy also finds the idea of eating the pigeon problematic; however, his moral dilemma comes out of a sense of affection and not abjection for the animal. During lunch with his father, little Jimmy feels both confused and terrified when his father's coworkers tease him about the contents of his meal by saying "Pigeon pie again...Pigeon pancakes, pigeon popcorn. Come on, Jimmy, eat up!" (*ibid* 24). Because Jimmy considers the pigeons his "friends," the idea of eating pigeon meat becomes immediately an ethical conundrum of "who should be allowed to eat what" (*ibid*). As a child, Jimmy is not able to understand the anthropocentric hierarchy that accepts the non-criminal sacrifice of the animal, as he perceives animals as living, breathing beings and thus deserving of the same right to life as the human. For him, killing and eating a pigeon would equate killing and eating a person, and therefore he feels reluctant to accept his father's coworkers' jokes.

This problem also reflects the increasing reification of human biology, as eventually the population seems to accept pigoon meat as real, edible meat. Although this is never confirmed, there is a suspicion among OrganInc Farms employees that the meat they are being fed at André's Bistro, the company's staff café, is pigoon and not pig, and despite such a suspicion, they continue to eat it. While it is indeed "wrong" to eat people and the advertising companies continue to assure that "none of the defunct pigoons [end] up as bacon and sausages" (*ibid* 23), the reaction of the OrganInc Farms employees to the increased appearance of "bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies" on the staff café menu reveals a tacit acceptance of pigoon meat as an acceptable food, especially as other meat becomes a rarity in a resource-depleted environment (*ibid* 24). This attitude echoes Derrida's discussion of carnophallogocentric "eating": "The question is no longer one of knowing if it is 'good' to eat the other or if the other is 'good' to eat, nor of knowing which other. One eats him regardless and lets oneself be eaten by him" (1991:114). In the process of eating, the other and the self become, then, amalgamated identities, eating each other, in the same way that an ouroboros eats its own tail. We observe here, then, the ultimate commodification of human life, which, like the animal, has not only become property of the corporation, but has been literally swallowed by it.

In this way, the animal and the woman enter into a carnophallogocentric discourse dominated by the "carnivorous virility" of the human, male scientist, which devours all other bodies. To recall Derrida's concept, carnophallogocentrism refers to the predominance of the male subject as the center of power and authority in Western culture and discourse. As Derrida puts it, carnophallogocentrism "installs the virile figure at the determinative center of the subject. Authority and autonomy...are, through this schema, attributed to the man (homo and vir) rather than to the woman..."

The virile strength of the adult male, the father, the husband, or brother... belongs to the schema that dominates the concept of subject” (1991:114). The male – who Derrida stresses is a “meat-eating male” – as the image of God and imbued with authority by God – let us not forget that, according to Christian mythology, God gave Man the power to name the animals and, in this way, subject them to his will – becomes “the measure of all things” and all other lifeforms are but inferior versions of him. In this context, the male subject emerges as a devourer of discourse and of the “other,” i.e. the woman and the animal: he swallows the “other,” absorbing it into his own interpretation of the world (*ibid* 113). This is visible in Atwood’s novel, where men are all meat-eaters, while the women are associated with vegetarian diets. For instance, Jimmy’s father eats pigoon pie and Jimmy later on gobbles down buckets of ChickieNobs, but Ramona is only ever seen eating salad, while Oryx prefers meatless pizza with “mushrooms, artichoke hearts, anchovies, no pepperoni” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:117). The domesticization of the woman can also be seen as a form of carnophallogocentrism: while the woman is not literally eaten by the man – no literal cannibalism occurs in the text – we observe the increasing reification and animalization of her body by the male protagonist, a process that ultimately erases her status as a subject and excludes her from the compound’s biopolitical order. The “carnivorous” man, then, takes over the landscape – biopolitical, social, scientific, economic – by swallowing up and suppressing abnormal or “inferior” bodies.

The Other Speaks: Oryx as Liminal Character and the Dissolution of Corporate Biopower

However, as Derrida tells us, eating is a communal practice. “One never eats entirely on one’s own” (1991:115), and so the “other” – the one that is being “eaten”

discursively or literally – is always present. And here is where Oryx comes in. In Chapter II, I argued that Oryx functions as an interstitial or liminal character in the novel, as her ability to move through and in-between the surveilled borders that divide the compounds and the pleeblands allows her to escape a simplistic classification within the binary biopolitical structures set in the narrative. In particular, Oryx's treatment as a sexual commodity and object of consumption, while seemingly relegating this character to a status of "animalized otherness," in fact functions as a means of resistance against the carnophallogocentric discourse of corporate biopower. In this last section, I will do a closer analysis of this character within the context of the bodily presences of the woman and the animal within corporate biopolitical structures.

While much has been written on *Oryx and Crake*, with an emphasis on generic definitions and the human/animal relationship in the novel, there exists very little scholarship on the role of Oryx in the narrative. Not only has this character remained critically underdeveloped in the years since the novel's publication, but the little research there is on the topic have tended to portray her as a vastly passive and inconsequential character, whose presence serves only to advance the male narratives of Jimmy and Crake. For instance, in "Survival in Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake*," Earl Ingersoll portrays Oryx solely through Jimmy and Crake's eyes, describing her as either Jimmy's "mother" or Crake's "whore" (2004:165), who is manipulated by Crake into joining his project of human annihilation. Such a view, as I will show, is reductive and simplistic, as it overlooks very clear discursive signals of the character's self-awareness and freedom of choice. Stephen Dunning, in "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic," identifies her refusal "to speak of (or for) herself" as a source of "perpetual mystery" (2005:92), in this way

“effectively depoliticizing her presence and positioning her as a reflective object through which male desire is realized” (Johnston 2012:105-106). By disposing of Oryx as a passive, silent object of male desire, these authors, among others, invariably overlook the potential for rebellious discourse in both her speech and her silence.

Unlike the other women in the narrative, Oryx’s body resists being swallowed up by male corporate discourse. Like Sharon and Ramona, Oryx’s body is volatile and humid; it leaks its influence everywhere it goes. But, while Sharon and Ramona can easily be contained within the domestic environment into which they are pushed (Ramona more easily than Sharon, as the latter eventually escapes the confines of the compounds to join a group of environmental activists), Oryx’s leakage is hemorrhagic and can never be completely sealed. While still under the gaze and hold of corporate influence in the pleeblands, Oryx is removed from both the scientific space that may threaten to animalize her – note that Crake hires her to be the Crakers’ teacher because she is “someone who [can] communicate on their level. Simple concepts, no metaphysics” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:309), a clear suggestion to Oryx’s stronger similarity to low-reasoning nonhuman animals than to humans – and the patriarchal domestic sphere that could swallow her up as well. Because Oryx is not a compound “native,” she is able to move more freely between spaces and networks, in this way penetrating and contaminating the patriarchal narratives (Jimmy and Crake’s) of corporate biopower. As a result, her presence within the walls of the compound becomes abject, transgressive and dangerous. Her outsider status, perhaps ironically, is what allows her the “viral power to infiltrate and infect this discursive system,” as Johnston states (2012:107), and to undermine it from the inside out. In Oryx we find, then, a liminal subject whose abjectness becomes a powerful tool to deconstruct the masculine, anthropocentric structures set up in Atwood’s novel.

Interestingly, the way in which Oryx penetrates the heavily secured compounds is through the sexualization and capitalization of her own body. In the violent markets of the pleeblands, Oryx has had to make use of her body in order to survive from a very young age. First as a prostitute and then as an escort for the rich compounders, Oryx has turned her body into her own capitalist market, willingly selling sexual favors for life's comforts without shame or regret. In fact, Oryx is introduced into the narrative as a sexual body on a computer screen performing sexual acts, a body that is completely disengaged from the space which it is entering. We first see Oryx as a "small-boned and exquisite" eight-year old girl, "naked like the rest of them" (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:90), looking directly into a camera while licking a male torso. Jimmy and Crake come upon her while surfing "HottTotts, a global sex-trotting site" where you can, from the comfort of your home, watch live feeds of "sex tourists...doing things they'd be put in jail for back in their home countries" (*ibid* 89). These porno sites reveal an increasingly surveilled society, where control has also become voyeurism and young men like Jimmy and Crake become vicarious consumers of the female body, as if they themselves had had an orgasmic experience with the bodies on the screen. While this practice denotes an increasing commodification of the female body – a body that is malleable, bendable and accessible everywhere anywhere – Oryx's presence disturbs what would otherwise be just another sex scene: deep into the act, Oryx stops what she is doing and turns to the camera, staring directly "into the eyes of the viewer – right into Jimmy's eyes, into the secret person inside him. *I see you*, that look said. *I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want*" (*ibid* 91). Oryx's deliberate awareness of the camera and acknowledgement of the voyeuristic eye behind it disturbs the unilateral line of communication/consumption between the actor and the viewer, between the edible

female body and the hungry male eye. When looking back, as Johnston puts it, “the young girl sees more than two horny boys sitting at their computer screens; she envision [sic], instead, the imperial scope of economic, cultural, and technological networks that bind her body to their desires” (2012:96). By looking directly into the camera, Oryx claims her presence into the video and into her viewers, not just as a body, but as an agentive, conscious and deliberate subject, refusing to be swallowed up by the male gaze.

Oryx has come to learn that the body can be a valuable commodity, and so she is always in complete control of it, even if sometimes she creates the illusion of vulnerability with the men she sleeps with, as is the case with Jimmy. For Jimmy, sex is the ultimate form of possession: “while it was going on, he was in her” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:315). But Oryx’s body is an odd vessel: while its permeability allows it, like an airborne virus, to seep through and across borders, it becomes impenetrable to male authority. Jimmy is never in control of Oryx’s body during the sexual act, in the same way that Crake cannot prevent her from sleeping with Jimmy. Nobody controls Oryx’s body but Oryx herself. Even when she begins working for Crake, sleeping with him, teaching the Crakers and distributing the BlyssPlus pills, the decision is hers and hers alone to support his vision “to make the world a better place” (*ibid* 322). So, even in the sexual act, her body is never really possessed by her male partner. Instead, the reverse happens: through the sexual act, Oryx takes hold of the male body, her abjectness leaking onto and into him, and absorbing him completely. Instead of allowing the phallus to take possession of her reproductive organs, to colonize her with its seed, Oryx’s body becomes a weapon, her vagina, like a mouth, threatening to swallow the phallus whole, to cut off this “carnivorous virility” at the root. The interiorization of the phallus, which Derrida identifies as the

ultimate form of patriarchal domination (1991:113), functions here instead to make the female “other” visible, to open up a gap in the dominant discourse through which the abject other can communicate.

Oryx’s self-control is also visible in the way in which she manipulates discourse and silence in her interactions with Jimmy. In the narrative, Oryx’s silence carries an important critique of the colonizing and all-consuming nature of Western discourse. Although this thesis does not aim to provide a postcolonial reading of Atwood’s text, it is important to note the way in which Oryx and Jimmy’s relationship functions to recreate the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Similarly to Jimmy’s attempt to possess and dominate Oryx through sexual penetration, he also tries to enclose her within his own interpretation of her narrative. The latter half of the text is punctuated by scenes where Jimmy prompts Oryx to tell him her life story, only to be disappointed with her answers, as he often receives either a dismissal of the subject or a satisfied acceptance of her hardships as facts of life. Picking mushrooms off a pizza while propped up on Jimmy’s bed, Oryx recounts the most significant events of her life, shedding light on what life really looks like in the pleeblands. Oryx’s retelling is unromantic and detached, the tone of someone who has fully accepted the capitalization of one’s body as a necessary custom and practice to ensure one’s own survival. As Oryx puts it, the mother’s selling of their children and the children’s prostitution “was understood, and if not condoned, at least pardoned” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:121). Other times, when prompted to give more detail, Oryx becomes quiet, refusing to talk more “about ugly things” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:144). This frustrates Jimmy profoundly, as he fails to understand how Oryx can feel grateful for the life she has had. In his own position of socioeconomic privilege, Jimmy produces a “blanket condemnation of sex-work as inherently

exploitative” (Johnston 2012:107), and perceives Oryx as a victim: for him, she is an innocent girl who has been forced into selling her body to survive, and whom he, as the superior man, must now save and protect. However, this same impulse to protect Oryx is rooted in a colonizing, carnivorous impulse to dominate and replace her narrative with his own version of events. When faced with the girl’s silence, Jimmy attempts to fill it with his own imperialistic interpretation, which he often imposes on Oryx as the correct one. In his version of events, Oryx’s satisfaction with her life stems from the fact that she has never known a different one, and it is his job to show her a difference and better life in the compounds. Similarly to the gendering of the human/animal divide, here we observe once again a gendering of colonial discourse, reproduced in Jimmy’s desire to be the hero, the knight in shiny armor, who will save poor, innocent Oryx from a life of squalor, abuse and degradation.

This relationship seems to echo, in a way, Gayatri Spivak’s critique of western, white postcolonial discourse “Can the Subaltern Speak?.” In this essay, Spivak argues that postcolonial discourse produced in the West attempts to co-opt the discourse of the colonized, in this way re-inscribing it into a political and economic neo-imperialist frame (1988:280). For Spivak, the West’s self-ascribed “permission to narrate” the (hi)story of the non-Western, colonized “other” leaves them no room to speak for themselves, ultimately obliterating this colonial subject (*ibid* 280, 283). The “subaltern” or colonized cannot speak because he/she is not authorized to; his/her voice is shut down by the dominant voice of the imperial West, which claims to speak for the reality of the “other.” Yet, in *Oryx and Crake*, we observe a reversal of or refusal to submit to this discursive structure, as Oryx’s silence constitutes the character’s deliberate choice instead of being an external imposition. When questioned by Jimmy, Oryx chooses not to speak or answer his call. Her silence

challenges “Jimmy’s paternal concern for her because she seeks a revolutionary end to the oedipalization of biopower” (Johnston 2012:108). In fact, several times throughout the text, Oryx contradicts Jimmy’s reasoning, pointing out that “he doesn’t understand her” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:119) and that “he worries too much” (*ibid* 136), a clear sign of the character’s refusal to be inserted within his carnophallogocentric discourse. In this way, Oryx’s silence creates a vacuum in the text that disrupts the seemingly organized and uncomplicated discourse of Atwood’s corporate society, opening up a space for a new, nonconforming voice to emerge, the woman’s and, with her, the animal’s. Oryx’s interstitial or border presence in the text, her ability to breach boundaries and subvert corporate patriarchal structures, becomes, then, an opening through which the “other” can penetrate into discourse and, this way, shift power away from the humanist subject. While Oryx invites the strange and the hybrid into discourse, it is the Crakers who ultimately realize a post-anthropocentric subjectivity.

Conclusion:

Life After the End of the World

“I’m counting on you,” Crake tells Jimmy as he slits Oryx’s throat, seconds before Jimmy puts a bullet in him and sets the stage to becoming the last known human on Earth. Crake’s last words appear as enigmatic to Jimmy as they are perhaps to the reader, for whom there seems to be an implied hopeful note of something yet to be accomplished, that this is not the end of the human species, but that it is perhaps the beginning of something else. After this, Jimmy and the Crakers must seclude themselves in the Paradise Dome, living off Crake’s emergency goods while watching “the end of a species...taking place before his very eyes. Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.... *Homo sapiens sapiens*, joining the polar bear, the beluga whale, the onager, the burrowing owl, the long, long list” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:344). At this point, humanity becomes conflated with all the other animal species that have since become extinct, this merger signaling the dissolution of the liberal humanist subject, the creature whose unique intellect and skill made it superior to, and therefore more valuable than, all other creatures. The human race is no more, washed away by its own engineered flood, the biopolitical systems that have governed over and caused the extinction having now fallen apart with the absence of its goods and consumers.

Having run out of supplies, Jimmy and the Crakers prepare to brave the new world that awaits them outside of the compound. What is interesting in this departure is Jimmy’s perhaps irrational sense of hope. He still believes that there may be other survivors who will one day find the Dome, and so, as the “romantic optimist” that he is, Jimmy decides to write an account of the events (*ibid* 346). However, when Snowman returns to the Paradise Dome many years later, his reaction is one of

hopelessness, as he “crumples the sheets up, drops them onto the floor. It’s the fate of these words to be eaten by beetles” (*ibid* 347). By contrast, the Crakers present themselves to Jimmy/Snowman as “blank pages,” on which “he could write whatever he wanted” (*ibid* 349). Here, Atwood seems to signal an important biopolitical paradigm shift, the replacement of the human with the hybrid “humanimal” as the patriarchal figure at the top of the tree of life. While humanity is meant to perish, their words – and so their history, literature, culture, language – eaten by beetles, the hybrid Crakers, these lifeforms that are less – perhaps more? – than human, are designed to thrive and evolve as blank slates unmarred by any of the flaws that have led humanity to extinction.

At the end of the novel, the visible landscape has been left to these lab-grown, DNA-spliced, hybrid creatures, as we observe the formation of animal communities in what had previously been a human-ruled space. Hybrid creatures like the pigeons, wolvogs and rakunks have begun reproducing naturally and taken over the surrounding natural space, giving rise to a new biopolitical order. As Johnston reminds us, “[b]y the end of the novel, ChickieNobs and their trans-species kin... become catalysts for a violent reorganization of the narrative’s bio-social world” (2012:9). And so, where Snowman had previously been the predator, he has now become the prey, the threat to these creatures’ habitat, their food.

Most importantly, Snowman’s departure at the end of the narrative, and the impending autonomy of the Crakers suggests the inevitable dissolution of the biological boundaries that had previously organized and determined each species’ place in the tree of life. While Snowman initially takes on the role of teacher and paternal figure to the Crakers, fabricating a history and mythological origin for these creatures, the Crakers soon show that they are able to thrive on their own, without any

input from their human guide. Not only does their biology make them especially adaptable to and apt to live in the new environment – a combination of the DNA of humans and several nonhuman species, the Crakers have a limited lifespan and perform sexual intercourse during limited polyandrous breeding seasons so as to prevent overpopulation, are herbivorous, so that they can feed from the plant resources around them, and possess a series of physical capabilities that allow them to survive dangerous circumstances, such as the feline purr for healing wounds and the marking of the territory with urine to ward off predators – they have also begun to develop their own systems of cultural and political organization: they perform their own ritualistic routines, have established a chain of hierarchy and, most importantly, have begun to develop symbolic thinking, so that written language – the one thing they still do not possess – and by association the production of a historical and literary record cannot be far along.

The Crakers' autonomous society becomes evident in the very last pages of the novel, where, feeling the absence of their human guide after Snowman leaves for a scavenger hunt, the Crakers build “a grotesque-looking figure, a scarecrowlike effigy,” around which they gather singing and humming something akin to a religious hymn in order to communicate with Snowman from a distance (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:360). This is an important moment in the narrative, as it establishes not only the Crakers' ability for symbolic thinking and artistic and mechanical production – two fundamental features in a society – but also signals the ultimate dissolution of the liberal humanist subject as a patriarchal authority in the post-flood world, as Snowman becomes inscribed in the Crakers' mythology as transcending the natural and human realms. Here, Snowman himself, the novel's last remaining staple of humanity is no longer human at all. In addition, Snowman has lost his usefulness, as

the Crakers can now communicate with him and with Crake through him via the scarecrowlike effigy, so that Snowman himself is no longer needed in the text. So, it is perhaps not surprising that it is at this moment when the Crakers develop the ability to symbolically represent an absent signified – in this case, Snowman – that the protagonist decides to leave the Crakers and trudge his own path. This further solidifies the dissolution of Snowman's character as a potent remnant of the pre-flood biopolitical system. With Snowman gone, the Crakers can begin to construct their own hybrid "humanimal" society, one where, as Johnston reminds us, "kinship, experimentation and embodiment cannot be easily bifurcated by the branching logic of the tree of life" (2012:12), and that therefore precludes any possibility of a rehabilitation of the pre-flood forms of biopolitical organization and human subjectivity that had turned the nonhuman and any other nonconforming human bodies into objects of consumption.

At the close of the narrative, then, Atwood seems to suggest that we need to rethink the notion of the human as subject. In particular, *Oryx and Crake* brings attention to the traditional anthropocentric concept of human subjectivity as the disciplining force in human/nonhuman relationships, and to the prevalence of neoliberal corporate structures that have of late emerged, in the real and literary worlds, as supranational biopolitical authorities that seek to organize, control and reshape life as a commodity for consumption. Above all, Atwood seems to be signaling the possibility – and perhaps even desirability – of a model of subjectivity that is not enclosed by and within the liberal humanist subject, but that moves beyond the traditional Western conception of the subject as human, male and white, so as to encompass other forms of nonhuman, non-male, non-white biopolitical life. Atwood's post-apocalyptic narrative seems to enclose Rosi Braidotti's roaring call for an

egalitarian ontology and ecology that is open to *zoe* – “the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself,” human or otherwise (2013:60). In Braidotti’s words, “We need to become the sorts of subjects who actively desire to reinvent subjectivity as a set of mutant values and to draw our pleasure from that, not from the perpetuation of familiar regimes” (*ibid* 93). There is hope yet, it seems.

Indeed, hope is a feeling that pervades the narrative: even in the most desperate moments, Jimmy/Snowman tends to believe the best possible outcomes. Early in the narrative, as Jimmy is first learning about Oryx’s childhood, he is outraged at what has become in the developing nation from which his lover hails a common practice: mothers sell their children into human trafficking networks for “a decent-enough price” so they are able to “give [their] remaining children a better chance in life” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 2004:118-119). Jimmy’s outrage is likely to resonate with the Western, white reader for whom child prostitution and human trafficking are vile, immoral and unacceptable practice. When Jimmy takes his concerns to Crake, however, the scientist reacts much in the same way as Oryx while recounting her narrative: for him, as for Oryx, this is a regular everyday practice, the result of a socioeconomic context of overpopulation and resource scarcity. Human trafficking becomes here explained as the natural result of an economic imbalance – as Crake crudely puts it “the less we eat, the more we fuck” (*ibid* 121) – a process that has become normalized by the rules of neoliberal capital. At this point, Crake blames human imagination for such a reality, namely he blames the desire for a sort of immortality through the perpetuation of one’s genealogical line, which he deems a sign of human desperation. Jimmy, on the other hand, chooses to interpret imagination as a sign of hope and reproduction as the possibility of new life – of new beginnings.

As depressive a turn as this thesis may have taken at times – biopower, especially when coupled with capitalism, is never an entertaining subject – underlying its project is also an optimistic impulse toward hope and the role of literature in our current perception of the world. This conclusion is being written at the close of 2016, a year that has been marked by unexpected and an unexpectedly high number of deaths of popular icons, the gradual rise of far right movements throughout the developed world, ethical debates surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis, the dreaded and dreadful election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency and its potential implications for international relations and the preservation of human rights. In this context, reading Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* takes on a new meaning and purpose.

This thesis can hardly hope to do justice to the thematic and formal richness of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and so there is much that can still be unearthed, analyzed and discussed about this novel. Particularly, the role that language plays in the shaping and dissolution of the narrative's society, and its connection with the commentary put forth by Atwood about the relationship between the Humanities and the Sciences, is a fundamental point worth further looking into, one that is at the inception of this thesis, although it invariably took a different course. Similarly, a more in-depth analysis of religious parallels between the novel and Western Christian mythology has been left out, but is fundamental to understanding how Atwood fits her narrative into the context of the Western literary canon. Underlying the project of this thesis is, however, the desire to uncover, through literary analysis, the larger political and ideological implications that the novel seems to signal: we have currently reached a point where the structures of neoliberal biopower developed in *Oryx and Crake* seem to no longer be fictional fabrications, but instead reflect current geopolitical and economic relationships between the all-encompassing corporations of the developed

nations and the large, depleted nations of the developing world, whose plight is simultaneously produced and rendered invisible by these corporate powers who consume the countries' resources and continuously escape legal and political accountability. By looking at the dynamic established between the compounds and the pleeblands in Atwood's text, we can perhaps begin to address the large implications of these geopolitical and economic practices.

Most importantly, this novel allows us to address what it means to be human in a world governed by these globalizing neoliberal forces. As several posthumanist theorists, among whom are Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti, have pointed out, we seem to have reached a moment in history and intellectual thinking where the word "human" is no longer sufficient or even accurate to define ourselves in relation to each other and in relation to other forms of living. To be "human" is no longer something one can take for granted, as the current globalized forms of biopolitical and economic organization have resulted in a splintering of the concept of "human" into varying degrees of "humanness," from which several groups have become excluded. So, a closer look at literary texts like Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* may open up a space for thinking about alternative forms of self and species identification that escape these fractured and delimiting conceptions of the "human." The Crakers may provide a space for theorizing a vitalist post-anthropocentric ontology (Braidotti 2013:60), one that perceives all life – human and nonhuman – as worth living. Perhaps I am just being naïve in perceiving a lifeboat at the end of this flood. After all, as Jimmy states, as humans we are doomed by hope, but we are also doomed without it. So, as the bullet train of neoliberalism, biopower and environmental depletion rushes towards us, I choose to arm myself with the weapons I have been given – words and a really stubborn personality – and go out fighting.

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