

THE HUMAN AGAINST ITSELF: POSTHUMANISM IN CONTEMPORARY
NOVELS

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Dedication

To my son

Abstract

Even as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno were appalled by the acts of human atrocities at the height of World War II, they maintained that the human is the means to emancipation and enlightenment. The subsequent reaction to the war, however, takes a different course by taking up the concept of the human as a troubling category. A discourse of anti-humanism that emerges in Europe immediately after the War, is one example, and the recent theories of posthumanism are another, which refurbish the anti-humanist philosophy by focusing on issues such as human relationships to nonhuman species and to the ever-evolving technosciences. Their premise and conclusion is the same—the concept of the human as autonomous and self-determining must be displaced, as such attributes are a fiction leading to human domination and violence.

“The Human Against Itself: Posthumanism in Contemporary Novels” intervenes in this discourse, arguing that if as posthumanism implies humans are the very problem to be eliminated, no coherent ethics can be established, whose operation relies on humans as agents of its principles. The current renditions of posthumanism, however, withdraw their confidence from the human and misanthropically pit the human against itself, placing hope instead in the posthuman that is always yet to come. They posit that human problems can only be resolved by the human negating itself and announcing the death of its own subjectivity.

In order to explore in detail the limits of these self-annihilating visions, I turn to novels by Margaret Atwood, Octavia E. Butler, and J. M. Coetzee, which engage with posthumanist themes by re-visioning the human: Atwood by constructing genetically enhanced “superhumans,” Butler by inter-species procreation, and Coetzee by “animalizing” the human. They write as though posthumanity has already arrived, but only to reveal knowingly and unknowingly the limits of posthuman existence. In the process, the novels leave room for the possibility of critical humanism by affirming the human’s self-reflexive capacity to rethink, undo, and reconstruct itself. At a time when the very concept of the human has fallen into disfavor, the novels prompt the readers to imagine a world that does not abandon the human and the legacy of emancipatory and resistant humanism.

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Introduction. Pitting the Human against Itself: Misanthropy in Posthumanism

Two factually but not thematically unrelated cases appeared in news headlines near the end of 2014. The first case concerns an orangutan named Sandra who has been held at the Buenos Aires zoo for two decades; she has been recognized by the Argentinian court as deserving “the basic rights of a ‘nonhuman person’.”¹ The animal rights activists have petitioned for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of Sandra, and the Association of Officials and Lawyers for Animal Rights (AFADA) has argued before the court that the “ape had sufficient cognitive functions and should not be treated as an object.” Indeed, as *BBC.com* adds, “Sandra was ‘a person’ in the philosophical, not biological, sense,” who was in a “situation of illegal deprivation of freedom as a ‘nonhuman person’.”² The court agreed and gave Sandra the “rights to freedom which needed defending.” Based on the ruling, Sandra now had a choice to be transferred to a sanctuary for retirement. Although, from the perspective of animal rights activists, the court decision signals a big step forward, it remains more as an exception, for in the same month earlier a U.S. court denied that Tommy the chimpanzee of New York, owned privately, is a “person.”³

¹ See “Captive Orangutan has Human Right to Freedom, Argentine Court Rules” by Richard Lough at *reuters.com*, reported on December 21, 2014.

² See “Court in Argentina Grants Basic Rights to Orangutan” at *BBC.com*, also reported on December 21, 2014.

³ See “US Chimpanzee Tommy 'Has No Human Rights' – Court” at *BBC.com*, reported on December 4, 2014.

The second case concerns the Black Lives Matter protest currently underway in the United States⁴ in response to the police killings of two unarmed black men Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner. The co-creator of the viral social media hashtag “#Black Lives Matter,” Alicia Garza, writes that the phrase makes an “ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” and “seen without value.”⁵ In words evocative of Anna Julia Cooper who famously declared in her speech in 1886 that it is only “when and where [black woman] enter[s] ... then and there the whole Negro race enters with [her]” (644),⁶ Garza writes that it is only when “Black people gets free, everyone gets free.”

The two cases are important in that they both point to the nebulous status of the human and raise the question of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century, especially in a postracial and posthumanist age as it is called, whose terms reflect the readiness to eliminate markers of racial and speciesist identity in the name of inclusivity. The long-held idea of the human as a distinctively rational, historical agent is also put under serious re-consideration, following on the one hand the post-war anti-humanist claims of the death of the human subject and on the other hand the scientific findings that continue to blur the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, such as the

⁴ The latest in series took place at the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota. See “Mall of America Protest Attracts Thousands on Busy Shopping Day,” reported by James Walsh on December 20, 2014, at *startribune.com*.

⁵ See Garza’s personal website at <http://blacklivesmatter.com/>.

⁶ The speech refers to “Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race,” delivered to the Convocation of the Colored Clergy.

discovery of the 96 percent identical genome of chimpanzees and humans.⁷ In step with this current research finding, the court ruling in Buenos Aires suggests that legalistically, at least, humans and apes can be seen to be on a par. Yet, in the light of a slogan “Black lives matter,” which exposes the reality that a group of human lives is easily expendable and disposable, the legal recognition of the human rights of apes is a further reminder to assure, ironically enough, that the agenda of universal human rights should be applied to human beings of color. These converging issues of trans-species as well as inter-racial relationships therefore lead to the difficult question of how to address the hierarchy of life that becomes manifest in various aspects: at the level of trans-species relationships, the well-being of humans is given priority over that of other living beings such as invertebrates, but this does not immediately mean that *all* humans are equally regarded and privileged, for a look into interracial as well as gender relationships tells us that human lives are differentiated and hierarchized among themselves. It seems important, then, to attend to the nature of the social and political realm in which these distinctions, and consequentially exclusions, are made in relation to race, class, gender, and species: in other words, how are lives ranked and politicized within the sociocultural system in which they are situated?

⁷ See an article by *National Geographic News*, “Chimps, Humans 96 Percent the Same, Gene Study Finds,” that introduces a 2005 study by The Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium. It is interesting to observe that, a member of the research team, Evan Eichler, states that this comparative genomic study is hoped to reveal more about the “*difference* [from chimps] that makes us human” rather than the similarities that establish a kinship between humans and chimps (n.pag. emphasis added). Thus while scientists enunciate the 4 percent of difference that distinguishes humans from chimpanzees, some humanities scholars focus on the 96 percent of similarities that make chimpanzees and humans nearly identical, with an aim to expose the illusions of human exceptionalism.

Today these questions are perhaps most enthusiastically taken up by the thinkers of posthumanism, although their primary argument, I suggest, is crippled by a circular reasoning, which argues that human superiority over nonhumans is an illusion and therefore human superiority is an illusion. This is to say that posthumanism avoids attending to the power dynamics and socioeconomic landscapes that create the condition in which humans *do* assume the superior position of holding power over nonhumans. Instead it insists on how delusionary this human superiority in fact is, given the human's ontological exposure to finitude of life that it shares with other beings. This focus carries with it the consequence of prioritizing a certain ethical mode of being—such as living in humility—at the expense of political engagement organized at a collective level. I intervene in this posthumanist scholarship that devotes its attention to critiquing the ideologies of the human subjectivity and agency, highlighting instead its *own* ideologies that inform its critique of the human.

One undergirding argument of my dissertation is that posthumanism functions as an ideology that is complicit in reinforcing the ways of capitalist societies that continue to alienate both humans and animals. That is, unable to find a breakthrough amid the ever intensifying process of reification and objectification of all beings,⁸ posthumanism attempts to outmaneuver the alienation by rendering alienation a

⁸ In advanced capitalist societies, one of the most obvious examples of the alienation and reification of both humans and animals can be found in sites of modern factory farming. A number of books have helped expose the reality, such as Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. The most recent publication of *The Chain: Farm, Factory, and the Fate of Our Food* by Ted Genoways describes in detail the alienation of human factory workers, who oftentimes are of the people with non-unionized, immigrant, or undocumented status.

condition of human existence. It thus naturalizes alienation by ontologizing suffering as a condition that cannot be overcome. In addition, by claiming the illusory nature of human agency and discounting it as an element at the center of ethical and political order, posthumanism also exempts the human from the obligation to remedy its destructive behavior, despite the fact that the human is the principal agent of the destruction of the earth. Indeed, not only does posthumanism displace the human from the center of the universe, but it also ends up making the human a threat as such, by rendering the human presence in itself as posing a danger and thus pitting the human against the universe and its own well-being. The posthumanist effort to stress the ethics of coexistence by submitting the human subject in humility thus has the consequence of diminishing the figure of the political subject that can undertake transformative projects based on decision and intention—in fact, such categories of political action are ineffectual in the world of posthumanism, which replaces decision and intention with the indefinable force of affect and the flow of non-representational intensities that evoke the Deleuzian ethics of becoming whose crux lies in the constant malleability of self and the world without a center. It expels, in other words, the narratives of the human as a historical agent who shapes the world according to the knowledge and principles collectively derived. Intervening in this re-grounding of politics as ethics based on affect, I thus critique posthumanism with an overarching concern to re-invigorate the idea of the human as a historical agent who can envision an alternative economic and political order on the basis of her understanding of the historical totality she is situated in and the context within which her relationship to the world is shaped.

This dissertation is thus rooted in humanist-materialist thinking, which although stresses the materiality that overbearingly determines the lives of each individual, veers away from the cynical view that humans are inconsequential beings in the vastly complex and multivalent world, even as it stresses. A contemporary thinker who exemplifies this idea of the human can be found in the works of Edward Said, which I argue provide us with a perspective and a model with which we can better assess and critique this culture of antihumanism and not simply align ourselves with it. Said, like posthumanist critics who take issues with humanism, very well knows that humanism's *actual* practices are in deep contradiction with its own principles and in fact oftentimes operates as a ruse for maintaining particular forms of domination such as Eurocentrism and imperialism. Said nevertheless consistently defends humanism, making a case that a wrongful use of humanism does not justify the entire abandonment of it. He best exemplifies how a humanist thinks by being critical of humanism and yet being open-minded at the same time, always sensitive to the ways in which ideas operate in actuality, which oftentimes turn out to be complicit with the structures of domination.

Hence in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said states that it is possible to be “critical of humanism in the name of humanism” (10). This deceptively simplistic argument is important, for here Said is suggesting the indispensability of oppositional consciousness, or in Adornian terms, negative thinking. To be critical of humanism in the name of humanism is to be self-critical by contemplating one's own mode of thinking. Between acts of affirmation and negation, Said's humanism is an intellectual exercise of *negation* and critique, and in this sense his humanism directly contradicts the

caricatures of humanism that are widely circulated today, which almost always have to do with the human's unfounded conviction in and *affirmation* of its own superiority and unique achievements. Unlike the often grand and self-reassuring rhetoric that is associated with humanism, Said's humanism is deliberately oppositional and negative, although importantly, he never loses sight of a *utopian* imagination of the future that is involved in the act of negation.

Said's "Orientalism Reconsidered" best describes what he thinks should be part of humanistic endeavors. He writes that humanism involves an "investigative open analysis" that takes Adorno's lesson on negative dialectics seriously, which is to be "*against* the grain, deconstructive, [and] utopian" (214). I argue that the word "utopian" is suggestive here of his emphasis that one does not go against the grain simply to produce difference for the sake of itself, but with a specific purpose to make a move forward. In other words, critical humanism entails a vision for a determinate change. In fact, for Said, terms humanism and "participatory citizenship" are compatible and congruous with each other (22), and the endorsement of humanism must be "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom" (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 29).

Critical humanism is thus a good antidote to the rather despairing and cynical tone with which the humanity is being discussed today, and can be set up to dispel the growing sentiment of misanthropy that I argue is the conspicuous part of posthumanist thinking. Ostensibly its concerns for the fate of nonhuman animals or its interest in the

humanoid technologies and biotechnologies all arise out of desire to ensure coexistence between humans and nonhumans in their various forms and origins; yet, there also is the attempt to materialize this goal of coexistence through the demotion of the human to some contingent, natural existence. Hence the majority of theoretical endeavors are given to prove this very point: a human is a mortal and an earthling who is ontologically bound by their fragile bodies and nonhuman materialities.

Indeed the scholarship on posthumanism today is puzzling, which although purports to address the issues of anthropocentrism and violent species relationships head-on, in fact renders them a side issue by turning the attention to the supposedly originary and ontological condition of all living beings, which is that life is fundamentally fragile and bound inevitably to mortality. In other words, instead of focusing on the cultural and institutional structures that sustain and exacerbate the discriminatory principles, posthumanism purportedly aims to get to the heart of the matter by arguing that such practices of exclusion are rooted in the much worse problem—that is, the metaphysical idea of the centrality and primacy of the human in Western philosophical discourses. Therefore, despite the fact that posthumanism hosts a wide range of thoughts in a number of different disciplines such as animal studies, bioethics, cybernetics theory, and environmental studies, there is a thread of coherency that draws them together under the rubric of posthumanism. The commonality is that they all highlight a nonhuman world that is agential, dynamic, and vital, performing

activities *beyond* the human capacity to fully grasp.⁹ From this notion of the world as being unaccountably complex and ungovernable by human will, posthumanist theorists build on a new politics *not* based on decisions and determinations of individual agents for the reason that the earth, being the dynamic place it is, is far from being a terrain where only humans determine the course of events. Thus posthumanist scholars critique the ineffectiveness of traditional politics based on autonomy, intention, and decision and construct an alternative post-political paradigm in which politics means not a “coherent field of self-reflection or the conceptual economy of an ideological vision,” as Lee Spinks describes in “Thinking the Post-Human,” but as that which entails “affective and stylistic procedures” not ascribable to the authority and intention of the individual subject (36). From the politics based on parliamentary procedures and participatory democracy, then, the focus is shifted onto analyzing the intricate ways in which the idea of the human as being at the center of the universe is philosophically produced and reinforced. And in the process of exposing the myth of this human exceptionalism, posthumanism deflects from the immediate realities of human domination of *humans*, a fact surprisingly watered down in its preoccupation with all things nonhuman. The posthumanist critique thus adopts a highly theoretical and esoteric form, as exemplified by the way the problem of suffering animals under human domination today is framed as the “question of the animal.”

⁹ For examples, see the words that have gained significant theoretical consideration over the past few years, such as “vibrancy” in Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, “animacy” in Mel Y. Chen’s *Animacies*, and the “*agential intra-actions of the world*” in Karen Barad’s “Posthumanist Performativity” (821).

Indeed, Cary Wolfe explains, as he places the question of the animal “within the larger context of posthumanist theory,” that to examine the question of the animal is to survey the long stretch of Western philosophy that goes back “at least to Plato and the Old Testament,” in which the animals have been “always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called ‘the human’” (6). Derrida is the backbone of this line of argument, as he states in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, that in the “Western philosophical discourse” lies the unchanging schema in which “what is proper to man, his superiority over and subjugation of the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics,” are all based on “this default in propriety” that distinguishes humans from animals, and humanity from animality (45).¹⁰

It must be noted at once however that the fact of human abuse of nonhuman animals cannot be the occasion to dismiss some of what Derrida lists above as the characteristics that shape the “propriety” of Man: that is, the fact that Man’s “emergence out of nature” or his “access to knowledge and technics” is appropriated as a means to abuse animals does not justify the dismissal of some of the obvious historical

¹⁰ See also Peter Atterton and Matthew Carlarco’s introduction to *Animal Philosophy*, where they similarly argue that “with the possible exception of Nietzsche,” most Continental philosophers, even while being very critical of humanism and anthropocentrism, are resolutely silent in problematizing the “chauvinism” of the human as a species (xvi). It is however nothing short of ironic that in the context of discussing human exceptionalism in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Continental philosophy, they should use the term chauvinism, which has precisely been the ideology behind *European* exceptionalism and expansionism throughout much of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century.

achievements of the human that have been enabled by the use of human reason and technology. Moreover, this purported critique of the deep-seated anthropocentrism in the Western thought falls short by becoming a critique *ad infinitum* in which there is only a repeated deconstruction of the figure of the Western Man. The repeated critiques expose the very stubborn prejudices that still sustain the illusions of human primacy, but it also renders the human helpless by delimiting it as a being only capable of deconstructing itself but not transforming itself and acting upon the world. By doing so, posthumanism, I argue, intensifies the alienation of the human by reducing it to a powerless figure embodying the conditions of physical vulnerabilities and cognitive constraints. It negatively places the human and the nonhuman on an equal plane of life that is bound to frailty and mortality. Dismissing the effectiveness of political discourse of both animal and human rights, Cary Wolfe, for example, stresses the “crucial role that vulnerability, passivity, and mortality play” in building a species ethics, which he explains is of great importance for philosophers like Cora Diamond and Jacques Derrida (*What is Posthumanism?* 83). Relying on Derrida and his idea of “radical passivity” as the core element of ethics as laid out in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Wolfe further quotes Derrida, stating that “mortality resides ... as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion” (81). But not only does Wolfe attempt to reground the ethical basis of human existence on the fact of finitude of life, but in an attempt to further disprove human exceptionalism he also defines the human as subjected to the “semiotic system” that always already comes before the human (89). In this sense

humans operate through and within “a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language,” and share with nonhumans, whether they acknowledge the fact or not, a common reality of “passivity and subjection” (89). Wedding posthumanism to the poststructuralist idea of language in which it comes prior to the subject who speaks it therefore, Wolfe implies that we do not speak language but language speaks us. Thus, where poststructuralism and posthumanism come together in the hands of Wolfe, the human becomes a theoretically powerless and passive being—although, in reality, the human continues to have dominion over the world, quite apart from whether or not the human is governed by both the apriority of language and the law of nature that inevitably ends in death. Put another way, a mere claim that humans suffer the same passivity as nonhuman animals itself does not make the reality of human domination go away. This is why this ethical subjection of the human to ontological passivity appears to be motivated more by the inexorable disillusionment with humanity than by anything else—according to posthumanist ethics, problems occurring from human dominion are not resolvable through humans’ cultural and political praxis because such means that heavily rely on the subjectivity and intention of humans have simply not been historically effective. The only suggested way out of predicaments caused by human dominion and violence is through the relegation of humans to passivity and to the realm of contemplation, where humans redeem themselves from destruction by reflecting with humility on the biological and linguistic finitude within which they operate. Indeed, humans are seriously deprived of the opportunity to engage in remediation. The emphasis on the vulnerability as a given human condition thus yields a

consequence contrary to the intention: that is, far from making humans humble before the planet, it just renders humans politically and practically incompetent. It has the effect of removing humans from the *immediate* necessity to act, because it insists that humans do not exercise such high-impact influence over the world as they think they are. In *How We Become Posthuman* N. Katherine Hayles similarly theorizes the posthuman in self-deprecatory terms, as she explains that her “version of the posthuman ... celebrates finitude as a condition of human being” instead of an illusionary mastery of the world (5). Life is finite and delimited—humans must learn to realize their non-transcendental status and operate on the plane of interconnectedness where consciousness is distributed rather than centralized, and where humans are deeply implicated in the environment rather than being independent of it.

One prominent strand of posthumanism as articulated by critics like Wolfe and Hayles thus describes life as that which is finite, vulnerable, and subjected to *a priori* conditions, and in that sense it would not be an exaggeration to state that the line of thought shares an intellectual affinity and resonates well with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of bare life in *Homo Sacer* which is equally, if not more, self-abnegating and self-renunciatory. Human life according to Agamben is ontologically exposed to violence and rendered disposable, precisely because “*not simple natural life, but life exposed to death...is the originary political element*” (88). That is, the human life is “always already a biopolitical body and a bare life” that has “nothing in it ... to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power” (187). Further explaining that this utter powerlessness inherent in human life has been rendered a

“supreme political principle” that undergirds Western modernity (10), Agamben rebuts the assumption of dignity and uniqueness of the human, and instead relegates human life to a “zone of indistinction” where there is a “continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture”(109). Here again, we see the similar move noted earlier, in which the idea of passivity is mobilized as a means to equalize humans and nonhuman and place them on common ground—that is, the human exposure to radical vulnerability is perceived as a means through which the “anthropological machine of humanism” is destroyed, which Agamben explains in *The Open* is an ideological apparatus that sustains the distinction between man and animal, always at the expense of the animal.

Agamben’s negative view of biopolitics is well shared by posthumanist thought, although it must be added that with posthumanism’s apparent ecological bent that admires the vital energy of bodies and nature (which I will discuss more below) it also attempts to turn the concept of bare life into a more positive one, which is not only exposed to death but also to life-affirming principles. The difference is that if the former highlights the insurmountable fact of frailty and death that governs humans, the latter goes the opposite way by stressing the principles of life as manifest in the complexities of a natural world to which humans are a mere mortal part of and certainly not as a master of it. This, in Timothy Campbell’s words in *Bios*, is an “affirmative biopolitics” whose positivity can “identify and deconstruct the ... biopolitical, or better, thanatopolitical, *dispositifis*” (xix). On the basis of his reading of Roberto Esposito, Campbell further explains that affirmative biopolitics focuses on the possibility of building a “politics *of* life” instead of a “politics *over* life”(32 emphasis added), one that is able to

develop the idea of “positive immunity” in which life thrives by incorporating the foreign and the Other (xvii). Contrary to the conventional “immunitary paradigm” that receives the Other as an invasive element that disturbs the instinct for self-preservation and stunts the healthy growth, affirmative biopolitics asserts that the reception of the extrinsic is the means to strengthen and diversify and create new norms of life.

Rosi Braidotti further advances the idea of turning the negative understanding of life into a positive one, which she claims is what posthumanism should ultimately be based on: as described in *The Posthuman*, there is an “over-emphasis on the horizons of mortality and perishability” in the current understanding of life, wherein she intervenes with a more vital and viable concept of life as a means to counter what she calls the “forensic turn... haunted by the spectre of extinction” in the biopolitical thought (121). She defines life as “*zoe* ethics of sustainable transformation” ; hence the politics of life constitutes the “relentlessly generative force including and going beyond death”(121), or to put it another way, it has a “transversal force” that can contribute to a “*zoe*-centered egalitarianism” and does not discriminate one segment of life over another (60).

As mentioned above however, as much as life-affirming and *zoe*-centered posthumanism is, it does not in principle differ much from its supposed opposite that dwells on the necropolitical idea highlighting the common disposability and mortality of life. This is because the life-affirming posthumanism also relegates the human subject to passivity while assigning a disproportionately high level of activity and agency to all things nonhuman. For example, the status of the human in the world is greatly reduced as their trajectory of life is considered to be contingent upon the dynamic and agential

material reality. The human, though part of the vitality of life, is not the central figure of the universe but merely a part of the larger, intricately webbed environment that it can never dominate in entirety. In words sympathetic to environmental causes and evocative of Deleuze, Braidotti describes that posthumanism stresses the “multiple ecologies of belonging... [which] is in fact a moveable assemblage within a common life-space that the subject never masters or possesses but merely inhabits, crosses, always in a community, a pack, a group or a cluster” (193). The idea of human individual is thus a myth that has been formed in order to accommodate certain politico-economic structures: in truth, humans exist as a species, insignificantly at that, in the vast continuum of life. We are immanent in this “life, this *zoe*, an impersonal force that moves us without asking for our permission to do so” (193). As is the case with Wolfe, in which acknowledging the primacy of mortality and language over humans was the very means to enter into posthumanity, for Braidotti too, admitting the primacy of the force of a “common life-space” over the agency of humans is a passage to posthumanity. The remedy to human arrogance and supremacy is thus that we should take heart and “confront this position [of human vulnerability] lucidly,” for the recognition of our humble status will help us “enter into modes of relation that enhance ...the boundaries of what transversal and non-unitary subjects can become” (194).

What I described as the ecological bent in posthumanism is therefore the attempt to prove again, through the studies of ecology and ethology, the limitedness of being human: there is for example the posthumanist use of the increasingly popular term *Umwelt* originally introduced by Jakob von Uexküll, which reminds that what we call

“the world” is not a singular world that is experienced homogeneously, but rather layers of multiple worlds perceived and experienced differently according to the physiological structures and biological needs of each species. A unitary world that all beings universally recognize as their own is thus an anthropocentric illusion—only multiple and heterogeneous environments exist, without one being aware of the other. The implied radicality of this theory of *Umwelt*, from the perspective of posthumanism, lies in its conviction in the liveliness of multiple worlds that orchestrate themselves, without necessitating the agency and intervention of the human.

Umwelt is indeed notably mentioned in Agamben’s *The Open* as a concept that helps dispel the primacy of human perception and the myth of the singular, anthropomorphized world, for it postulates an “infinite variety of perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together as if in a gigantic musical score” (40). The recent publication of Uexküll’s work, *A Foray into the World of Animals and Humans*, on the Posthumanities series of University of Minnesota Press explains in an Afterword about the *Umwelt*’s particular compatibility with posthumanism, which is that the concept closes in the “abyss between animals and humans” by disputing the claims that “nonhuman subjectivity” does not exist (Winthrop-Young 222). In other words the concept of *Umwelt* and the posthuman intersect as they both reject the idea of human exceptionalism: “animals are promoted by virtue of their human-like ability to construct their own environment” whereas “humans are demoted by virtue of our animal-like inability to transcend our *Umwelt*” (222).

However, as attractive as this environmental perspective may be especially because *Umwelten* appear to be self-sustaining and self-restorative, it again yields results opposite to intention. That is, although posthumanism emphasizes the self-sufficiency of the environment for the purpose of dethroning the human from the illusion of the control of the environment, the self-sufficiency becomes precisely the excuse for the human's abandonment of responsibility for its destruction of the environment. *Umwelt* may encourage in other words the quietist withdrawal from the political realm because it postulates the autopoietic and homeostatic worlds of each species, rendering human intervention and social and political activities irrelevant and unnecessary. If all *Umwelten* are self-sufficient and mutually exclusive, what becomes of the innumerable *Umwelten* that are being destroyed by human subjects as well as the current reversal efforts to conserve those very worlds that are being destroyed? In fact, posthumanist thought removes the human further away from the environment by evoking *Umwelten* that do not correspond with each other and cannot be transcended—despite the claimed turn away from metaphysics in order to engage with realities grounded on earth, posthumanism engages in metaphysics of its own where living beings live in their own niches, “equally perfect and linked together as if in a gigantic musical score,” as quoted from Agamben above.

The attempt to remove the human from the center of the earth for the purpose of ethical remediation is a consistent task throughout posthumanist scholarship, but so is its tendency to isolate the human further away from the world of politico-economic histories and praxis. We can turn to the emerging theories of new materialism for more

examples, which work to further expand the breadth of world's liveliness by illuminating on the agential force of non-living things. In *New Materialisms* Diana Coole and Samantha Frost consult the studies of contemporary physics in order to demonstrate the lively activities of the universe that are yet to be accounted for satisfactorily by humans. Their examples include concepts from physics such as "dark matter" and "chaos and complexity theory," which indicate that "our natural environment is far more complex, unstable, fragile, and interactive" than we allow it to be (13). They use this scientific evidence of yet unaccounted matter in the universe to demonstrate that the human, rather than being above its immediate circumstances, is merely a part of the environment where activities of various matter such as particles and waves are at work. The complexity and even mystery of the natural world is a proof that the world is defined more by the "posthumanist sense of material agency" and less by the "humans' agentic efficacy" (14). The irony, of course, is that "dark matter," at least in the world of science, is an ongoing, viable research question, prompting a transnational, collaborative project of one of the largest and the most expensive kind as a matter of fact.¹¹ In the humanities it is used as a means to discount the human capacity to construct knowledge of the world it inhabits. I have mentioned earlier in the essay about how contrary to scientific endeavors to account for the *difference* between humans and chimps *despite* their near genetic identity, the humanities utilize the fact as a means to discount the sense of fundamental distinction. Here again, the case of dark matter tells

¹¹ For an example of a research regarding dark matter, see the efforts by the CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, as described very recently in a piece by Robin McKie in *theguardian.com*, "The Large Hadron Collider Sets its Sights on Dark Matter," published on January 4, 2015.

the familiar story, in which whereas in the scientific corner the whole attention is given to deriving more knowledge, in the field of posthumanities every effort is being made to underscore how much we do not know and cannot know.

This willful debilitation of the human capacity to know and intervene is a starkly conservative move, which becomes clearer when juxtaposed to the works of those thinkers who make every effort to argue for the necessity of immediate human action and immediate overhaul of current economic and political structures. Susanna Hecht's and Alexander Cockburn's study of the Amazon in *The Fate of the Forest* is one example, which argues that "wherever one turns, the landscape [of the Amazon] almost invariably bears the imprint of human agency" (34). This not only debunks the myth of pristine "ur-forest" (32), but also suggests that human presence in itself does not pose a threat to the forest life: rather, the studies increasingly demonstrate how the "indigenous and local populations manage their natural resources and sustain them over time" (33). Thus "humans can continue to make their history in the forest, sustaining and sustained" (33). There is then only one way to ensure the continued existence of both the Amazon forests and humans, which is not in the increased knowledge of mysterious Umwelten or dark matter, or the conservatory efforts that excludes humans, but simply in executing "justice and distribution" as Hecht and Cockburn conclude (217). The history of destruction in the Amazon, or any other landscape and ecosystem, is less directly about human arrogance than about the desire for economic and political gains of various parties involved. The human-nature relationship in the Amazon cannot be understood without a knowledge of the "political history and political economy both of the region

and of Brazil. No effective analyses can ever emerge without an effort to understand the rationales of particular actors, in light of their class positions and economic strategies” (110).¹²

This acknowledgement of human economic and political realm that forcefully implicates and influences all social and human-nature relations, however, is starkly missing in the posthumanist understanding of the world: its project of effacing the human as an acting and thinking being leads further to avert its eyes from the material and historical conditions that apparently inform the way humans make a living with the rest of the nonhuman world. Hence there is the attempt to give the world a naturalist and highly technological explanation—one that is seemingly de-anthropomorphized and objective. I am specifically thinking of “systems” as defined in systems theory and further expanded by some posthumanists, which is another concept that similarly highlights the self-sufficient vitality of the world. Identifying all sections of the society as systems that are autopoietic with self-organizing principles, it argues that the world operates through systems maintaining themselves, with self-referential reflexivity coordinating both internal and external processes according to their own principles. Bruce Clarke thus regards systems theory as offering a functioning principle of the world, and concludes in *Posthuman Metamorphosis* that “the discrete merger of separate

¹² See also *The Ecological Rift* by John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York who also highlight the importance of material conditions and human circumstances in understanding the environment and its natural processes. The authors argue that the “ecological rift”—defined as a “rift in the metabolic exchange between humanity and nature” (45)—is fundamentally “the product of a social rift: the domination of human being by human being. The driving force is a society based on class, inequality, and acquisition without end” (47).

systems into hybrid consortiums is the way the world works” (195). Cary Wolfe also relies on systems theory in his promotion of a posthumanist outlook, which he defines as essentially based on Niklas Luhmann’s idea of “openness from closure,” which contrary to the belief that it ends up in the system’s solipsism, is in fact the basis from which it can “increase environmental contacts and, in the process, produce more environmental complexity for other systems” (117). The posthumanist mode of perception thus entails the idea of the structural limit of being a human which is the self-referentiality or the “constitutive blindness” (117). It is this closure that enables the “buildup of internal complexity,” which then “increases the system’s connection and sensitivity to, and dependence on, the environment” (xxiv). For posthumanists, therefore, there is no thing as delusionary and misleading as the idea of transcendental subject, which by failing to see the limitedness of one’s being, also “stops short of applying its own protocols and commitments [of Enlightenment rationality] to itself” (xx).

In all of the strands of posthumanist thinking described above, there is a consistent emphasis on the world’s complexities and multiplicities that posthumanism will open our eyes to, which is hoped to advance a more expansive ethics. In the words of Wolfe again, posthumanism fosters the “vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited” (47). Acknowledging the limits of being human does not amount to being defeatist or pessimist; on the contrary it will be the first step toward “describe[ing] the human [...] with *greater* specificity,” as it now knows that it lives within the virtuality and multiplicity of worlds that have “their own ways of ‘bringing forth a world’” (xxv).

Notwithstanding the posthumanist promise of a new ethics, one cannot help thinking that this insistence on the world's vast diversity which humans are constitutively unable to know fully is a mere strategy to avoid having to commit to a definitive stance based on one's limited and anthropomorphic knowledge. In this sense, there is a deep anxiety in posthumanist thinking, of committing an ideological crime of casting one's own humanist perception; it wants to remain free of accusations that it is falling into the traps of universalism and transcendence, and thus dramatizes the world's vast complexity while minimizing the human's capacity to know it and act in it. There is indeed a stark irony in the way posthumanism is vehemently against universalist claims and pretensions of objectivity but yet proceeds to offer an objective account of the world, approaching the world pseudo-scientifically as an aggregate of various systems that is self-referential and yet influencing one another, merging and multiplying. In its desire to be beyond the humanist mode of perception—in other words, a desire to remain intact from its own bias—it constructs an argument that is technical and noncommittal, through which the world is presented as being profoundly, and indeed, sublimely complex, multiple, and inter-relational, which in principle cannot be disputed. Posthumanism further claims that because this kind of dynamic world has no place for an omniscient human subject who remains unaffected by the larger operations of the world, it offers an alternative mode of being, which navigates the world through the engagement with a “mutational, viral, or parasitic form of thinking” (Wolfe xix). The foremost issue in posthumanism then becomes tracing how its viral thinking is developed, hosted, and transformed across the boundaries, which precludes the

possibility of ever assessing the ideological content of this very thinking, precisely because it is viral, which one can only study etiologically but not determine its legitimacy.

This then goes back to the claim I have made earlier about the posthumanist preoccupation with its own act of deconstruction—it takes overt pleasure in seeing itself thinking the posthumanist thought and unraveling the fallacies of Man ad infinitum. Despite the claims of being non-solipsistic, it indulges in seeing itself thinking the posthuman thought, and in that sense it falls short of being a kind of self-reflective critique as articulated in the tradition of dialectical thinking. If, as explained by Marcuse, this thinking enacts a determinate negation that is simultaneously a refusal of the given and a recognition of the alternative, posthumanist thinking enacts a series of negation that is a mere bad infinity. The purpose thus seems to lie in perpetually turning the human against itself; or as Neil Badmington in *Posthumanism* describes, if humanism persists today like a Lernaean hydra that regenerates itself each time parts of it are severed (10-11), posthumanism then is what stamps it out only to have it recur again. Thus in diametric opposition to humanist triumphalism a narrative of resignation and renunciation is cultivated, one which renders human existence as being in itself tragic and antithetical to the condition of flourishing of all life. And in that sense posthumanism casts a pessimistic eye on the human: it is misanthropic in that it is skeptical of the ethical power of humanist subjectivity while being overtly trusting of all qualities that denote being nonhuman—mainly, animality, affect, intuition, non-rationality, embodiedness, and so on, but above all, passivity and vulnerability.

There is thus a turn to the nonhuman, in which one envisions a world of networks and hybrids that a critic like Bruno Latour terms as the “parliament of things,” through which he effectively erases the epistemological barrier between the human and nonhuman and thereby turns politics into a kind of natural history of the intermingling humans and things. This turn to the nonhuman is therefore a turn away from the human and a misanthropic gesture that reinforces human alienation. Think of the last statement in Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto,” which declares that she would “rather be a cyborg than a goddess,” referring to the potentially liberating qualities of a cyborg as a hybrid entity crisscrossing the boundaries between culture and nature. Almost a decade later in an interview in 1991 Haraway added that she “would rather go to a bed with a cyborg than a sensitive man” (18 *Technoculture*). Neil Badmington puts a spin on this quote by stating in his book titled *Alien Chic* that he “would rather go to bed with a cyborg than a ‘Man’ of reason” (80). These quotes elucidate their shared forms of misanthropy and by contrast, their curiously romanticized understanding of nonhuman beings. If goddess is properly de-mystified and demoted, cyborg replaces that position by being hailed as a figure of revolutionary hybrid. Likewise, if the status of human is de-mystified and diminished in the quotes above, animals are instead elevated as beings which might fulfill the ethical promise of coexistence that humans have failed to do.

It seems that today theory considers the preference of nonhumans to humans as being a more viable choice for sustainability and the general well-being of the world. The figure of the thinking and acting human subject has fallen into disfavor: if anything the presence of such human that engages in praxis is in itself a threat. In tracing various

versions of posthumanist thinking, Timothy Brennan in *Borrowed Light* therefore explains that we come to a situation where “humanities have come to stand against humans” (6), humans here especially understood as the figure who claims “any commitment or affiliation with the idea of political will or force” (7). Posthumanism has its basis on disillusionment with humanity and with humanism, and it pits man against itself by defining it as the very enemy to be eliminated. In contrast to this deep skepticism about the human race, one finds a curiously romanticized understanding of nonhuman beings as seen in the comments by Badmington and Haraway. If goddess is properly de-mystified and demoted, cyborg replaces that position by being hailed as a figure of revolutionary hybrid. Likewise, if the human is de-mystified, animals are instead elevated as beings which might fulfill the ethical promise of coexistence that humans have failed to do. It is now no longer humans but nonhumans who are the source of knowledge and inspiration. In *Unhuman Culture*, Daniel Cottom describes this kind of misanthropic thinking an “undoing of humanity” that is “drive[n] to betray what Samuel Beckett called ‘anthropomorphic insolence,’ or whatever may be thought of as properly human desires, intentions, and concerns” (4). There is then a “necessity of misanthropy,” as the title of his chapter suggests, as it is what “create[s] the possibility of humanity” by undoing the self-indulgent and megalomaniac understanding of self that reinforces the triumphant humanism (5). In a similar vein, describing Cottom’s theoretical use of misanthropy as a “strategic misanthropy,” Stefan Herbrechter further argues in *Posthumanism* that it is the only way to disengage the human from the self-

serving heroism that always redeems itself, “giving in to the rehumanization reflex” (71-73).

But to be strategically misanthropic is to still rely on the thinking subject who has the capacity to create a distance from the immediate context it is immersed in and be intentional about its own mode of existence—in other words, it postulates the presence of human agent who can strategize to change the way its own species inhabit the earth. In this sense, posthumanism, unless it is drawn toward nihilistic self-denial, has no option to talk about its topic other than through the mediation of the human thinking mind. The problem of the human cannot be outdone by the promise of the posthuman; it can only be worked through to be determinately changed and developed. In that sense, the labor of “tarrying with the negative” as described by Hegel is particularly useful in thinking about the human—for in posthumanism there is a constant effort to *prefigure* the new, affirmative, posthuman figure while sidestepping what is immediately before it, which is the apparent forms of social contradiction and systems of violence that humans create. This prefiguration of the posthuman however is so abstract that it is hollow: according to Braidotti, the posthuman specifically is what is in the process of “‘becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine’,” which is to be the “foundation for a system of ethical values where ‘life’ stands central” (66-67). The negativity of the human then is not in any way dealt with; it is replaced by the positivity that is the posthuman. Hegel aptly describes the inadequacy of this thinking, when he states that “this kind of activity is always away beyond it; instead of tarrying with [the real issue] and losing itself in it, this kind of knowing is forever grasping at something

new” (3). The posthumanist aim of establishing an egalitarian species ethics based on post-anthropocentric thinking, then, is just that, for as Hegel continues, “the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out” (2), which is to say that the praxis of the human agent based on the understanding that it is a part of the world from which it can conceptually detach itself, is still of great importance.

In modernity the human has precisely been that figure that posthumanism says is an illusion—the dominating master, a detached observer, and a measure of all things through which all beings are anthropomorphically defined. The idea that humans are animals who share certain passivity with the rest of species is indeed irrefutable—but it is also undeniable that even with such knowledge of one’s shared vulnerability, humans partake in material practices of domination and control. The self-knowledge regarding ontological passivity in itself does nothing to eliminate violent practices that are nevertheless enacted. To put this yet another way, if the posthumanist aim lies in an “increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly and differently, inhabited” (47), as Wolfe claims, then the way to materialize it is by way of negating the specific forms of violence that is enacted, which can only be done by way of transforming social systems and re-shaping politics. Hence, the juridical procedures and parliamentary politics still matter greatly both for humans and nonhumans, in which humans’ collective intention and decision are still the deciding factor. Anthropocentrism is mediated by the acting and thinking human, and therefore this very human-centered system of belief can only be unraveled through the mediation of the human agency. The human still looms large, and if in the present the human

subject connotes the state of negativity, then perhaps the human, now more than ever, is what we should tarry with.

With this critique of posthumanism I present four chapters: three will focus on reading contemporary novels that I argue are intent on tarrying with the negative by thinking through the problems posed by the human without renouncing the potential the human contains. This is not to say that the works of Margaret Atwood, Octavia E. Butler, and J.M. Coetzee—the *MaddAddam* trilogy just completed in 2013, *Xenogenesis* trilogy, and *Disgrace*, respectively—take the position of a stubborn and stale humanist who strives to preserve the privileges of man as the holder of unique attributes such as language and reason; far from it, if anything they all demonstrate strands of posthumanist disillusionment in the human, and concretely imagine what it would be like to live in worlds where humans have been displaced from the center of the universe, no longer a being uniquely qualified to be the master of the world. One way or the other, all three works address the shifting definition of the human in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it is perhaps in this context that the novels are increasingly being categorized as posthumanist fictions.¹³

A more nuanced reading may be possible, however, if I approach them not as fictions *of* posthumanism but as fictions *about* posthumanism. That is, they imagine about posthuman worlds, about posthuman lives, and about posthuman being—they

¹³ For articles on Butler's posthumanism, see Goss and Riquelme 434-459, Nayar 796-817. For works on the relation of posthumanism to Atwood's trilogy, see Ciobanu (2014) 153-162, Pordizk 142-61. Coetzee's in-depth engagement with posthumanism and its trans-species ethics is argued by Ciobanu (2012) 668-698, and Rohman (2014) 562-578. .

depict holistically the overall context in which the idea of the posthuman becomes manifest in everyday lives, but not to endorse, much less celebrate them. Rather, the novels challenge the principles of posthumanism by describing just how much a failure a posthuman world is. In all three novels, the posthuman emerges at the most dire political moment as a euphoric alternative, but in truth turns out to be a vision that makes the situation go bad from worse, or at least maintain the status quo, by identifying the human as a being who is best to just be: a natural being that constitutes its own *Umwelt*, engaging with multiple other worlds without really knowing why and how. An extremely stratified society in the *MaddAddam*, as well as the forlorn earth where the aliens have come to save the humans in the *Xenogenesis*, or in the post-apartheid South Africa where racism and speciesism are a serious source of tension as described in *Disgrace*—these situations I argue, are worsened by the posthumanist argument that the way to create conditions for flourishing is to finalize the death of the subject. While agreeing with the basic proposition of posthumanist ethics that a human is a human animal, I argue that these novels do not forgo the idea of human as described in the narratives of emancipatory humanism, which are essentially about freeing humans from the tyranny of both physical and conceptual kinds.

If one of the strengths of this humanism that is concerned with emancipation and praxis is that it is hinged on historical specificity, posthumanism seems inadequate precisely for its desire to move beyond historical specificity and be *ahistorical*. Chapter One, “The Animal in Excess,” aims to examine this by studying how posthumanism purports to emancipate animals, which is by way of unmooring them from the violence

of human representation and relegate them to the sublime, a historical space. If for Peter Singer animal liberation involved the logistics of applying our common sense, moral values, as well as juridical laws, for posthumanism, animal liberation, if one can call it that, involves a *conceptual* one, in which the animals are freed from the human's epistemic violence. I describe how posthumanism, in discounting human reason as a medium of communicating truth, offers a poetic and affective approach as a means to recognize the animal in a non-anthropomorphic mode. But because posthumanism stresses the impossibility of knowing the animal and its unrepresentability, it results in the elevation and mystification of it as what can only be *experienced* and not known. While this affective approach enriches the ways of imagining the animal, I question its ethical and political effectiveness, for it merely encourages the human to *feel* the animal as a figure of excess unbound from human cognition, while evading the ways humans exert violence on the nonhuman to begin with.

In the second chapter "Biologism in the Reagan Era: Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy and the Posthumanist Utopia," I argue that Butler's trilogy (1987-89), by way of offering a utopia that can only be realized through the *genetic* enhancement of humans, obliquely critiques the effects of Reaganism on democratic values: mainly, civic engagement and the confidence in the human agency, regardless of racial and other forms of identity, to transform the social arena. The trilogy, then, is a reflection of a culture that relinquishes the participation in politics by placing hope in biotechnology and its remedial power. Butler reveals her tensioned position to both the human and posthuman sensibilities, when while wanting to retain a certain level of

autonomy for her black female protagonist, she also casts a longing gaze on extraterrestrial beings as what can save her protagonist from the complexity of being a human.

If I argue that Butler abandons in the end any confidence she has in the human, opting leave the earth in order to be somewhere else more utopian, I suggest in “Dialectic of Enlightenment in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy” that Atwood sets her feet firmly on the earth by trying to resolve post-apocalyptic problems through human efforts. I suggest that Atwood’s trilogy on the post-apocalyptic world traces a dialectical movement in which the moment of enlightenment at its peak turns out also to be the darkest moment in civilization. The technologically advanced society Atwood imagines therefore does not give the freedom that it promises—rather, it further dehumanizes and binds all forms of life to its reductive scientism. In the trilogy, “life” is considered uniformly as bodily capital from which profits can be derived. All life-forms are treated equal then, albeit negatively under the capitalist principle of equivalence that neutralizes all beings and things for the purpose of numeric measurements. The trilogy explains the ways in which *because* it is a posthuman world that reduces beings to biological species devoid of cultural and metaphysical meanings, the society is at liberty to appropriate them at its disposal. Atwood thus suggests that it is not the idea of the human as such that must be negated, but rather the social process of dehumanization itself.

The inadequacy of the posthumanist engagement with nonhuman beings is further examined in the third chapter entitled “Allegorical Dog: Reading J.M. Coetzee’s

Disgrace.” In this chapter, I read *Disgrace* to examine the tensions between two outlooks regarding canines—one is the consideration of canines as companion species and as man’s best friend, and the other is the treatment of canines as humans while treating humans as “less than” canines. By analyzing the representations of human-dog relationships in the novel, I propose that dogs in the context of post-apartheid South Africa are not simply companion species but rather the “white man’s” best friends and best guards to his property. What seems as innocuous as dogs, then, takes on a different meaning in *Disgrace*—dogs challenge the “dignity” and the identity of a colonized subject. Contrary to the interpretations arguing that *Disgrace* beckons the coming of posthumanist ethics by highlighting the animality of all beings, I argue that the novel embraces it only reluctantly for the alienating effect it has on the colonized subject, to whom the full gaining of human rights is yet an unrealized hope.

Chapter 1 The Limits of Posthumanism: Animals and the Poetics of Excess

“Free Alba!” This was the catchphrase Eduardo Kac devised when his transgenic living artwork—a fluorescent bunny named Alba—was taken away from him to be kept at the Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA) in France, a site where Alba was originally created. Named “GFP Bunny” for being genetically engineered with a Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) abstracted from a jellyfish, Alba was the result of a collaborative art project between Kac and a few scientists at the INRA. The project was to be considered fully “complete” once it could live as part of Kac’s family at home in Chicago, demonstrating to the public (allegedly struck by fear for biotechnology and its monstrous products) that a genuine “dialogical relationship” is possible between man and a transgenic animal (*Telepresence* 237). The second purpose of the project—and this point is relevant to his many other works as well—lay in highlighting the biological affinity that man and animal share, a fact Kac says is well demonstrated by studies like molecular biology which proves that the “human genome is not particularly important, special, or different,” but is “made of the same basic elements as other known life forms” (274). The third aim, alarmingly enough, is to have Alba be a contribution to the diversity of species on earth, for as Kac asserts, the purpose of transgenic art is to “increase global biodiversity by inventing new life forms” (237).

However, despite the former agreement between Kac and the INRA that Alba would be transported to Chicago, the INRA, to Kac’s much surprise, revoked its original plan to release Alba from its laboratory for reasons clearly unknown. Numerous factors are believed to have caused the change in plan, such as the Institute’s fear of drawing too

much unwanted public attention to itself and its discomfort with Kac's allegedly dishonest appropriation of Alba. For the purpose of this chapter, however, I want to bring attention to the ways Kac responded to the Institute's decision, specifically the ways he launched a campaign for Alba's "liberation," resorting to the rhetoric of emancipation that depicted Alba as the victim of abuse of bureaucratic power which needed to be freed and be back in the safety of Kac's abode in Chicago. For examples, he installed "Free Alba!" photography exhibits, hung out the impressionistic "Alba flag" outside his home, and dramatized Alba's plight by compiling a flurry of public and media responses in *It's Not Easy Being Green!* (2003). Freeing Alba was an urgent task for Kac, for her freedom was to be, to a certain extent, a measurement of how open and committed humans could be towards the issues of transgenic animals.¹⁴

I begin with the story of Kac and Alba because it effectively captures the larger cultural climate under which the human-animal relationship is discussed, especially within the theoretical circles of posthumanism today. I find in posthumanism a purpose similar to that of Kac's GFP bunny project, which is to undo the binary between the human and nonhuman and to highlight the less-than-distinguished status of the human species, whose history of evolution is inseparable from that of nonhuman animals. As Kac's primary purpose in designing Alba was to carry out a utopian vision of trans-species coexistence, posthumanism too envisions a place where humans and nonhumans

¹⁴ Kac's campaigns to free Alba failed, and the rabbit is reported as having died in the laboratory at INRA in 2002, a fact which Kac is highly skeptical of. For more details, see Kristen Philipkoski's "RIP: Alba, the Glowing Bunny," an online article in *WIRED*.

coexist without violence, and where species differences do not serve as a valid foundation for political hierarchy.

As argued in “Introduction” however, posthumanist scholarship purports to do this *not* by transforming Man and its political realm where such discriminatory practices are sanctioned but by elevating nonhuman animals as sublimely complex and multi-dimensional beings. In this sense, the posthumanist task does not so much lie in changing the actual terrain but in simply reversing the human-animal dynamic, in which it is no longer the humans who enjoy special status, but rather the nonhuman animals. In other words there is only a switch in the role one plays while the hierarchical scheme itself remains unchanged. If it has been the norm in Western philosophy to epistemologically reduce the complexities of animals by having them fit the Procrustean bed that is the human mode of perception, posthumanism attempts to overturn this practice by announcing that animals are inexhaustible and irreducible. It re-invents animals as a figure of complexity that is capable of exerting agential force that is ungovernable by humans and not entirely perceptible to the human eye. Under the theories of posthumanism, animals become that which can only be indirectly inferred and partially known. In other words, animals are that which is unknowable—it is a figure of excess because it exceeds the capacity of human reason.

Another way to describe this tendency in posthumanism would be that it attempts to free animals specifically from the grip of human *representation*, the implication being that man distorts and constrains animals through anthropomorphic representation. However, as posthumanism discounts the credibility of the claims of rational and

objective understanding of animals, it goes the opposite way by reckoning animals as being *too* complex to be properly reflected by the human mind. The nonhuman is rendered un-representable, as an excess that escapes the capacity of human cognition and representation. Thus, the nonhuman gains freedom by virtue of exceeding the limits of human knowledge. In the following I will show how the idea of the nonhuman excess is an important motif that underpins the current discussions of posthumanism.

Furthermore, this motif of excess I will argue has the effect of shifting the interest from the political nature of trans-species relationship to the *poetics* of the relationship, in which fostering a particular sensibility towards the nonhuman beings becomes a primary issue. I will describe this posthumanist mode of engagement a “poetics of excess,” which attempts to liberate animals by rendering them as beings that always already *exceed* human comprehension and expectation. As also explained in “Introduction,” this results in replacing politics with ethics, in which the liberation of animals from human domination is conditioned upon the cultivation of a new sensibility on the part of the human being, without having transformed a single aspect of the existing politico-historical realm that validates and reinforces the human practices of violence and domination. Under posthumanist ethics one only needs to show a gesture of acknowledgement regarding what has always been true but denied, which is that animals are incredibly complex beings not conducive to rational thinking. In this sense, I will conclude that posthumanism is not so much about changing but navigating the terrain, by learning how to quietly and contemplatively *be*. It is concerned more about how not

to exert *epistemic* violence on nonhuman animals than about reducing the actual, physical violence on animals.

Countless examples are found throughout the contemporary works that speculate on human-animal relationships from the posthumanist point of view, arguing to the effect that animals are unfathomably complex. Consider, for instance, Rosi Braidotti's description of animals in *The Posthuman*. In arguing that animals are not mere inferior objects that serve to demonstrate the superiority of humans, Braidotti argues for the need of a new "code system" or a "zoontology" that might better reflect the complexity of animals and their proximity to humans (70). The case of Dolly the sheep, the first animal to be cloned, exemplifies the need of new mode of understanding, Braidotti argues, for

[it] blurs the categories of thought we have inherited from the past—she/it stretches the longitude and latitude of thought itself, adding depth, intensity and contradiction. Because she/it embodies complexity, this entity which is no longer an animal but not yet fully a machine, is the icon of the posthuman condition.

(74) Animals thus promote a form of thinking that embraces *liminality* by exceeding the normative socio-cultural boundaries. Cary Wolfe, too, describes animals as that which cannot be thought universally to fit within the existing legal and political framework. In a dialogue he has with other scholars in *The Death of the Animal* edited by Paola Cavalieri, Wolfe describes how animals always solicit an ethical thinking that is "not generic" but specific in the sense of requiring qualified attention to each context within which a respective animal demands an ethical decision (54). Indeed, for him the animal question is that which cannot be contained by the "existing jurico-political framework

and its philosophical underpinnings” (55). In *electric animal*, Akira Mizuta Lippit also complements the posthumanist argument by suggesting that animals since modernity, despite declining in numbers, “never *entirely* vanish” (1). Instead, they “exist in a state of *perpetual vanishing*,” acquiring a “*spectral*” status in the realm of media and particularly cinema (1). For Lippit, the philosophical development of the theories of mind and language, as well as the technological development of photography and cinema, are intricately entangled with traces of animals: animals always manifest within the parameters of human consciousness, reminding that they are “in excess of human discourse,” thereby disrupting human’s self-knowledge and casting a “magnetic force or gaze that brings humanity to the threshold of its subjectivity” (51). The point is that animals are situated at once within, beyond and below—in the “crypt of modernity,” as Lippit describes (54)—and that they are defined not by a lack or an absence but by always exceeding the boundaries that define the humanity.

The recent publication by Carrie Rohman on the relationship of animals to modernist literature also shares the view that animals designate something more than what humans perceive them to be. In *Stalking the Subject*, Rohman suggests that a large part of modernist literature is nourished by the animality that stalks the human subject and the tension it creates as human characters repress, challenge, and embrace that animality. Again, there persists the view that the animal designates profundity beyond the confines of human rationality and linguistic capacity. Animality is the “critical ‘unknown’” and should be regarded as a “privileged site of alterity that probes the postmodern relation to otherness beyond the easy boundaries of human fraternity” (20).

There is indeed a common theme that runs in all of the posthumanist accounts on animals: by presenting animals as what eludes human cognition, they arrive at anti-representationalism, which deems the act of representation itself as a kind of epistemic violence and a distortion of what is truly multi-dimensional. According to posthumanist mode of perception, animals, contrary to being existentially poor and lacking in capacities, in truth boast a remarkably wide range of diversity and complexity that is not reducible to a single concept. In *Animal Lessons*, Kelly Oliver describes this tendency to free animals from being pinned down as a concept, explaining that by “penning [animals] into one concept... we do conceptual violence to them as well as justify physical violence to them” (34). Like Rohman who has identified animals to be the “privileged site of alterity,” Oliver too suggests that animals today highlight the need of an “ethics of difference or alterity,” which eventually should develop into an “ethics of *relationality* and *responsivity*” (21) whose priority is the question of how to share the planet (22). Animals can neither be repressed nor mastered, Oliver argues, for they “break free of the roles defined for them by philosophers,” and like the white tiger in the Las Vegas show that bit his long-time trainer in 2003, they bite back, whose motivation for doing so “we cannot be certain” and “we will never know” (22). Here once again, is the motif of animals being uncontainable. Wolfe also expresses his anti-representationalist stance in *Animal Rites* by way of a reference to Richard Rorty who argues that human representation is an unreliable knowledge and therefore, “ethics cannot ground itself in a representationalist relation to an object.” Wolfe reasons that man cannot observe some “essence” in the object as if “*nothing, in principle, is hidden*”

from him (167). There is an “inescapable violence and disfiguration of representation itself,” and there will always be a “blind spot” (151).

Thus, for fear of exerting conceptual violence on animals, humans must refrain from attempting to ever construct knowledge about animals that presume to be objective. Animals are at their safest when humans renounce from representing them. The view is quite pessimistic, then, as it points to the illusory nature of the world so understood by the human mind, which is also, by way of inference, anti-political and anti-historical in its conviction in the impossibility of beholding objective, unified knowledge of reality upon which humans can collectively act. Posthumanism’s expulsion of the thinking subject that actively seeks out a coherent view of the world indicates its abandonment of the idea of historical agency of humans that produce future visions and drive social transformations. No wonder then, with this withdrawal of the figure of the human subject accompanied by the proportionate promotion of animals, posthumanism arrives at obscurantism and resorts to the withdrawal from the social realm, choosing to turn one’s attention away safely to animals and the problems concerning their representation.

I must at once point out that in so far as the concrete emancipation of the victims of power is considered, it is the materialist and humanist thought that has traditionally been the most involved. The interest in the working conditions of laborers and the conviction in the potential of their organizational power are some of the obvious examples; there are also anticolonial thought and postcolonial theories that address the issues of disenfranchisement, which draw their intellectual influence from the tradition of materialist thought, particularly the “Marxism of the Eastern periphery of Europe”

(190) as Timothy Brennan writes in “Postcolonial Studies Between the European Wars.”¹⁵ But if the studies within the purview of historical materialist thought seem to limit themselves to the problems of *human* suffering and emancipation, Herbert Marcuse’s convergence of the fate of humans with that of nature shows the larger applicability of a materialist perspective to the question of animals and domination of nature. Throughout works such as *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* and *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse demonstrates how the problem of environmental destruction simultaneously brings one’s attention to the problem of the destructive principles that have been internalized and rendered second nature to humans, which are further validated and abetted by the politico-economic frame of capitalism. Thus in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* Marcuse stresses the dialectical correlation between humans and nature, explaining how nature is an “ally in the struggle against the exploitative societies in which the violation of nature aggravates the violation of man,” and vice versa (59). One of the specific and quite forthright observations Marcuse makes is the fact that while treating nature and animals “‘for its own sake’ sounds good,” such idea “belongs to the Orphic myth, [and] not to any conceivable historical reality”—what *can* be done however, is to realize the collective goal of a free society which “under its ‘regulative idea of reason,’ make[s] the concerted effort to reduce consistently the suffering which man imposes on the animal world”(68). Importantly, this effort to reduce the suffering of nature does not come from a romanticized understanding that nature designates a

¹⁵ See also Benita Parry’s *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, which similarly illuminates on what oftentimes go unacknowledged, which is that a critique of empire originates from the “writings of liberation movements”(6) that are based on the understanding of systems of oppression, both economic and political.

sacredness that is inviolable. Rather, if humans have the obligation to reduce the suffering of nature then it is because nature is a “subject-object” and a “*cosmos* with its own potentialities, necessities, and chances” (69). In other words, nature is the “bearer of *objective values*” which must be fully materialized through human efforts, and not just a “value-free function” (69).

If it is the dialectical view that helps Marcuse to define nature as both a “*subject* in its own right” and an “object of history” (60), then it is precisely the non-dialectical view that leads posthumanism to resist the idea that nature is inevitably a historical object mediated by human activities. Animals become ahistorical beings under the posthumanist imagination, therefore, and are submitted to the intellectual play of obscurantism in which animals are “liberated” by virtue of their poetic ambiguities that evade human understanding. The historical dimensions of animal existence today gets washed away by the wishful thinking of posthumanism that wants to redeem animals by de-historicizing and de-politicizing them. In this sense, a number of worried critiques of posthumanism offered from the perspectives of critical animal studies are very convincing. In “The Trouble with Posthumanism” Zipporah Weisberg, for example, writes about an increasing tendency to conflate posthumanist scholarship with critical animal studies, the latter which she argues is and must be “unabashedly abolitionist, opposed to all forms of instrumentalization, commodification, and exploitation of both nonhuman and human animals” (110). Posthumanism however cannot adhere to this goal because it “often explores the animal question as a self-indulgent intellectual exercise, rather than as a means to a radical praxis” (107). One of the consequences of

turning the animal question into a theoretical feat is the fetishization of inter-species hybridity as a romantic concept that liberates beings from norms and boundaries, when in fact such elevation of hybridity merely serves to validate many of the biotechnologies that arbitrarily combine different organic matter. Thus Weisberg argues, posthumanism, violates “animals’ ontological integrity” (99) and “ontological boundaries (100): by uncritically embracing the virtue of hybridity, which Weisberg terms as the “Haraway effect” that began with her postmodern, cyborg theories, posthumanism ends up vindicating for the very literal hybridization of life that is the biotechnological engineering, which is most of the times carried out with the hope of garnering lucrative investments from biotech firms.

On the other hand, writing with a more accommodating gesture, Helena Pedersen in “Release the Moth” seeks for a possibility of “cross-disciplinary knowledge” that might be produced in the sometimes strained ties of critical animal studies with posthumanism (68). Yet, Pedersen, like Weisberg, critiques that posthumanism is fascinated with “boundary-dissolution” of species, which seems to reveal a kind of “metonymic desire” to belong to an “expanded context and community of life forms” (72-3). Pedersen thus notes on the “colonising tendencies” latent in posthumanism (67)—an “uncomfortable resemblance of posthumanist boundary dissolution with political, cultural, and ecological colonialism” (72). Indeed, the blurring of boundaries which might grant a human subject a free, independent, and indeed, colonial spirit that roams without commitments to any forms of identity, may in fact mean nothing more than “violence, horror, and death” for nonhuman animals, whom in

fact, have not sought for that kind of boundary-dissolving merger (72). One could say that even in the allegedly humbling moment of seeing oneself bound to and circumscribed by its environment, a posthuman subject wields its imperial tendencies. The human in posthumanism *is* still the autonomous subject that can metaphysically detach itself from its surrounding world. In reality, what it does is to relieve itself from ethical and political responsibilities by demoting its own potential as an acting agent and relegating animals to the safe space where systems of representation cannot violate them. It seems that animals are once again slighted, this time paradoxically by way of being elevated and sublimated as an elusive figure.

Here we can bring our attention to Gary Steiner's critique of *postmodernism's* engagement with the question of the animal, for he challenges it for the similar reasons that I challenge posthumanism in relation to the animal question. In *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism*, Steiner notes how postmodernism "become[s] a *procursus* into the realm of obscurity and confusion" (75) because of the ways postmodernism, in what is akin to an "adolescent act of rebellion" (74), hastily invalidates the role of human agency, language, and reason upon which law and justice is established. Given that posthumanism has its intellectual roots in the preceding discourses of postmodernism and poststructuralism, it is not surprising that Steiner's critique of these two major contemporary thoughts can be applied in the same way to posthumanism. But perhaps in the context of discussing the animal question, the extensive influence poststructuralism, and particularly Derrida and his *The Animal That Therefore I Am* holds over the posthumanist scholarship must be scrutinized, for the scholars discussed

above, like Badmington, Oliver, Rohman, and Wolfe, as well as others like Matthew Carlarco (2008), Leonard Steiner (2007), and Kari Weil (2012), all meditate on animals through the framework offered by Derrida.

A particularly influential aspect of Derrida's discussion of animals is that he shows a way of approaching animals that is attentive to the irreplaceable and singular context within which a human encounters an animal. He thus shows a possibility of ethics that defies being codified on generic and universal terms. Put another way, Derrida shows that human encounter with an animal is always *anecdotal*, which by its nature is something specific and private that makes sense only to the individual subject forming a relationship with an animal. Consider the story of Derrida encountering his cat while naked in his bathroom, where he lets his guard down, so to speak, and allows the cat's gaze to unarm his anthropological security. What he experiences when his aggrandized sense of human self is diminished is the "abysmal limit of the human" and the feeling of apocalypse that follows the abyss (12). Derrida describes his experience as being in a state where he can no longer "announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself" (12). Once the anthropocentric ego is out of his way, his cat no longer seems possible to be conceptually reduced by the human mind—on the contrary, the cat reveals itself to be a being capable of giving man a vertigo by its gaze alone, only if humans would allow themselves to be the receiving end of that animal gaze. Being seen by his cat, Derrida thus finds himself unable to deploy the analytical and calculative approach which he argues the Western philosophy orchestrates to seize and measure the animal Other. Thus, Derrida opposes what he

regards as the philosophical formulation deployed by “*all* philosophers,” which determines there is “*the* limit” that separates “man in general from the animal in general,” the limit which on its other side has “an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right, the theoretical or philosophical right, to distinguish and mark as opposite, namely, the set of the Animal in general, the Animal spoken of in the general singular” (40-1). Against the conceptual violence implicit in the phrase “the Animal,” therefore, Derrida suggests, as an alternative, a “chimerical word,” *l’animot*, devised in the hope of reminding the fact that an animal is “neither a species nor a gender nor an individual” but “an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals”(41). As Steiner notes, the “mot” meaning word in *animot* is devised to bring one’s attention to the “violent character of language” which “conceal[s] singularities under symbolic rubrics” (122).

Here again, the same theme persists, in which the semiotic representation is in itself rendered violent. There is then a compulsion to keep animals out of human systems of representation, in order to retain the irreducible and irreplaceable singularity of each animal. But despite all the Derridean as well as posthumanist claims about forgoing the metaphysical thinking, they cannot but participate in it by producing the universalist idea that all animals are singular. But more importantly, this tendency to safeguard animals against reason-based forms of inquiry and against universalist claims is a reflection of the poststructuralist and posthumanist desire to release themselves from the political grounds where difficult decisions must be immediately made, at the expense of equally important issues and as a result of calculations and tug-of-war. Instead of remaining on

this difficult ground, however, they pursue after the highly aestheticized and non-representational form of relating to animals that I have discussed throughout the essay—relationships that are mainly initiated by encountering animals as living beings in intimate proximity with humans but yet conceptually ungraspable because of their ontological elusiveness. There is not much that can be done when animals cannot be discussed on general terms, and are rendered ontologically resistant to intellectualization. I would say then, that there is a tendency to elevate elusiveness and non-knowledge itself, with which one can justify being in the state of indecision and inaction. What is more, this state of indecision itself is rendered an activity of its own, one that purports to be ethically tackling the issue by rigorously turning over the matter in mind. In that the state of inactivity itself is considered as a kind of restlessness that can be propelled toward action and decision, I will argue that this surprisingly sheds light on the affinity between the camps of Derridean posthumanism and Agamben's thinking on animals, which I will come back to later.

At any rate, the non-rational and highly affected form of meeting an animal that Derrida describes and which posthumanists pick up after him, is regarded as being an "event" that is the beginning of a proper "animal ethics," as Matthew Calarco in *Zoographies* writes (126). According to Calarco, the value of this impromptu encounter is that it underscores that "animal ethics is not simply a matter of theoretical consistency and rationality" that can be programmatically laid out, but rather a summoning of a spontaneous and immediate response from man as he undergoes the "shock of encounter" with the Other (126). In important ways, this impromptu meeting is also a

non-rational moment that arouses the “passion of the animal,” as Derrida describes it (21). Also called as “extreme passion” (12), this arousal of pathos is important because it removes the focus away from the Cartesian query of whether an animal can think or not, whose conclusion has always been that it cannot think because it lacks reason. In contrast, the passion of the animal allows man to raise an altogether different point of concern, such as the “immense question of pathos and pathology, precisely, that is, of suffering, pity, and compassion” (26). It is for this reason that Bentham’s question that asks if animals can suffer is deemed as highly significant. It underscores the shared passivity of all sentient beings, the condition of suffering and being bound by the finitude of life. Passion can thus be the basis of a new species relationship as it diminishes the significance of the humanist concept of agency and reason.

The force of passion and pathos that works in the human’s encounter with an animal is further made prominent by Derrida who explains that the occasion of the encounter constitutes a primordial time and space where there is no “Fall,” signifying a “fault or failing in man” (20) from which man must recover. This is because the Fall is paradoxically an indication that man seeks redemption and gains transcendence in the end, thereby securing himself a metaphysical significance (21). Calling this pre-mythical time as the time “before the Fall,” Derrida imagines a prelapsarian state of being that is free from the “frame of redemption” (20) and a “redemptive language” (21). Put another way, the moment in which the inter-species ethics materializes comes *prior* to the mediation of socially and historically circumstanced mode of understanding. It is a

sustained moment of pure interiority where there is no point of objectivity and the historically informed perspective interfering in the way the subject encounters an animal.

The animal encounter before the Fall, the instance of a prelapsarian moment, is thus described as a *contretemps*, a “time out of joint, prior to and outside of knowledge and identification,” as Calarco describes (125). In what seems to be one of the important arguments Derrida makes in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, he elaborates that this space is sustained by “*limitrophy*” (29) where the very limits that distinguish man from animal grow and multiply, so that there is an *excess* of limits. In other words, in the pre-mythical, extra-societal realm man experiences the “*transgressal* [...] experience of *limitrophy*,” which “consist[s], certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply” (29). The limit that divides man from animal, therefore, *itself* variegates, so that man and animal dwell *in* differences where limits themselves grow, change, and multiply (30). In what is a familiar move in poststructuralist thinking, the issue becomes not about closing the gap between a single difference that distinguishes man from the animal, but rather about observing how the “abyss” between the two makes it impossible for the dividing line itself to be “traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible” (31). In other words, the focus is on how lines multiply “by feeding on an abyss” (31). The emphasis on the changing form of differences therefore illuminates the indefinite nature of man and animal itself. This releases the traditional category of the subject (man) and object (animal) from being attached to a single definition, giving them the freedom to be what they are in their

immediate context. Within this frame of limitrophy, differences can be differences without having to be condensed to a single, universal idea.

Here, however, one cannot but ask whether Derrida's effort to be concrete and singular in his approach to animals meets with the opposite effect of being more abstract and immaterial. That is, this growth of the very limit itself, which supposedly enriches the way we understand about human-animal dynamic, is in fact a component of unreliable impression of an animal that recedes once the passion subdues, which moreover, while meaningful to the subject undergoing the passion of the animal, cannot hold itself accountable to humans other than itself. Moreover, despite the claims of recognizing the singularity of animals, no substantive knowledge about animals is ever offered. Instead, animals are presented as being complex without the content of this complexity ever being described. In the emotionally charged encounter, the only certainty with which Derrida can speak regarding the animal is the symptoms of his own "malaise" as he is seen by the cat (11).

Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* also reflects this way of thinking, which she describes as being inspired by Derrida who traces the "intimacy of being and following" (xiii). In determination to "follow" nonhuman objects and be guided by their lively agency, Bennett, too, proposes that we restrain from imposing human thoughts onto the objects. Thus she suggests that in place of exercising judgment and analysis, we should be "caught up" in the vibrancy of matter (vx) and let ourselves be witnesses to things as "existents *in excess* of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects" (4 my emphasis). Bennett specifies that this requires firstly a "cultivated, patient, sensory

attentiveness to nonhuman forces” (xiv) and secondly a restraint from the constant urge to “demystify” all phenomenon by rendering them bare and transparent (xiv-xv). In other words Bennett proposes that the subject be “caught up” in the vibrancy of the object, cultivating what she calls as a “methodological naiveté” that “postpone[s]” a “genealogical critique of objects” (17). She explains that she draws the idea of naiveté from Deleuze, who uses the term to describe himself as a “naïve” philosopher who works with “raw concepts” instead of “work[ing] with more mediations,” thereby “produc[ing] a kind of *art brut*, [...] not the most profound but the most innocent” (128). Embracing Deleuze’s usage of the term, Bennett too, deploys naiveté as a method to express the nonhuman object in its most pure, raw, and unmediated form. Bennett’s argument is that naiveté serves to shed light on the vibrancy of the matter which is the “active, earthy, not-quite-human capaciousness” (3). In comparison to this almost mysterious working of nonhuman objects, the human and its subjectivity, is rendered as being at its best when it restrains and subdues itself in order for the object to manifest itself in its purest form. The irony that goes without being mentioned in this line of argument, of course, is that the subject that enacts in this kind of naivety is nonetheless a human mind at its work—the work in which one exercises human agency by being benevolent, non-interfering, and deliberately naïve.

It seems then that for Derrida and the posthumanist thinkers following in the steps of him, the cat, as well as other animals and nonhuman objects, are a prop for a philosophical meditation, used as a kind of mirror that is held up before the human subject to confirm the illusionary nature of the idea of “man” and to accelerate the

demise of its subjectivity. My point of critique is not that we should give even *more* attention to the cat, or attain *more* empirical knowledge about the cat, but rather that this multiplicity, or the unsettling of the limit that releases objects from human's arbitrary category, is thought to be closer to the truth merely by virtue of being in the state of flux.

It would be quite helpful here to recall Adorno's prominent thesis of the primacy of object in trying to understand this lavish and quite profound significance that is being given to the nonhuman in some of the important works today. Famously, Adorno formulates the thesis of the preponderance of object by arguing that the object has a "remainder" that can never be adequately crystallized into a concept (*Negative Dialectics* 57). Hence, the subject cannot force the object to be identical to itself: there is always a *nonidentity* between the subject and object. But this inconsumable element, or the preponderance, of object, for Adorno, does not automatically translate into the demotion of the subject in the sense of the subject being totally engulfed by the object. In fact, in work such as "Subject and Object," Adorno warns that the primacy of the object does not translate as the object being "absolute" (149). In "Cultural Criticism and Society" too, he explains that it is naïve to "unflinching[ly]" immerse oneself in the object, thinking that the "logic of things" would inevitably lead the subject to truth (209). To the contrary, the immersion in the object will only have the subject be "dragged into abyss by its object" (210), generating "fetishism of an object" that in turn rouses the feeling of the "hatred" of the mind (209). This observation seems important, especially in the light of the posthumanist tendency to idolize the nonhuman object and efface the subject. Adorno, in contrast, argues dialectically that subjectivity must be "a moment

that lasts” precisely in order for the primacy of the object to be maintained (144). This is because the subject is the medium through which the primacy of the object is confirmed—while object may “potentially, even if not actually,” exist without subjectivity, one cannot imagine subject as not being “something,” an object, which “indicates an irreducible objective moment” (143). Subject, therefore, “[n]o matter how we define it,” has “some entity”—an objective quality—that “cannot be juggled out of it” (143). In other words, the subject is the manifestation of some objectivity, which in turn, serves as the “corrective of the subjective reduction (143). This is far from saying that subjectivity is something to be rid of—as Susan Buck-Morss succinctly describes in *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, the primacy of the object means that “[t]ruth resided in the object, but it did not lie ready at hand; the material object needed the rational subject in order to release the truth which it contained” (81).

In light of Adorno’s understanding of subject and object, which by the nature of their dialectical relationship are mutually implicated, it becomes clear that posthumanism is engaged more in cordoning off the object from the intrusion of the subject. Thus, although it appears to be driven toward a concrete change in the relationship, it is in fact involved more with a reversal act in which the object becomes absolute, whereas the subject becomes consumed by it. The consequence is the mere inversion of the roles man and object plays—the *nature* of the relationship remains the same.

It seems necessary, therefore, to address the kind of question Žižek raises in *Less Than Nothing*, which comes in the way of turning around Derrida’s argument by asking

why, as a matter of fact, must the human mind *not* simplify and speak of *the* animal? This seems a fitting task if the aim is to derive critical so as to be able to act upon that knowledge. As Žižek argues, this conceptual thinking, or the “violent leveling,” is the “necessary feature of every critical move” because there is a moment of truth in the attempt to condense (409). For Žižek therefore the act of leveling down is one part of the processes in understanding an object and deriving truth; in contrast, Derrideans and posthumanists refuse to reduce and to generalize animals for fear of getting further away from the singularity of each animal. Not to mention that, as Žižek interestingly proposes, animals too may be participating in the act of “violent leveling,” with which they observe humans abstractly as “*the* spectral animal existing alongside really existing animal kinds” (410). Or, from the subject-position of their own, animals may be refusing outright to be involved in the kind of logic posthumanism lays out, where they are denied their universality as a part of a species, and only referred to in terms of singularity, which strangely, is unknowable to humans.

This approach, which may be described as being highly speculative, leads some critics to develop a line of argument that departs from the Derridean framework of understanding animals as discussed above. Scholars like Haraway and Braidotti, identifying themselves as being feminists and materialists, come forth with their own brand of species ethics by critiquing what they consider to be Derrida’s retreat into the highly philosophized realm where animals are invoked poetically. Although I will argue that their works are still placed on the poststructuralist and posthumanist landscape broadly defined, they diverge from Derrida, arguing that he ends up being another

metaphysical philosopher who despite his physical proximity to the cat, places a gulf between him and the cat by merely meditating on the encounter based on the principles of alterity. Specifically, Haraway assesses in *When Species Meet* that Derrida fails to be as “prosaic” and “mundane” as he would have liked, for while Derrida is willing to meet the gaze of an animal naked in his bathroom one morning he refuses to consider the “touch” and the “play” that man have and *should* have with an animal (36). Moreover, Haraway suggests, from a more material and perhaps practical perspective of coexisting and “flourishing” together with companion species which Derrida’s cat is a part of, the irreducible “differences” between man and animal that Derrida very much highlights, are not that important (36). Similarly, Rosi Braidotti, who forms a kind of feminist comradeship with Haraway in “Posthuman, All Too Human,” argues that Derrida’s formulation of a new man-animal relationship “reduces animality to a general figuration of Alterity” (200). Braidotti finds that this metaphorization of animals is a defining characteristic of “philosophical post-humanism,” which she also describes is the “trademark of the post-structuralist generation” (197).

In other words, Haraway and Braidotti worry that Derrida is not materialist and pragmatic enough in the ways they regard the term, which connotes commitment to knowing the particularities of each animal in an everyday, one-to-one relationship in which “living well” and “flourishing” is the priority (*When Species Meet* 72). For Haraway and Braidotti, establishing a healthy, thriving relationship on an everyday basis is a more critical issue than mediating on animals as a metaphor that they find Derrida engaged in. However, the kind of idea endorsed by Haraway—the priority of healthy

coexistence and flourishing—contains its own problem, for its protocol in establishing the condition of flourishing in fact is nothing more than to be “‘polite’ in responsible relation to always asymmetrical living and dying and nurturing and killing”(42). This innocuous imperative—to be “polite” in the state of “asymmetry”—poses a problem, for it contains the risk of designating the problem of the man-animal relationship as a personal and moral task that necessitates a Foucauldian ethics of the care of the self, which is ultimately about the reinvention of the self for the sake of a better *adjustment* to the existing socio-political order and not about addressing the power relations and the structural problems themselves. It prepares the human subject for a quietist life by cultivating “politeness” with which one can navigate the “asymmetrical” structure of modern life. In the meanwhile, however, the asymmetry—a euphemism for the most brutal kind of inequalities—remains as it is. The real issue therefore, as discussed above, may not be that Derrida thinks too much like a philosopher and less like an everyday, ordinary companion to other species, but that in letting the cat come forth on her own terms he also lets himself, the subject, be consumed by it. The result is the subject’s self-effacement and an exaggerated significance of the Other that elevates the Other in itself as the reservoir of truths. It must also be said that in spite of Haraway and Braidotti keeping a conscious distance from the Derridean approach to animal ethics, their arguments too has the same outcome of privileging affect over fact and thinking, and of minimizing the force of historical and material factors that influence the nature of human and animal interactions. So much emphasis is given to human’s obligation to “respect and response” (15) in *When Species Meet*, which in the end has the effect of recasting

the structural problem of species inequalities as a matter of humans engaging in generous acts as a member of the entitled species.

Here I want to turn the attention to Agamben's theory of the man-animal relationship, as I find it fitting to discuss in this context, for his argument serves as an important, complementary counterpart to Derridean posthumanism and to its larger ahistorical move discussed above. Indeed, Agamben's critique of humanism anticipates many of the posthumanist formulations, and it re-confirms what I have been discussing so far: for example, the tendency to collapse history and material circumstances, to efface human agency, and mystify politics into a revelatory event. But what resonates the most with the posthumanist outlook of the animal question is that Agamben's idea of both human and animal freedom relies on the idea of innocence that is based on non-knowledge. The kind of innocence that I am discussing here is well exemplified in *The Open* when he describes the function of anthropological machine of humanism, which ceaselessly churns out the logic of human exceptionalism by exploiting the antithesis of man and nature. Identifying the dialectical movement of man and animality as the main cause of the antithesis between man and animal, Agamben, like Derrida, engages in the effort to erupt out of a historically and materially bounded condition. If for Derrida that realm outside of history is the prelapsarian *contretemps*, for Agamben it is where dialectical movement is at a halt and the antithesis that drove dialectics is no longer existent. The difference between them is that they are at the opposite ends of the same anti-historical and anti-dialectical spectrum—if Derrida argues for the evolving and multiplying limits between humans and animals that give them indefinable qualities,

Agamben argues for the innocence that is *unaware* of the very antithesis of humans and animals that supposedly keeps reproducing anthropocentrism. That is, Derrida speaks of heightening awareness to ever variegating human-animal relationships; in contrast, Agamben envisions a “zone of non-knowledge” (91), where humans become incapable of recognizing difference *as* difference—or better, where there is no difference to be aware of in the first place.

According to Agamben’s understanding this is a “dialectic at a standstill” as Walter Benjamin understood it but which Agamben utterly misinterprets: whereas Benjamin formulates the concept in the context of describing a tensioned moment of political illuminations that open up new possibilities for historical transformation¹⁶, Agamben absurdly identifies it as the moment of political *closure* and *rest*, in which historical movements and political programs become irrelevant. He conceives this space without dialectical movements as a space freed from the compulsion to produce a dialectical synthesis out of antithesis. This space is liberating for Agamben because the absence of an impulse to advance toward sublation or synthesis signifies that man and nature can finally reconcile at their “immediate constellation in a non-coincidence” and be at rest (83). From the “non-coincidence” between man and nature there will arise something that is “neither human nor animal,” a being newly found in *in-humanity* (83). This non-dialectical space is precisely where an opportunity opens up to think the man-animal relationship anew.

¹⁶ See “N: On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress” in *The Arcades Project*, where Benjamin describes the dialectic at a standstill in terms of an image that captures a historical truth that can *erupt* the stream of what he calls as the homogeneous empty time that sustains the blind progress of modernity and positivism (463).

Agamben thus envisions an idyllic domain free of tension and strife—like Derrida he gives the impression of having solved the problem of human domination of animals by shifting man and animal to an entirely new (and non-existent) realm that is pre-mythical and pre-social and thus, without the problems of human domination to actually tackle with. In this realm too, thinking is non-existent, and instead of knowledge that is rationally derived there is only a poetic and mystical *revelation*, which turns out to be only that beings should just let be. Consequently, the wrongly conceived idea of dialectic at a standstill, originally devised to refer to the bursting potential of historical transformation, works toward an *apolitical* space where as Agamben elucidates, the truly urgent task is *not* about “tak[ing] positions on the great issues, on so-called human rights and values” (16), but to engage in what he calls as an “impolitical” task, which is to work on the “divisions *within* man that endlessly negate its own animality—in other words what he calls as an “impolitical” task (76). The struggle, then, really is an inner struggle comprised of almost a spiritual cultivation.

The space without dialectics is thus a space full of potential, not in the sense of moving toward the possibility of becoming *actual*, as Agamben is quick to add, but a potential in the sense of remaining dormant, exerting its force precisely by not engaging in action. This is another revealing point regarding Agamben’s interest in being “impolitical,” which if not precisely an indication of the lack of interest in politics, is an indication of his aversion to politics that necessarily includes exercising one’s reason by being judicious, strategic, and agential. Thus, when Agamben uses the word potential it means the potential to *not* be in action—a condition of “worklessness” as explained in

The Open, or as “inoperativeness” in *Homo Sacer* (61). It is a “generic mode of potentiality that is not exhausted in a *transitus de potential ad actum*” (62). The term worklessness therefore, does not imply a nihilistic and nugatory space where nothing happens or exists, or so Agamben reasons—it rather describes a condition in which a potential is inexhaustible because it exists in excess. It exceeds the boundary of inaction and action and instead remains as a potential as such. Consequently, there is no historical movement in the state of worklessness—it is simply beyond human history and points to a condition in which beings are as they are, unmediated.

In what is a significant point for Agamben, this extra-historical realm is designated as a realm of the “saved night,” which as is typical of Agamben, is another misappropriation of Benjamin’s term that comes from Benjamin’s 1923 letter to Florens Christian Rang, also translated as “redeemed night.” If Benjamin uses the term to argue that the truths do not reside explicitly and superficially in the “theater of history [or] the dwelling place of mankind” but rather implicitly like “stars” that “shine only into the night of nature” (389), Agamben uses the term to suggest that truths are not only implicit but in fact *untouchable*, relegated in the night that is saved from the human domain and its social significations. Thus, whereas Benjamin explains that ideas are not laid bare in the vulgar history of homogenous empty time but are “at work in history invisibly” (389), Agamben understands the term as meaning that truths are outside the frame of human language, safely residing in the remote place where they reveal themselves only as a kind of mystic knowledge. Furthermore, to highlight that the saved night is an innocent realm without a need for deliverance of both religious and political kind,

Agamben contrasts it to that of the groaning, fallen nature that awaits redemption as described in Saint Paul's Book of Romans. Whereas the fallen nature yearns to be saved, the world of the saved night is rendered "unsavable" (91) because it is foreign to both religion and secular politics. The saved night is thus innocence by virtue of simply being. To be is to be already ethical in the saved night. It is the realm where nature simply *is*, "given back to itself" in its "beatitude" (82).

Both humans and animals in the saved night, then is therefore specifically "outside of being" in the sense of simply being not aware of. It is the state of "non-knowledge" or "a-knowledge" that is beyond "both knowing and not knowing, beyond both disconcealing and concealing, beyond both being and the nothing"(91). Agamben therefore creates a nebulous space where distinction between man and animal is neutralized and there is no consciousness of self and other. He reclaims innocence and creates a utopian space by relinquishing the human capacity to think and produce knowledge.

In the light of "impolitical" and anti-conceptual position Agamben takes, his willful misreading of Benjamin is startling, for Benjamin's thought seems to be constantly driven toward clarifying and toward the acts of knowledge-construction. The concept of the saved night, too, is to emphasize the fact that *despite* the fact that meanings are latent like stars that shine only in the night, they are *knowable* if they are followed by the kind of interpretive work he describes as the "mortification" and "colonization" of works (389). The point is that "all responsible human knowledge must

take the form of interpretation” and that the “task of philosophy is to name the idea” (389).

The task of Agamben, and really, Derrida, too, as well as the posthumanists that follow in the steps of their obscurantism, may be described in the exact opposite term. That is, their philosophical task is to *un-name* the idea, both humans and animals included so as to release objects from the violence of human thinking and to relegate them to the space that exceeds the limits of the constructedness of knowledge. They want the animals to be larger-than-life and to efface the force of human thinking altogether. Consider Agamben’s promotion of leisureliness, both intellectual and physical, in contrast to Benjamin’s emphasis on the necessity of critical thinking, which is to say the necessity of intellectual labor. For in spite of the fact that Agamben sets his concept of worklessness apart from that of simple inaction or idleness, the aristocratic undertone is unmistakably present. As if finding the workings of dialectical negations too toilsome, he envisions a blissful haven not needing work of any kind. In this sense, Agamben’s interpretation of Titian’s painting “The Three Ages of Man” is telling, which he describes is the portrayal of a saved night and an ideal expression of *otium*, a dignified leisure, in that in the painting are man and woman who enjoy postcoital bliss and contentment. They are happy because they are untroubled by an existential worry that the consummation will leave them deprived of innocence and the mystery of being, exposing to each other his or her “*vanitas*” (87). In other words, the man and woman are at leisure because they are relieved from metaphysics that fabricate a mystery and

fullness of being. What measures the humanness of man are “neutralized” and “rendered completely inoperative” (87).

This leisurely world is thus a strangely demystified and yet mythical place—demystified in the sense that man and animal are laid bare by being delinked from the idea of metaphysical fullness of being, but also mythicized in the sense that they live in a leisurely, non-thinking space where man and animal can “be” by blindly affirming their existence. Labor and history become irrelevant in the saved night. In conclusion, then, Agamben is not critiquing man’s domination of animals and animality so much as sidestepping the problem by channeling a zone of nonknowledge. He thereby effaces the problem of domination itself and transports all beings to the realm of the saved night. This means that, as aforementioned, to be is to be already ethical in the sense of being unaware and innocent. It retains “beatitude” by virtue of simply being, exceeding the realm of human knowledge, history and politics.

The posthumanist impulse that I have traced so far in Agamben, too, then, affirms a way of life that simply is, an argument that I suggest is drawn from the philosophy of Nietzsche, affirming the pure force of will to life and disentangling from the ties of all socially constructed ideologies. In fact, as a way of conclusion I would characterize the current posthuman thought to be the continuation of the Nietzschean affirmation of life that calls for a revival of animality and vitality. And as an example that embraces this way of life Nietzsche discusses in “Use and Abuse of History” the grazing herd, for according to him the herd does not have a historical perspective that burdens it with the memories of the past; the herd can simply *be* “at the mercy of the

moment, feeling neither melancholy nor satiety” (97). Nietzsche promotes this non-thinking and non-metaphysical mode of being in *The Will to Power* by arguing that man should “only recognize one law” which is “to be”(99), for it is a “great injustice” to run against the nature by denying his “inclinations and impulses”(110). The Nietzschean man in other words must simply “be” by affirming the pure, raw force of nature that “compels” (350).

It is perhaps no surprise then that thinkers of anti-humanism would find its intellectual lineage in Nietzsche, even echoing the laughter that Nietzsche provokes to dispel the sick and effeminate culture of humanism with its robust gaiety, coming from playfulness, a simple affirmation of life, and taking self lightly. Recall Derrida’s echo of Nietzsche’s laughter in “The Ends of Man” as a means to summon the “change of terrain” and bring on the nonhumanistic condition. Foucault also evokes this laughter at the end of *The Order of Things*, hailing Nietzsche’s overman as a figure who laughs and revivifies the nature of man again, having killed both God and man as conceived in the human sciences. It could be said that in the steps of Nietzsche, posthumanism too breaks out this laughter and celebrate a new kind of man. Or rather, the laughter may not be so much based on the celebration of a nonhumanistic man but rather the celebration of the nonhuman as what is pure in the sense of being unmediated by the human mind. Which is to say, that posthumanism has the effect of playing down the tremendous influence man exerts on the nonhuman by rushing to claim the freedom of the nonhuman. In rendering the nonhuman unconquerable due to an excess beyond itself, posthumanism

blurs the reality of human domination, which further serves to evade the responsibility man has towards the nonhuman.

Seen in this light, the way to changing the current structure of domination would require *not* a submission to non-knowledge with regard to animals and animality, but in fact a more active pursuit of elucidatory, systematic, and universalized knowledge. Instead of branding the human mind as in itself dangerous and showing skepticism towards its intellectual activity, one could find the solution *from within* by regarding the human mind as being capable of negating the specific aspects of itself that are considered to be at fault. This would seem to be the way to admit without equivocation that man indeed dominates the nonhuman and is responsible for its suffering condition. There is a difference, then, between posthumanism's call for a more sensitive attention to the nonhuman and the determinate negation that dialectics necessitates. If as posthumanism argues, the problem of "asymmetrical" living relationship derives from the inherent violence of the human mind, it seems that the only way to remedy it is to look no further than to the very source that causes the problem (that is, the human), and to find solutions from within rather than looking to release animals from the human grasp by rendering them figuratively elusive. One cannot, in other words, dismiss the human mind and seek a refuge in the saved night and in the zone of non-knowledge. To quote Benjamin once again, the purpose of philosophy is to "name the idea," which in this context concerns the animal. It would be an insult to animals to say that they are in the saved night and are safe in that they are unnamable, when the obvious reality is that they are forced to be in close proximity to humans and exploited to sustain human

civilization. The least we can do, as a starter, then, is to acknowledge that animals are not in excess of human understanding, but that as far as they share the same planet, they are not incommensurable, and that humans can know and name animals.

**Chapter 2. Biologism in the Reagan Era: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy
and the Posthumanist Utopia**

Written throughout the years of the Reagan administration, the *Xenogenesis* series of *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989)¹⁷ comprise the story of a black female protagonist Lilith Iyapo who must find ways to survive when, as a consequence of a series of missile exchanges between U.S. and USSR, a “nuclear winter” freezes the earth and kills almost the whole human race (*Dawn* 91). The biggest challenge does not arise from the tasks of rebuilding and restoring the ruined earth however but from the question of how to coexist with “alien” species called Oankali. Seeing that humans are irresistibly attractive in terms of their genetic make-up, the Oankali have come to Earth to save a few humans in hopes of having them as a “new partner species” (160).

The reason for this attraction lies in that the Oankali have a life purpose in strengthening their viability by *diversifying* their genetic compositions, which they claim can be fulfilled by humans because the human body is versatile: it “knows how to cause some of its cells to revert to an embryonic stage” (252), and also has cancer-causing cells which in fact have great potential to be turned around to be used for regeneration and cures.¹⁸ The trilogy is thus a saga of human-alien coevolution that moves forward

¹⁷ The most recent edition of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy was published as an omnibus edition in 2000 under the title of *Lilith’s Brood*. The work is still more frequently referred to as the *Xenogenesis* trilogy.

¹⁸ See an essay “Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy: A Biologist’s Response” (2000) by Joan Slonczewski, a biologist and a science fiction author. She writes that Butler is “one of few science fiction writers to explore the positive potential of ‘bad’ genes”—here referring to cancer caused by cells that mutate, which are in fact “some of the most

with a purpose of yielding more biological diversity and difference. Indeed, a number of critics such as Donna Haraway and Bruce Clarke argue that the trilogy develops a radical posthumanist imagination by creating a new evolutionary alignment of species that breaks down the barriers of race, gender, and species.

Yet, Butler's alternative utopian world, maintained by symbiosis rather than competition, is delimited by its own biological frame that approaches life exclusively from the evolutionary standpoint. It posits that the purpose of life is to increase viability and biological diversity, and assesses that humans are *inherently* unfit to make themselves thrive, because their behavior is determined by a genetic predisposition that cannot be reversed—a “mismatched pair of genetic characteristics” that comprise of intelligence *and* violence (*Dawn* 39). But of the two, the Oankali observe, the violence-inducing gene always overpower that of intelligence, which they suggest is why humans inevitably make choices that lead to self-destruction. The moral of the story seems to be that humans must succumb to the Oankali who are far more superior in their knowledge of life, and let them intervene by genetically engineering humans. It is suggested that only the co-existence with the Oankali would give humans a chance to thrive, albeit in a radically altered form with different genetic compositions. The trilogy then presents a utopic future that is rich in evolutionary possibilities but poor in political possibilities, as humans are not given much agency with regard to how to live after the freeze as opposed to the Oankali who are given great regenerative capacity. In line with my critique of posthumanism's disillusionment with humanity, the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, too,

critical genes of the body, vital for normal processes of growth and development” (n.pag.).

reveals itself to be held by the same kind of loss of confidence in the historical agency of humans. Instead, it places hope in biological metamorphosis of humans into posthumans, in which human problems are not so much addressed as they are dissolved by the workings of nature and by the genetic intervention of the Oankali.

The trilogy is a failed utopia specifically in the sense Raymond Williams explains it in “Utopia and Science Fiction”—which is a narrative where humans fail to bring on a new world by “*willed transformation*” of the existing reality, relying instead on the “projections of a magical or a religious consciousness” (54). Williams writes that the stories of utopia found by human efforts are in fact hard to come by in the modern times, because as the history of utopian imagination since More’s *Utopia* and Bacon’s *New Atlantis* tell, the modern culture overtly relies on science, which increasingly come to appeal to a static mode that especially excludes transformation in social and moral dimensions (62-63). The transformation in modern narratives of utopia and science fiction tends to be “natural” rather than willed, in which a “mutation” takes place “at the point of otherwise intolerable exposure and crisis; not so much, in the old sense, a new life as a new species, a new nature” (63). Here, the utopian impetus is diluted and imagined to be tantamount to “be[ing] other and liv[ing] elsewhere” (63). This description is very pertinent to the discussion of the *Xenogenesis* series, for in its attempt to imagine an alternative world it goes to the extreme by imagining an extraterrestrial, if not otherworldly, world, where the future of humanity is relegated to the hands of aliens. Here, too, utopia is about assuming a different identity and being somewhere else. As Williams explains, this form of narrative abandons the task of changing the structural

conditions and instead anticipates a *mutation* of the self into the Other, which essentially mounts to mere *consumption* of identity into difference.

I am not however arguing that the trilogy entails a failure in the absolute sense as Fredric Jameson does with all Utopian narratives, arguing that Utopian imagination is bound to fail because we have “constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself” due to the “systematic, cultural and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners”(289). I am reluctant to attribute the failure of utopian imagination in the trilogy to something definitively insurmountable as “our own absolute limits” (289) as Jameson does, for utopia as Williams indicates is a future that should be attainable, with its possibilities already latent in the here and now. Rather, the trilogy’s failure in utopian imagining is due to its misguided conviction that humans are hopelessly inept at changing the moral and political characteristics of their society, thereby fixating on the posthuman identity of humans, implying that humans can redeem themselves only by *not* being humans in the genetic and physiological sense of the word. Put another way, the utopia that the trilogy imagines fails not because of the humans’ structural limit in imagining a genuine alternative world, but because of the very loss of confidence in the humans as being capable of conceiving a different world and enacting willed transformation. The attempt of this chapter is therefore to read the trilogy as a utopia that wrongly places hope in biologism and the posthuman transformation but, importantly, *not without* first reading the trilogy as enacting resistance, which is what led the work to imagine an alternative world in the first place. The elements of subversion in the text constitute moments of truth and thus deserve detailed attention, despite the larger

falsehood of the biological imperatives under which the utopia is imagined.

One of the significant subversions in the trilogy is that it imagines a world where species live through *symbiosis* and not through the survival of the fittest upon which so much of American understanding of society rested upon during the Cold War and especially during the 1980s. In other words the *Xenogenesis* series attempts to sketch a utopia that leaves behind the American model of society during the Reagan era, a time defined by the logic of the arms race, the rule of neoliberalism and rugged individualism, and social Darwinism. The subversive moment thus lies not so much in its evolutionary metamorphosis of humanity into posthumanity as it is wont to be read, than in its defiance of the given social reality that operates on the mechanism of the survival of the fittest.

In a 1990 interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin, Butler states that “Ronald Reagan inspired *Xenogenesis*—and that it was the only thing he inspired in [her] that [she] actually approve[s] of” (67). In response to Reagan’s appeal that security can only be gained by an increase in weapons, Butler comments: “That’s when I began to think about human beings having the two conflicting characteristics of intelligence and a tendency toward hierarchical behavior—and that hierarchical behavior is too much in charge, too self-sustaining” (67). Butler’s choice to have this arms race culminate in a global catastrophe is thus her means to contest the validity of the logic of the arms race and the rest of ideological strife that it involves. The implication is that Reagan is wrong, for the evil turns out to be not in Communism or in the Soviet Union but rooted in something more visceral and inherent across all ideologies and border lines: it is the

hierarchical nature in humans itself that lead them to self-destruction.

Notwithstanding the absolute primacy Butler gives to the power of genes, thereby relegating politics to the realm of biology, every aspect of the alternative world that Butler envisions manages to counter the cultural norms and the politics that defined her times. Consider Butler's portrayal of her black protagonist Lilith who goes on to become a progenitor of the new, mixed race of humans and the Oankali at a time when the frequently evoked image of an African-American woman was that of a "Chicago welfare queen," spun out by Reagan in numerous versions as occasions required. As Haney-López writes in *Dog Whistle Politics*, without any reference to race Reagan managed to conjure up the figure of a "lazy, larcenous black woman" in association to this welfare queen whose "tax-free cash income is over \$150,000" (58), while the hard working tax payers suffered as a consequence of her cheating. Walter Williams adds that Reagan had utilized this story to the point that it has acquired a status of myth which, if it did not directly lead to any immediate legislative changes then, was picked up by Newt Gingrich, a figure now associated with "mean Reaganism," to initiate welfare changes in 1996 (*Reaganism and the Death of Representative Democracy* 80).

Indeed, by a series of association of ideas, blackness develops into an effective means to carry out the neoliberal agenda in the 80s. Blackness was a sign that evoked underserved welfare recipients, who was further vilified against an image of hardworking white Americans whose virtues were self-reliance and independence. As Herman Gray writes in *Watching Race*, white Americans were cast as victims of an inept and yet intrusive government that instituted unnecessary "social policies such as quotas,

affirmative action, and special treatment extended to women, blacks, and other communities of color” (17). With television culture reinforcing these barely disguised racial discourses, Gray writes that the Reagan era “[took] away from blacks the moral authority and claims on political entitlements won in the civil rights movement of the 1960s” (18-19). Instead, African-Americans came to be regarded as “pathological underclass trapped in a culture of poverty” (23).

That one’s racial identity comes to be considered as a pathological case is of a great significance here, for the Reagan era was also a time in which biological explanations were increasingly being offered for social issues, especially for those associated with negative circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, and illness. No longer were the causes for these issues attributed to socio-economic inequalities or other structural problems; instead they were seen to be caused solely *hereditary* factors. Hereditarianism, as Kelly Happe writes in *The Material Gene*, is especially compatible with neoliberal tenets and thus was one of the underlying principles that shaped the Reagan era, as the attribution of physical infirmity as well as social incompetency to individual genetics validates the neoliberal efforts to mitigate the necessity of governmental and institutional interventions. Indeed, hereditarianism “hyperindividualizes and privatizes risk and disease” at the expense of undermining the “notion that disease is the corporeal effect of embodied social relations” (xiv). The effects of this discursive formation was very palpable, as Happe writes, as it led to significant reduction in welfare spending in contrast to a “\$1.2 trillion increase in defense spending over the same time period” (46), whose repercussions could be felt

throughout various sectors of the society, from the large number of the mentally ill who went homeless to African-Americans who had to live amid the “climate of the time ... characterized by...biological theories of racial pathology” (47). The extent to which the 80s operated according to this “racist biologism” can perhaps be clearly demonstrated by some of the major scientific works that came to fruition in the 1990s—one the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994 by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray that identified intelligence as a hereditary and racial attribute, and the 1992 Violence Initiative funded by the NIH whose very premise of the project was based on the biologized understanding of race (47).¹⁹

Add to this pathologization of African-Americans the formation of viral discourse throughout the Cold War in the U.S. The rhetoric of the “infiltration” of Communism that arose in the 1950s is one example, which as Priscilla Wald explains in *Contagious*, fed on the fear of Communism with the images of its idea penetrating, saturating, and spreading in the minds of Americans. Wald quotes Herbert Hoover’s 1954 speech “The Protection of Freedom,” which exemplifies the use of invasive virus

¹⁹ Garland E. Allen in “Modern Biological Determinism” describes in detail the origin of this (abruptly discontinued) project, which was planned in the context of rising crime rates in the U.S., with Rodney King riots happening just a year before the Initiative was publicly proposed in 1992 (5-6). The project’s aim was to identify the causes of violent behavior and to eliminate them by developing “tools of biology—particularly organic psychiatry and behavior genetics” (1). This attribution of violence to biology is alarming enough, but it further drew furor with a proposal of methodology that entailed selecting violence-prone children and youths from the “inner city, families in which the parents... have a low income and a low educational level, or female-headed households—all synonyms, of course, for poor, urban, African-American (or in some areas, Hispanic-American) populations (1-2). It further proposed: “elementary school teachers would be asked to identify 12% to 15% of the children who showed characteristics of ‘early irritability and uncooperativeness,’” who were then to undergo a series of “psychiatric screening of the family via telephone and then in-person interviews” (3).

as a metaphor for Communism: Hoover speaks of the “Socialist virus and poison gas generated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels” that was “rotting the souls of two-fifths of all mankind which it has enslaved” (179). This rhetoric was hardly reserved for politicians alone, for it was in turn reflected and further corroborated as fact in scientific literature as well. “Even in a specialist journal like *Science*,” Wald writes, “the language of viral *agency* and *invasion* became a staple” (180).

The AIDs epidemic that began in the early 1980s further reinforced the viral discourses that pathologize the targeted group. The initial suggestion of GRID for the name of this illness, which is an acronym for the gay-related immune deficiency, amply tells the stigmatization that was involved in the process of understanding AIDs. Moreover, AIDs was also increasingly being understood as having an origin in Africa, which aside from the credibility of the theory, was widely utilized in the process of “justify[ing] U.S. intervention in decolonizing nations” after World War II, which were cast as “wild and primitive landscapes plagued by uncontrolled violence and ‘sociopathic illnesses’” (236). In other words they were depicted as being in need of aid from a first-world country (236). Indeed, as part of the Cold War legacy, the “emerging infections” of the 80s and 90s were considered to be a “consequence of globalization” (30), or rather, as a part of process of ““third-worldification”” (45) from which the U.S. needed to be immunized to or isolated from the threat of foreign ideologies and foreign microbes.

This socio-cultural context gives us a better understanding of the significance of the rebirth of humanity that happens through the mating of black woman and the

Oankali, who are like “writhing, dying night crawlers” (*Dawn* 13). Butler’s narrative counters the marginalization of the black body by reimagining it as a source of new evolutionary lineage. Moreover, Lilith’s body becomes a medium for xenogenesis, meaning the “production of offspring permanently unlike the ‘parent,’”²⁰ and thereby becomes a medium for yielding biological diversity that is highly prized according to the Oankali understanding of life. Difference from progenitors therefore is not considered as an anomaly but rather as an instance of an evolutionary variation in display. As Cathy Peppers writes, the *Xenogenesis* is a story that replaces xenophobia with xenophilia (60). Bruce Clarke, too, writes about the value of new evolution in *Posthuman Metamorphosis*, arguing that the trilogy envisions what he calls as the “cellular sublime” or the “posthuman sublime,” which is contained in a cell that serves as a vast reservoir of knowledge regarding natural life and a potential to open itself to a vast array of future possibilities (192).

That the narrative steadily progresses toward a future and ends with an indication of even more possibilities for growth and expansion is also significant, considering what Madhu Dubey explains is the relative lack of “futuristic imagination” within African-American literary tradition (15). The thought of future with a self as part of it is something that has been historically difficult for African-American writers, for as Dubey explains, the enormity of their past experiences gave a “historical rather than speculative bent” to their imagination (15). In that sense, the act of envisioning a future can itself be read as a progressive gesture, and may be understood in the context of the

²⁰ This is a definition according to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

aesthetics of Afrofuturism which emerged in the 90s, firstly to contest the backwardness through which African-Americans were depicted, and also to exercise speculative imagination that narrated about what is to come, especially in relation to future technologies (17). In this sense, the *Xenogenesis* may also be called as what Marleen S. Barr has called as “*écriture noire*” in *Afro-Future Females*, which is a writing that uses “black ink to burst forth from the black/period planet and fill the space of the white page,” (xii) black period here meaning the “figurative planet placed on the white outer space page” (xi-xii).

The significance of the new evolutionary genealogy however lies not only in its uprooting of the racial and gender stigma that is deeply ingrained by way of biological discourses. The human-Oankali evolution is also noteworthy in that it diverts from the normative understanding of evolution that was prevalent in the last quarter of the twentieth century, which was generally based on the Darwinian idea that life evolves by natural selection of the fittest. Critical commentaries on Thatcher and Reagan from the progressive front on both sides of the Atlantic are a good indication of the extent to which Darwinism and social Darwinism played a role in the making of conservative politics of the 80s. Rosalind H. Williams, then a research fellow and now a professor at MIT’s Science, Technology, and Society program, writes in the *New York Times* a few months after Reagan came to office in 1981 a column entitled “Solidarism, an answer to Reagan Darwinism.” In the piece Williams writes that “Mr. Reagan is a spontaneous Social Darwinist,” for his reduction of the government role is a means for the strong to further thrive while letting the weak perish. Under the Reagan administration, the

suffering of a few is thus shadowed by the promise of the “overall good of the species” that the “fiercely competitive environment” will be able to bring forth. In this political climate, Williams writes, the philosophy of solidarism, the like which is articulated in *Mutual Aid : A Factor in Evolution* by Peter Kropotkin, a Russian anarchist who sought to refute the social Darwinist claim of his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century, is the thought potent enough to counter social Darwinism that is prevailing at the moment. More will be said on Kropotkin’s evolutionary theory, but the point here is the extent to which a biological principle is translated into an economic and social principle to valorize the free market and competition.

A year later, Edward Said similarly notes on the manifestation of social Darwinism in America during the Reagan years. In “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community,” Said mentions the ruthlessness of Reaganism that is based on a “brutal Darwinian picture... as an image of the world ruled by what is being called ‘productivity’ or ‘free enterprise’” (120). The problematic in this essay is the relationship of this essentially “antidemocratic view” of Reaganism (119) to the “politics of interpretation and the politics of culture” more generally (118). For Said, the humanistic studies in the years both preceding and following Reagan’s presidency looks much like a cultural counterpart to Reaganite economics and social policy—for example, the elitism found in the humanities in its “cult of expertise and professionalism” and the promotion of a “doctrine of noninterference among fields” (119) is in line with the specialization and privatization of knowledge that was under process in the socioeconomic sphere. The consequence is that “universal literacy” and access to

knowledge by the people becomes impossible (124). Just as Reagan's Darwinism promotes "self-help" and "self-promotion"(120), cultural practices and criticism during what is "manifestly the Age of Ronald Reagan"(118) becomes its literary counterpart: it becomes, in other words, a matter of cultivating one's own garden (120), myopically tending to one's own field of knowledge without an awareness of larger political and historical realities. This identification of the Reaganite socio-economic model with social Darwinism is also briefly mentioned in Irving Howe's 1986 essay "Reaganism: The Spirit of the Times" (301). Well into the second term of Reagan's presidency, Howe had this to say about the era: "it has consisted of a spectacular transformation of popular attitudes, values, and styles," which is evidenced by the Reaganites' success in "restoring popular confidence in the virtues of capitalism, the mystical beneficence of 'the free market,' and the attractiveness of a 'minimalist state,' even though that state, faithfully attending to corporate needs, has never been close to being minimalist" (301).

Some scientists were also quick to point out the connection between conservative politics of the 80s and Darwinism, as British neurobiologist Steven Rose did upon Thatcher's rise to prime minister in 1979. In "The Thatcher View of Human Nature" written immediately following Thatcher's election win, Rose explains that the her election campaign emphasized the "naturalness of a conservative order," naturalness here meaning not the state of nature "ordained as it might have been last century by the Christian deity, but by the much more powerful 20th century scientific deity"—mainly, sociobiology as an updated version of Darwinism, but more so by the "good old 19th century social Darwinism," which turns out to be "quite adequate" for the Thatcherites

(575). The aim of this discreet reliance on a form of biologism, of course, is to allude to the futility and the unnaturalness of ideas such as “collectivism, communalism, solidarity, egalitarianism, even altruism,” for they go against the human nature which is essentially unchangeable (575). He goes on to say, quite insightfully, that it would be an overstatement to argue that Thatcherite ideologies have been scripted by sociobiologists (or social Darwinists), for the “coincidence of fashionable theory with political events is messier than that” (575). And yet he adds that future historians of the late twentieth-century are sure to observe the parallel between the turn to the political right and the similar “switch in scientific fashion” (575).

Nearly five years later in 1984, Rose, with leftist scientists R.C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, would publish *Not in Our Genes*, in which they further discuss the reciprocity between biological determinism and the “New Right” ideologies of the 80s in both Britain and the U.S. Their agenda, as they provocatively state, is to discuss their shared “commitment to the prospect of the creation of a more socially just—a socialist—society” (ix), which they saw was being hindered from materializing because of determinist and reductive sciences that justified the status quo of various topics ranging from the heritability of intelligence to gender and class inequality.

Not all agree with the book, however, especially for reasons of the conflation of scientific studies with philosophical and political questions. Eric M. Gander, for example, argues in *Not in Our Minds* that their book is “concerned not with the correctness of any specific scientific theory but with the overall wisdom of applying conventional scientific methods...to the study of human societies or cultures” (77). This

“undercut[s] the persuasiveness of the scientific arguments that they make against the very theories that they do not like” (78-9). It is thus the chapters where the authors “subject science to precise and demanding critique, using its own methods” that Gander applauds (94), while being highly critical of the parts where they assume, unscientifically, the immediate translatability of science to specific economic and political ideologies.

Richard Dawkins, who is dubbed by Leowontin, Kamin, and Rose as “the most reductionist of sociobiologists” (262), also has written a scathing review of their book in turn, on the grounds that the three simply mistake sociobiology for all the things that it is actually not, such as biological determinism and reductionism and a “conspiracy theory” for “bourgeois ideology” (59). Dawkins counters that sociobiology never argues for the genetic “inevitability”—rather it simply assumes that “if we tried to do our Darwinian theorizing *without* postulating genes affecting behavior, we should get it wrong. *That* is why sociobiologists talk about genes so much, and that is all there is to it” (59).

But it must be said that misgivings about sociobiology are in part due to its underlying assumptions and larger implications, which is to say that quite contrary to Dawkins’s claim that there “is all there is to it [in claiming that genes are significant determinant of behavior],” there is always more, in the sense of the impact such a claim may have on decisions to allocate research funding to social policies, as we have seen with the example of the Violence Initiative Project. Not to mention that E.O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology* (1975) is itself founded upon the idea that genes have larger social and political ramifications, as the book is an attempt to explain the interrelation, and perhaps

even *identity*, between biology and society. If the aim of Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin had been to offer a “dialectical” (11) view of the “relationship between the biological and the social” (10)—thereby acknowledging the correlation and inseparability but *not* the equivalence of nature and culture—Wilson’s aim is something much more ambitious. It is to offer a *new synthesis*, as the book’s subtitle indicates, between society and biology by subsuming society and all social behaviors under biology. Indeed, Wilson writes that sociobiology is “defined as the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviors” (4)—a prescription that studies of social behaviors, including ethics, must be biologized (5, 562), with proper “reference to evolutionary explanations in the true genetic sense” (4). In his frequently quoted concluding chapter, Wilson continues that because social sciences is still not firmly rooted in evolutionary knowledge, it is still “in the natural history stage of its development” (574), whose complete maturation can only be fulfilled when “neuronal explanation of the human brain” can be offered” (575). Only then will a “genetically accurate and hence completely fair code of ethics” can be developed (575). The implication of course is that a “fair code of ethics” can be accomplished only when society and its individuals go through a sufficient amount of evolution—until then, ethical shortcomings are unavoidable given the lack of neural knowledge we have about our brains. By extension, then, sociobiology also suggests that scientists are to be the moral legislators of the future society, because within the “sequential relation between evolutionary studies, ecology, population biology, and sociobiology” (6), one will be able to generate a forecast of the nature of future society—that is, to “predict features of social organization” (5).

One can easily anticipate the troubled reception of this attempted synthesis (or reduction) by people like Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin, as well as by the Sociobiology Study Group that was organized in the Boston area, specifically to refute the claims of sociobiology (and which included people like Stephen Gould).²¹ Those critical of sociobiology seem to agree, especially in regard to how sociobiology had narrowed down some aspects of Darwinian thought that were originally open to interpretation. If as Nancy Leys Stepan and Sandra L. Gilman argue, the “charged and metaphoric language of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* allowed the work to be “appropriated in selective and varied ways by very different groups for very different purposes” (174), it was no longer the case with the Darwin as theorized by sociobiologists. Chris Schilling, for example, writes in *The Body and Social Theory* that if Darwin “emphasized the randomness of individual variation relative to natural selection, and viewed evolution as an open-ended process not guided by any ultimate goal, sociobiologists “tend to reify the human traits conducive to survival as markers of inherent fitness” (54). Mike Hawkins in *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought* also writes about the same restrictions of meanings that sociobiologists put on some of Darwin’s open statements.

²¹For a brief history of the reception of Wilson’s sociobiology in both the Europe and the U.S., see Antti Lepistö’s “Revisiting the Left-Wing Response to Sociobiology: The Case of Finland in European Context.” For left-wing thinkers, Lepistö writes, the particularly troubling aspect of Wilson’s suggestion was that wars, competitions, and aggressions were part of an evolutionary necessity, which was an alarming claim in the times of ideological division in Europe and the Euromissiles crisis during the Cold War. Citing the case of Finland, Lepistö describes that one effective strategy for Finnish left-wing thinkers in countering these claims was to posit a “peace biology” which argued for the “biologically evolved, essentially sociable and peace-loving nature of the human species” (127). The claims of peace biologists sat well with the Finnish public, Lepistö writes, because of the anti-war and anti-nuclear moral climate in Finland during the 70s and 80s (127).

He continues, if Darwinism originally “contained an indeterminacy” (305) regarding the question of whether natural selection occurred at an individual or a group level—thereby rendering itself susceptible to various interpretations depending on the “ideological predilection of the theorist”—sociobiologists have “narrowed . . . one of the original indeterminacies” by emphasizing “self-interested behaviour, whether at the level of individuals or genes”(306). On the topic of competition, Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin also observe the same: that is, whereas for Darwin competition was “not a fundamental property of organisms” but a consequence of a developed trait “in a world of finite resource,” sociobiologists largely regarded it as an expression of a genetic trait (243).

This is of course not to say that Darwin’s theories are characterized by radical openness to interpretations: the authors of *Not in Our Genes* stress that there was no mistake that Darwin himself tended much more toward the idea of the primacy of “competitive struggle between organisms,” perhaps due to the “pervasiveness of competitive relations in our society” (241-2). And yet, Darwin’s evolutionary theory was open enough for some like Kropotkin, to argue on the basis of Darwin’s evolutionary theory that evolution does *not* continue itself by way of the survival of the fittest but rather by *cooperation* (241). Kropotkin’s thesis in *Mutual Aid* (1902) is indeed the primacy of cooperation in evolution, which is grounded on his observation that even in harsh environments such as Eastern Siberia and Northern Manchuria, he has “failed to find . . . that bitter struggle for the means of existence, *among animals belonging to the same species*, which was conserved by most Darwinists (though not always by Darwin himself) as the dominant characteristic of struggle of life” (xxxv). He does not deny that

struggles and belligerence exist among animals, but he observes that they are far from being the dominant feature that constitutes the everyday existence of animals, because he sees in nature that there is “as much, or perhaps even more, of mutual support, mutual aid, and mutual defense amidst animals belonging to the same species” (5). In this sense, the condition of being the “fittest” can be understood *not* as referring to the physical strength but rather to the capacity to cooperate and establish solidarity (2). Among humans too there is the same principle of mutual aid that serves as the progressive element in evolution, even in the politically worst times. From this viewpoint, that the principle of the survival of the fittest takes precedence over that of mutual aid is in fact a sign that the social system is failing in cooperating, cultivating instead the sentiment of competition and struggles. Humans simply cannot survive without mutual support (229), although modern society makes it as though the “self-assertion of the individual” is the most “progressive element” (295).

And this is where I turn to Butler’s *Xenogenesis* again, for the human-Oankali evolution that is at the center of the narrative is precisely the kind that diverts from the evolutionary scheme as presented by social Darwinism and sociobiology that defined the discursive practices in her times. If, as we have seen, Darwinism and its various offshoots have primarily been appropriated as an apologia for a conservative ideology exemplified by the primacy of the individual over the collective and competition over cooperation, Butler turns away from this understanding of life as a ruthless struggle and instead envisions a life that is based on symbiosis and cooperation. Although the trilogy maintains its biological determinism to the end in that it never retracts the idea that

human behavior is governed by a pair of antithetical genes linked to intelligence and violence, it creatively rejects the most predominant biological discourse of the time that was being pursued in the context of the Cold War and the prevalence of Reaganism. She adopts theories of symbiosis and symbiogenesis, which as the words themselves imply, emphasize the primary role of mutual aid and cooperation in Darwinian evolution.

Consider the Oankali, who give themselves names such as “life trader,” “weaver,” and “bridge” that make evolutionary connections among different species (*Imago* 6). They are stewards of life and experts in the life sciences: they heal illnesses because they “exist to make the people and to unite them and to maintain them” (*Imago* 119). Indeed, the first act the Oankali engage in when coming into contact with human survivors after the freeze is to heal their diseases through genetic operations and to lengthen their longevity. To humans their nonhuman physiognomy provokes fear, but at the most visceral and pheromonal level, humans cannot but be attracted to the Oankali—in fact, once the humans come into bodily contact with the Oankali, they cannot bear the touch of another human. As a much more advanced species in terms of evolution with their predisposition to cooperate and act communally the Oankali’s influence over humans is almost determinate. Intra-human sex thus becomes impossible; instead human sex becomes a tripartite event in which ooloids, the gender-neutral beings among the Oankali, participate by using their “sensory arms,” which give human males and females an ecstatic “neurosensory illusion” (177). The pleasure is to such a degree that it “offer[s] an oneness that [...] people strive for, dream of, but can’t truly attain alone” (199). The advanced principles of life that the Oankali embrace thus overpower the

understanding humans have about life being a struggle. In the trilogy, the diversification of genetic traits by mating and breeding and the receptiveness of change is the source of pleasure of life. As Gregory Hampton writes in *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler*, “for Butler the highest goal for humanity is survival by any means necessary, but mainly by accepting difference and acknowledging the inevitability and omnipotence of change” (xix).

The description of this irresistible attraction and alliance between different species leads some critics to compare the evolution in the *Xenogenesis* to the evolution as explicated by the science of symbiogenesis and symbiosis, which according to Lynn Margulis, the co-author of the seminal *Microcosmos* (1986), is the “living together and sometimes merging of different species of organisms,” whose one of the most important examples is the merging of the “chloroplasts (of all plants) and the mitochondria (of all plants and animals), both of which were formerly independent bacteria” (22).²² Indeed, as Bruce Clarke notes as he quotes an e-mail correspondence between himself and Butler, Butler was well informed about the popular works by scientists such as Wilson, Margulis and Sagan, and James Lovelock.²³ And as Butler herself acknowledges, *Microcosms* bears a significant mark on the *Xenogenesis*: most evidently, the way the

²² See also Margulis’s *Symbiotic Planet* (1998), where she defines symbiosis as “the system in which members of different species live in physical contact” (5). The evolution viewed through the lens of symbiosis therefore begins from the potency of bacteria to merge and “form larger cells including ancestors to both plants and animals” (6). Human existence very much relies on the symbiosis of the bacteria, as Margulis suggests that protein microtubules that enable brain activities themselves evolved first in bacteria (48).

²³ For works that further examine the relationship between Butler and the symbiotic theory of evolution, see also Ferreira 401-15, Bollinger 34-53.

Oankali reproduce and survive by merging with other species, for example, parallels the theory that posits that life sustains and diversifies itself by merging with what is heterogeneous to the self. For these reasons Clarke suggests that the Oankali are “an allegory of the gene-trading bacterial microcosm that supports and subsumes all other life” (175). Furthermore, in the trilogy:

[I]nstead of stories within stories, one has organelles within cells, cells within organisms, and bodily transformations welling out of symbiogenetic embeddings. The message of the extraterrestrial beings in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy is in large degree the message the bacteria in *Microcosmos* have for humanity at large: ‘The reality and recurrence of symbiosis in evolution suggests that we are still in an invasive, “parasitic” stage and we must slow down, share, and reunite ourselves with other beings if we are to achieve evolutionary longevity. (176-77)

Clarke’s biologized reading of the text, in other words, likens the text to bacteria, whose “message for humanity at large” is the “evolutionary longevity” through peaceful cooperation—or to use Clarke’s own terms, the message is about the importance of “posthuman viability” (159). Indeed, the trilogy’s ending that promises a grandiose, cosmic continuation of evolution and complex diversification of life lends itself to a reading that defines the work as a posthuman utopia, released from the anthropocentric and ostensibly conceited humanist subjectivity and facing toward the embrace of radical difference and otherness.

With the trilogy’s reliance on the relatively new and paradigm-shifting

concept of symbiosis, as well as its replacement of anthropocentric understanding of evolution with that of the posthumanist vision, the *Xenogenesis* surely occupies the cutting edge of literary and scientific imagination during the Reagan years during which it was being written. Butler's reliance on symbiosis is all the more significant if one considers its obscured Russian origin, with the works of Russian scientists such as Andrey Famintsyn and Konstantin Merezhkovsky, who as early as the 1900s, were developing theories of symbiosis in evolution. Tom Wakerford in *Liaisons of Life* explains that the reason that the symbiosis's distinct Russian history is relatively unknown in the West is in part due to political and ideological reasons—to those in the West, the idea of symbiosis seemed dangerous because it was interchangeable with Communism (134). Moreover, the World War I was the very evidence that symbiosis, as well as the kind of theory suggested by Kropotkin that emphasized cooperation, was a misconceived idea which the reality did not seem to reflect. During World War II, symbiosis was also understood to be promoting totalitarianism, because it allegedly demanded self-sacrifice of the individual “for the benefit of the nation” (138). Hence symbiosis became an “international pariah subject,” which was able to receive its long overdue attention only in the 1990s when it “at last escaped across biology's own Berlin Wall” (17).²⁴ Indeed, Margulis, who paved the way for the science of symbiosis in the

²⁴ See also Bradford Harris's “Evolution's Other Narrative,” where he similarly notes on the Western Europe's and America's hostile reception of the theory of symbiosis because of the “entrenched political ideal of individualism” more congruous with the Darwinian idea of life as an endless struggle and combat (n.pag.). The essay highlights the importance of knowing the intermeshed realm of scientific and political discourse, whose close correspondence illuminates the necessity to “disentangle some of our

West, writes in her introduction to Liya Nikolaevna Khakhina's *Concepts of Symbiogenesis*, that until 1975 she was not aware of the theory of symbiogenesis that was being developed in Russia by B. M. Kozo-Polyansky, for example, in his 1924 book *New Concepts of Organisms* (xix). In part due to her personal experience as a researcher Margulis has a keen understanding of the influence that socio-political conditions can exert on the making of scientific knowledge. In the preface to *Microcosmos*, she explicitly identifies her theory of symbiosis as being in reciprocal relationship with the political events of her time: indeed, it is in the context of the “deconstruction of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War” that she “extend[s] the lessons of evolution and ecology to the human and political realm” (16), which she implies have been seriously hindered from being introduced because of those very ideological reasons that erected the Wall.

The same can be said of the use of symbiosis in the *Xenogenesis*: in the face of the difficulties of racial relations, economic disparities, and ideological conflicts in the Reagan times, Butler draws from the knowledge of the most recent science to imagine a world radically different from her reality—the one that is more communal, cooperative, and comprehensive. As Gabriele Schwab writes in “Ethnographies of the Future,” for Butler to have invented the Oankali who are without the idea of possessive individualism that so defines the West and who are willing to trade for genes and be a medium for the production of new life is to examine “notions of property in alien worlds beyond the logic of late capitalism and the forces of globalization that determine living

political discursive traditions from our scientific ones, [so that] the story of evolution may itself evolve” (n.pag.).

conditions on Earth” (205). The “life” that Butler envisions is thus “a common property that cannot be owned and needs to be protected from pillage and destruction” (225).

But to come to the final point of this chapter, herein lie the limits of the *Xenogenesis* despite its sustained attempt to imagine a world antithetical to the existing social order. Life there essentially refers to a biological existence whose central concern is survival and the increase of evolutionary viability. Life then is not only common property communally shared, but also that which is binding as biological imperative to survive and continue the species. In other words, the trilogy is caught in the logic of biological survivalism, in which substantive and qualitative aspects that define life are of much less concern when compared to the question of survival as such which diminishes life to species existence. The *Xenogenesis* thus remains bound by biologism, even as it is very critical of predominant strand of biologism promoted by social Darwinism in the Reagan era.

To live is therefore merely to survive without a reflection on specific components that constitute human life as something more than biological existence. Indeed, the primary concern among the species relations in the trilogy is to be viable to each other. This is also why politics in terms of civic engagement, decision-making, the formation of collective will, and the launching of institutional changes are all absent in the trilogy. In contrast, there is an overwhelming focus on the human biological identity that must undergo a posthumanist transformation, because that is where the stakes for survival are thought to lie. According to Donna Haraway in *Primate Visions* (1989), *Xenogenesis* is a “survival literature” that celebrates the assimilation of humans into

nonhumans and the transformation of humans into cyborgs, because such metamorphosis destabilizes the “statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual entity, or body” (178). Haraway anticipates from the genetic interaction between the humans and the Onakali a demolition of an outdated liberal humanist notion of the self as inviolable and invincible, entitled to inborn rights. Although in *Dawn*, the first book of the trilogy Haraway still finds that the idea of the sacred original “human” is unsurpassed, she argues that the text is valuable in presenting what is to be the future “primate field” that “constitute[s] a defining dilemma of reproductive politics” that experiments on the idea of “sameness and difference”(381-82). Along these lines, *Xenogenesis* is not only a science fiction and a survival literature but also a *primatology* of the future (376), so she argues, that narrates about the ways the interspecies coexistence take shape. This new primatology, no longer insisting on the “fully human status,” offers instead a “report from the primate field in the allotropic space of earth after a nuclear holocaust,” where only cyborgs and the likes can survive (376). Thus elsewhere in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Haraway invokes a slogan “Cyborgs for earthy survival!” (4; 212), suggesting that earthly survival is possible only by means of human metamorphosis into cyborgs, whose biological nature defies the logic of hierarchical dualism that brings crisis to the earth.

Yet, the problem is that even with all the promises of what cyborgs or any other posthuman figures can do in times when survival is at stake, one cannot but question its ultimate reliance on identitarianism that prizes and even romanticizes one kind of identity over another, which in this case is the nonhuman identity. The strategies

for survival thus involve not the willed transformation that Raymond Williams prioritizes but the realignment of reproductive practices so that humans no longer engender offspring that are identical to themselves, but rather produce beings different from humans. Walter Benn Michaels's *The Shape of the Signifier* is especially insightful in reading the primacy of identity politics in the *Xenogenesis*; he argues that the preoccupation with identity (and by extension difference) shunts politics aside by focusing on the question of *who* survives rather than that of the aftermath of survival, which requires historical and political imagination. Moreover, in the end, within the scheme of identity politics, there is no consequential difference between the human *identity* that human survivors try to retain and the *difference* that the Oankali try to attain by mating with humans, because "what matters is only that, whatever's valorized, it's valorized *as* the other or the same" (38). This is the reason why the primary concern in the *Xenogenesis* is limited to the question of survival politics of identity and difference only yields one kind of question, which is whether the "different species ... can survive," thereby eliding the question of "how society should be organized," which is properly a political question (34).

Michaels argues that this neglect of politics as shown in the *Xenogenesis* is symptomatic of the cultural discourses that proliferated after the Cold War. It is manifested as well in Francis Fukuyama's end-of-history or the post-historical thesis which claims that the "ideological victory of the West" allowed the cultural and political discourses to be shaped through non-ideological confrontations (22). The *Xenogenesis* for Michaels reveals the effect of this non-ideological confrontation, for in the text "the

differences between what people think (ideology) and the differences between what people own (class) [is replaced] with “what people are (identity)” (24). Thus, whereas the “[v]ictory over the enemy on the Cold War model may be understood as the victory of right over wrong,” the victory over the ‘enemy’ within the politics of identity and difference is merely understood in terms of a survival of one identity and culture over another (34). Put differently, utopia in the post-Cold War era is concerned with the preservation of certain species over others, in contrast to the utopia of the preceding era that have been more concerned with the *form* of politics, which has lasting repercussions in the process of constructing society.

Frederic Jameson also traces this turn to the non-political in science fiction that takes place in conjunction with the processes of the Cold War. The argument in *Archaeologies of the Future* is that with the end of the Cold War, science fiction saw a dwindling interest in resolving social contradictions by re-imagining “class dynamics and the mode of production” (140). That is, literary imagination, no longer under the historical influence where ideological conflicts and military antagonism dominate the everyday life, shifted from projecting political and ideological visions to exploring the issues of gender and sexuality (140) that entails the narratives of “love,” “perversion,” and “sexual intercourse” between human and alien (141). Jameson examines this shift with suspicion in that the supposedly mutual bodily absorption of human and alien may in fact result in the one-sided assimilation of alien into human—alien thereby “becom[ing] a capitalist like the rest of us” (141), or vice versa, as I would also argue, in the case of the *Xenogenesis*, where humans get consumed by aliens, reverting to the

elemental and instinctual forms of living in which reproductive viability is the sole issue. According to Jameson, the difference between post-Cold War science fiction and earlier fiction of the progressive era during the 1960s and 1970s lies in that the element of the “alien” in more recent fiction is taken up as a theme that is to be experimented along the line of sex rather than as a means to imagine a different society. The exploration of aliens in post-Cold War fiction, therefore, is “structurally and narratively, which is to say unconsciously,” a desire to “resolve social contradictions” by corporeal and sensual means that forecloses the possibility of political investigation (130). The ultimate consequence of this otherwise provocative inter- and trans-species imagination, is the fact that the query into species relationship manifests in the form of transgressing sexual norms, becoming merely “a figure for everything non-normative or deviant or taboo in human society” and less an idea of different social relations and structures (141). In other words, the utopian impetus toward an alternative world is exhausted in the process of what is mainly a sexual exploration and experimentation.

Benjamin Kunkel’s “Dystopia and the End of Politics” (2008) also makes a case for the disappearance of a fulfilling political imagination in some of the literary texts of the 1980s and onward. In his reading of contemporary dystopian and post-apocalypse novels, Kunkel explains that the Cold War U.S. culture has seen an increase in the imagination of the apocalypse due to the “climate change, the arrival of peak oil, and the circulation of viruses” (89). Claiming that such a sense of doom yields “strains of morbidity in the air” (90), Kunkel critiques these narratives for tending to depict simplified societies, fragmented into individuals or small units of families resonant with

small tribal-like groups, absent of political communities (94). Humanity is reduced to a “zoological idea . . . where mating and survival are all that matter, and these efforts are pursued with an absence of reflection tantamount to instinct” (97). The novels of apocalypse are indeed morbid because there are no important choices to make in the realm of the everyday life (98) and no “field of competing legitimate claims” that constitute the dynamics of politics (96). Thus, much in similar ways to Michaels and Jameson, Kunkel too describes how the post-Cold War science fictions of the 1980s and onwards lack engagement with politics, which is effaced and reduced to zoology or to “the fact of the body and of biology and anatomy” (137), to use Jameson’s phrase. In such a simplified realm, identity and difference that define the human-alien relationship are unable to function as anything other than what *consumes* the Other, in which either aliens become humans, or humans become aliens.

Irving Howe, in an essay quoted earlier in the chapter, has described the Reagan era as evidencing “a debasement in the social tone of American life”; the Americans are thus “living in a moment of moral smallness, a curdling of generosity, [and] a collapse of idealism” (307). This very pessimism and helplessness, or “morbidity” as Kunkel characterized it, is what the *Xenogenesis* counters, although with a false sense of utopia as I have been arguing: instead of willed transformation, there is a cosmic expansion of new species and a struggle-free communalism that promises the feeling of oneness through sex. Such a world may guarantee species survival, but it is unable to think the qualities of everyday life that is the site in which historical and political meanings are produced. Henri Lefebvre, in *Critique of Everyday Life* (1961)

has argued that survival is an inadequate concept in thinking about “life”; it impoverishes the idea of life into mere “biological and physiological needs” (57) without considering the complex dynamic of a “problematic of everyday life, a perpetual confrontation between empowerment and powerlessness” (58). Interestingly, and quite insightfully, Lefebvre argues that this aspect of life is important, even for “man-made human being[s]” constructed artificially out of human cells, because the everyday inevitably determines the nature of their lives (57-8). That is, whether human or posthuman, a being which has needs and develops desires will come to “obey certain laws of ‘being’,” becoming part of the everyday and “struggle[ing] to *appropriate* life” (58). There is a shift of focus in Lefebvre from the identity of an artificial human to the qualities of its everyday life, which pushes the thought beyond the issue of survival. The focus is thus properly set on knowing the structures of society that shape the dynamics of everyday life, that entails “uneven development” to which no individual has immediate control over (58). But this irreducible and indeterminate aspect of the everyday life is the very basis of the idea that the social life is transformable, by humans who recognize the mechanism through which their lives are diminished.

To conclude, the trilogy, even as it dissents from the predominant ideologies of the Reagan era, is unable to negate the larger ideologies of survivalism that defines its time—largely because the text refuses to entrust humans with the capacity to transform, both on moral and political terms, and sees humans as being stuck in the constant tug-of-war between two contradictory genetic dispositions. The aftermath of the nuclear disaster is thus depicted in the light of the necessity to sustain an evolutionary alliance

with nonhumans species. As argued, there is no substantive life beyond the biological that concerns with the questions of what one survives from, what one survives for, and what comes after the survival. Put another way, the nature of the concrete, everyday life beyond the concerns of species survival is a topic that is not addressed. The stake is not in earthly survival made possible by cyborgs as Haraway suggests, but the quality of the everyday life that the human-Oankali brood carries on *after* the survival. The absence of this reflection in the trilogy makes the trilogy an inadequate political response to the political climate of the time. It stands as a critical biological rebuttal to the predominant scientific discourses that were mobilized to strengthen the Reagan and American hegemony then, but the trilogy's ultimate lack of faith in humans, in contrast to its unrestrained hope in the new posthuman evolution that is to come, keeps it mired in the ideology of biological determinism and the absolute urgency of survival. In other words the trilogy is too wary to be confident in human capacity to bring on transformation. Here we can recall Raymond Williams's essentially humanist argument on utopia, which renders the presence of humans who act upon the world an absolute necessity for the creation of utopia, because without human agents participating in the making of utopia then it is not utopia in the strict sense of the term—a utopia without the intervention of human efforts is a mere miracle, or a given paradise where there is “perpetual harmony and rest” (65). The unthinkable in the *Xenogenesis* therefore is ultimately the humanist idea that humans shape the world, and it is up to humans to change it. It deems it easier to imagine extraterrestrial species who make dramatic appearances, quite in the mode of *deus ex machina*, to resolve the genetic issue that humans themselves cannot resolve.

But as Williams argues, even in utopian worlds, it is politics, and not evolution and natural thriving, or magic and miracles that sustains the world and determines the nature of its organization. Williams argues in reading Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* that an "open Utopia" should not falsely downplay the obvious facets of political life that involves "choice, dissent and conflict" (65). In other words, the open Utopia may not guarantee perpetual peace, biological survival, and intense sexual pleasure as the Oankali community does, but it capacitates humans to abide with reality and to work through it internally. It is an "openness" that does not guarantee security, but allows room for "risk-taking experiment" that capacitates human reason and action to the maximum (65).

My arguments in the preceding chapters have been about the effacement of politics and human agents in times when *greater* human action is in need due to economic as well as ecological crises. We similarly see politics and its agents effaced in times of Reagan and the Cold War, replaced with biology and alien intervention. The *Xenogenesis* thus demonstrates the need to direct attention back to humans as historical agents situated within political and historical realms. In accordance with my preceding observations, the trilogy confirms that there is no way out of any kinds of modern social predicaments by denying humans their agency to produce possibilities for change in history. In other words, the given reality cannot be overcome by turning humans against themselves and by attempting to give humans new biological constitutions. As we will see, this theme is repeated in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, the topic of the subsequent chapter, which, like the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, tackles the issue of human

destructiveness and the tendency to perpetuate domination even at the risk of self-destruction. It is also a story about the metamorphosis of humanity as they mate with genetically engineered humans in the aftermath of the apocalypse. But I argue that the *MaddAddam* trilogy unlike the *Xenogenesis* tries to make a case for the necessity of a historical and dialectical perspective, especially against scientism and biologism that very much sustains the world. If Butler gives way to posthumanist impulse, I will argue that Atwood subtly brings back the figure of the human agent in the making of history.

Chapter 3. A Dialectic of Enlightenment in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*

Trilogy

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy *begins* with the world's end and, in this sense, creates a condition in which the world nonetheless continues, although no longer in the way it used to. For this reason one could describe Atwood's post-apocalyptic narrative as being more literally grounded on earth than that of Butler's end-of-the-world narrative, which as I have shown in the preceding chapter, seeks an alien, extraterrestrial source for the purpose of regenerating the handful of human survivors. If Butler's trilogy cuts all ties with the past ways of being and imagines a beginning that is new in the sense that humans become incorporated into an entirely different evolutionary genealogy, the *MaddAddam* imagines a beginning that still entails the same old humans who, with astute historical understanding, must learn to strategically change the way they inhabit the world if they wish to continue to survive the post-apocalyptic condition.

In focusing on the significance of Atwood's choice of beginning in the trilogy, I am engaging with Edward Said's study of a beginning, in which he argues that it is a reflection of the author's deliberate activity of carving out a point of departure amid the "incessant flux of experience" (*Beginnings* 43). The act of writing is a beginning, at once an act of *invention* and *intervention* in order to share the author's worldview and communicate her intention. A beginning is also a method, in that it decides the course of the narrative and the modes of presentation (43). In the light of this theory of beginning, one can argue that the *MaddAddam* trilogy's opening up of the narrative at the precise

moment of the world's end conveys a message about the force and importance of historical continuity as well as about ruptures that occur in the form of viral outbreaks, ecological disasters, and failures in social systems. The world that begins anew in the trilogy still resembles the old world, even with a near extinct human population and a drastically changed natural habitat, which is to say that Atwood's point of departure is not a beginning in the sense of being a point of pure Origin but rather a start of the arduous and tortuous re-working of the old world. As Said might say, Atwood's act of beginning *with* the end and *despite* the end is an act of historical and political intervention that wills a qualitative change from the former world.

The perspective that Atwood imparts in this work therefore is a materialist one, indicating that what humans perceive to be the "beginning" and the "end" of the world are the result of human making, which is to say that they are historical conditions that arise amid the myriad of social processes. In other words, a materialist view advances that endings and beginnings do not dawn upon humans, but that humans *create* both endings and beginnings. In a related way I also suggest that Atwood's perceived reality is also dialectical, as she observes that history does not project a straightforward progress that ultimately culminates in a series of catastrophes and then the final doom, but a dialectical interplay between progress and regress that has no quasi-religious events such as the End and the Beginning. As I will show, the world in the trilogy ends but circularly begins again, only to perhaps end again, with a hint that there are possibilities of reliving the same kind of mistakes that initially prompted the end.

In that the acts and thoughts of human subjects play significant role in this dialectical drama, Atwood's viewpoint is also a humanist one which centralizes the human agency, although with a caveat that, as dialectics makes it clear, humans are not only subjects who act but also objects that are on the receiving end of the action. I am then affiliating Atwood's trilogy with the thoughts traditionally associated with historical materialism, although I am not merely suggesting how amenable Atwood's text is to such line of thought, but rather presenting her work as a case in point in which a dialectical perspective of the contemporary world provides us with a specific vantage point from which we can speculate on how to grapple with the contemporary times, which Žižek in *Living in the End Times* characterizes as approaching an "apocalyptic point" that is also "a zero-point" with the ongoing processes of "ecological breakdown, the biogenetic reduction of humans to manipulable machines, [and] total digital control over our lives" (327). He continues, describing that today an "extraordinary social and psychological change is taking place right in front of our eyes—the impossible is becoming possible" (328). But there is an equally serious problem, he argues, which is that we evade this crisis with the efforts of "self-deception" and "dissimulation" (327). The coming zero-point either paralyzes us or makes us turn a blind eye—we either receive apocalypse as the inevitable, or deem it as an illusion. The vantage point of perceiving the world dialectically, then, which is also to think speculatively, is that it puts us in a position to examine the processes behind the crises and render them intelligible from a unified point of view. It enables us to reckon the crisis not merely as the final event that draws closer to us but rather as a process that unfolds, which when

we learn to recognize, we can hopefully better meet or avert. I will show below the ways in which Atwood undertakes this task of showing readers the process of disintegration.

But here I first provide a summary of the plot with some context for the work: the trilogy, which is composed of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), alternates between the past stories of the old world as recollected by a handful of human survivors and the stories of the present in which various remaining species, such as humans, genetically engineered “new” humans, and transgenic animals try to survive while ensuring peaceful coexistence. From these alternating narratives and flashes of memories, we learn that the former world is most distinctively characterized by the rule of global neoliberalism and technocracy, in which the logic of the market overrides all other social values. Most countries, including the United States where the story is set, are decrepit, the evidence being that nearly all of their military and police power is relegated to private security agencies that ultimately only represent the interests of corporations with investments in biotechnologies. The “CorpSeCorps Security” in the trilogy thus functions like private military companies (PMCs) that are hired to protect the interests and possessions of private companies,²⁵ and they enforce order by segregating the people of the lower rank into the “Pleeblands,” while safeguarding the people of the upper class in the gated communities called “Compounds.”

One of the most grotesque science projects that is carried out in this world is the experiment with a new species of chickens called “ChickieNobs” that are without the

²⁵See Spiegel 119-135.

whole functioning body except what are needed to produce meat. Genetically modified to be without eyes, beaks, and brains, all ChickieNobs have are mouths located at the top so that the nutrients can simply be dumped into them. Other experiments include transgenic pigs named “*sus multiorganifier*” more casually referred to as “pigoons,” which produce organs at a fast rate for human uses. Even more efficient pigoons are being developed, however, in the hopes of growing organs at a faster rate, “much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one” (*Oryx and Crake* 23).

It is in such a world that an immediately recognizable literary figure, a “mad scientist” named Crake, works on a project in which he builds a safe, germ-resistant bubble dome called “Paradice” in order to rear a new perfect human species with genial dispositions and perfect physical proportions. This new human species, as Crake envisions them, are herbivores with “bad” genes eliminated from them: they are, for example, without genes that induce violent behaviors and without neurons that supposedly incite what Crake calls as the “G-spot,” meaning the trigger for religious feelings and metaphysical thoughts that Crake assesses as having done more harm than good (305). In fact, in ways that are quite evocative of Nietzsche, whose significance I will discuss more below, Crake adheres to perceiving humans foremost as bodily beings, whose “spiritual” and “moral” existence is only a cumbersome fiction.

Ultimately, it is Crake’s corollary project that brings the world to an abrupt end, which is a plan to re-set the world by replacing human population with his new humans from Paradice. For this Crake randomly injects lethal virus in “BlyssPluss Pill” that ostensibly promises enhanced sexual experiences while protecting the users from

sexually transmitted diseases. It is when these pills begin to be circulated that a global pandemic occurs, bringing the world to an end. Amid the confusion the outbreak has incurred, Crake is killed by his friend Jimmy for what Crake did and for the way he made their love-interest, Oryx, be complicit in the act of spreading the virus. Crake's invention, Crakers, however, survive the pandemic, along with a few humans and a large number of both "natural" and transgenic animals.

What follow this "end" are the stories as told by some flawed and yet endearing characters such as Jimmy, Toby, and Zeb, who in one way or the other, have been marginalized figures in the former society for being a student of the humanities (which is a completely dead discipline by then), an underprivileged "pleb" living in the "Pleeblands," and a rebel who for lack of better options, has been a member of the fringe green movement called the "God's Gardeners," which is also a social resistance group founded by "Adam." In the third volume, the presence of Crakers and pigeons become more central, and thus finally ends with one of the Crakers taking over the role of recording "history" as it happens around him. As Crakers and humans turn out to be rather compatible mates, successfully bearing progeny of mixed races, the trilogy ends with a suggestion that humanity as a species, for better or worse, is finally de-centered and no longer the master race.

Since the publication of the first volume in 2003, perhaps because Atwood felt the need to defend the seemingly fantastical elements in her work that I have enumerated above, she has been quite consistent about arguing that her project only narrates what is probable, thereby indicating her alignment with the genre of realism rather than with

fantasy or science fiction. In 2005, she reasons that her work belongs to the genre of “speculative fiction,” which according to her definition weaves stories out of elements that are present on earth, here and now.²⁶ And upon the completion of her third volume in 2013, she repeats in her “Acknowledgments” pages that “although *MaddAddam* is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or bio-beings that do not already exist, are not under construction, or are not possible in theory” (393). Perhaps this insistence on her work’s realism explains Atwood’s now (in)famous denial to the claim that *Oryx and Crake* is a science fiction, reasoning that it does not host “talking squids in outer space,”²⁷ and “monsters and spaceships” in the extraterrestrial sphere.²⁸

I bring this issue to attention not in order to speculate on the nature of Atwood’s relationship to science fiction as a genre but to suggest that Atwood’s insistence on non-fantastical base of her work is telling of the explicitly instructive, rather than purely aesthetic or entertaining purpose she has in her mind, which I argue is to give a straightforward albeit simplistic warning that the world must not go on as it is now. Put another way, without any embarrassment that is usually associated with discussing the

²⁶ See Atwood’s 2005 online article “Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels” in *theguardian.com*.

²⁷ Atwood first mentioned the talking squids on her appearance at the *BBC One Breakfast News*. The original clip and script are not obtainable. Her rather nonchalant and even condescending depiction of science fiction in this interview has become a favorite entry point for discussions that relate to Margaret Atwood and genre writing. For examples, see Robert McCrum’s interview with Atwood at *theguardian.com*. Here he briefly describes the influence Atwood’s reference to the “talking squid” had on the community of science fiction writers and critics. See also Marleen S. Barr’s “Introduction: Textism—An Emancipation Proclamation,” an adamant essay in defense of science fiction, and in which Barr shares another instance where Atwood mentions squids in the context of characterizing science fiction (429-441).

²⁸ See Robert Potts’s “Light in the Wilderness” in *theguardian.com*.

“moral of the story,” Atwood practices didacticism, which I argue shows explicitly from the outset, in the two epigraphs she inserts at the start of the first volume. One of the quotes comes from *Gulliver’s Travels*, where Swift speaks of his explicit intention “to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style” rather than “amuse” readers with “strange improbable tales.” The second quote comes from Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* that poses a rhetorical question asking why there is “no learning by heart of the ways of the world.”

Atwood’s quotation of *Gulliver’s Travels* is interesting especially in the light of Said’s exposition on beginnings that I have alluded to earlier in the chapter. Said notes in *Beginnings* that Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* amplifies the significance of beginning in literature by having experiments on the “reversibility” of the current state of affairs (30)—that is, by initiating movements of going in and out of different geographies, Swift undertakes “experiments in changing directions,” testing out alternate possibilities (30). Thus, Said argues, the act of writing a beginning reflects “the desire, the will, and the true freedom to reverse oneself, to accept thereby the risks of rupture and discontinuity” (34). A beginning is an intervention in the present therefore, and it is a historical and political act that one enacts in order to initiate a concretely different path. A beginning gives an “authorization” to what comes after it, which is to say it validates the rest of the narrative in ways that we can imagine it as an alternate possibility with concrete consequences (34).

I suggest that Atwood’s act of beginning, especially in that it projects a *historical future* amid the sense of doom, parallels the kind of beginning Said argues is identifiable

in Swift. An analogy can further be traced between Atwood's preference for the simplicity and plainness as her chosen style for the trilogy and Swift's own espousal of simplicity as a literary style. In fact, as Said explains, Swift's goals, among other things, includes changing the style in which the English language is used, an endeavor whose premise of course is not only that "language and politics are reversible processes" but also that oftentimes, that political reversion is achieved by means of simplicity in rhetoric (30). In other words, simplicity is "a concept with which the ideas of antecedence, novelty, and foundation continued to be commonly associated" (31-2). Atwood echoes this position in her epigraph—her purpose is not to "amuse" with "improbable tales" but to be plain and straightforward as possible. The urgency of her topic and her attempt to "change direction," I argue, calls for that kind of plainness.

In this regard, Atwood's work diverges from some of the conventional patterns of contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, which James Berger in *After the End* characterizes as narratives that wrestle with traumatic historical experiences (the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima being two of the big referents) *as* apocalypses that already happened. Berger argues, moreover, that to read these narratives is to read the apocalypse as an unrepresentable trauma, that we can only understand by indirectly reading its symptoms, such as "traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts"(19). The task is to reckon with these symptoms and to understand what apocalypse reveals about the "true nature of what has been brought to an end" (5). The definitive characteristic of the twentieth-century post-apocalyptic narrative, then, is that it *ontologizes* life as trauma

after apocalypse.²⁹ And this is where Atwood's narrative counters the convention, I argue, for the post-apocalypse in the trilogy is not a drawn out mood, a climate, or a wound that pervades the collective psyche after the metaphorical end; rather it refers to a historical point around which a discontinuity occurs, from where Atwood wills a change of direction and a beginning.

Importantly, this beginning nonetheless is a beginning with an overlay of the past, for it continues to inform the present. The beginning as Atwood imagines it is not an originary point and a fresh start on a blank page. Rather, for every event there is what precedes it, and the beginning here as an event is no exception—a fact that brings us back to the discussion of dialectical movement in the trilogy, for in dialectics, the beginning, rather than being an isolated moment, already constitutes what comes before it. In other words, history is a unified process, and the act of beginning entails a decision to either affirm or negate what precedes it. The particular problem in the trilogy as it begins from the end, then, concerns how to meaningfully depart from and negate the very ways of the world that brought it to destruction. Simply put, how does one determinately negate the past ways of being, to use a Hegelian term, and what precisely are the past ways that the trilogy sees it must negate in order not to repeat them?

²⁹ See also, Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*. Like Berger, Heffernan describes post-apocalypse as a pervasive climate and a condition of the twentieth-century. Heffernan specifically argues that the twentieth-century post-apocalyptic narratives bespeak of a postmodern condition where the world no longer depends on the transparency of language to convey its meanings nor "on revelation as an organizing principle" (7). According to Heffernan, narratives of post-apocalypse are caught in a paradox of living the prolonged end and encountering new countless possibilities.

I suggest that Atwood, in order to answer this question of what to do to make a meaningful departure, begins in a dialectical fashion by examining the *contradiction* in reality, contradiction here specifically referring to the fact that the extremely enlightened and technologically advanced society becomes its precise opposite by way of self-destruction, reverting to the state of barbarism and irrationalism. Speaking of the extraordinary technological capacities of the modern society, Atwood states in her essay “Of the Madness and of Mad Scientists” that today “increasingly, whatever we can imagine we can also enact” (209). The contradiction here is that such great technological resourcefulness has not been put to use properly—that in fact, we have been using our imagination in the wrong way. Yet another way to describe this contradiction would be to rely on the observations made by Adorno and Horkheimer, who examine the deeply contradictory ways in which the Enlightenment reverts to barbarism, and reason reverts to a mythical state. In other words, it is the dialectic of Enlightenment, a movement in which Enlightenment passes through its opposite, that Atwood has us examine more closely.

One conventional explanation for the Enlightenment’s regression into myth has been to identify reason, the hallmark of Enlightenment thinking, as being inherently functional and reductive. But this response only has the effect of confirming the aforementioned reversal by suggesting that the Enlightenment reverts to its opposite because it is inherently destructive or instrumental; it does not explain the actual logic that is at work when, for example, reason reverts to myth or when the genius scientist in

the trilogy, *Crake*, relies on irrational means to achieve his rational ends—that is, to eradicate humanity in order to create a painless and more harmonious future.

In addressing this question of what sustains such a contradiction, I suggest that Atwood echoes the observation made by Adorno and Horkheimer, which is that the Enlightenment, in the course of its development, is increasingly sustained not by the principles of freedom but by domination and power, which mobilizes Enlightenment reason for its own purposes. They explain that as the Enlightenment intensifies, it consummates itself by carrying out a “compulsion toward the social control of nature” (27) in the process of which domination becomes an inescapable logic. In other words Enlightenment’s complicity with power is the reason why it becomes ruthless with time and is unable to stop itself, even when the technological mastery of the world has been “fulfilled in a telluric scale” (33). Although “critique” as a speculative thought can counteract this blind marching, Adorno and Horkheimer note the inadequacy of critique in modern society, for they conclude that thought itself has come to be “a mere means in the service of an existing order” by having allowed the “metamorphoses of critique into affirmation” (xv). The problem therefore is that all things merely *affirm* “in the service of the present” (34) with no space in which to think against the grain and to deploy the “conceptual language of opposition” (xv).

Not surprisingly, the ethos of affirmation culturally dominates the highly advanced and yet disintegrating world that Atwood depicts. Thus, the scientists in the trilogy have no way of looking at their own projects other than to affirm them by keeping on until they succeed with their hypotheses. Characterized by the crumbling of

metaphysical thinking that provides criteria upon which one could affirm or refute the given values and circumstances, this intensely technocratic world sets the logic of performativity as the sole legitimatizing and affirming force. As Lyotard has us see in *The Postmodern Condition*, such a world gives primacy to the idea of efficiency and measures it “according to an input/output ratio” (88). In the trilogy, for example, there are no religious, or moral, or other speculative discourses that can prompt the scientists to stop their wild reassembling of genetic composition of various living kinds. Only when their experiments turn out to be counterproductive would they find reason to terminate their projects. And if not for the sake of performance, they would engage in experiments as an “after-hours hobby,” as “it made you feel like God” (*Oryx and Crake* 51). Sometimes, fortuitously, experiments would result in a lucrative enterprise, as in the case of pets called “rakunks,” a hybrid species of raccoons and skunks (*Oryx and Crake* 51). The pervasiveness of the culture of affirmation and not incidentally, positivism is perhaps best described by Lyotard when he states that “it is [...] impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa” and that all one can do is to be in wonder at “the diversity of discursive species, just as we do at the diversity of plant or animal species” (26). In other words, in the absence of definitive criteria, one is left to affirm and assent to all.

Affirmation, then, is the dominant “spirit” that governs the ways of life in the trilogy. This is specifically reflected in the way human thought explicitly colludes with neoliberal economy for domination, quite unabashedly affirming everything that yields profit and thus power. Those in power in Atwood’s trilogy, mostly a few elite scientists

and corporate representatives, are indeed shameless and point-blank in their pursuit of their interests. They blatantly capitalize on bodily properties of both humans and nonhumans, thereby considering all forms of life uniformly as bodily capital from which profits can be derived. All life-forms are treated as equal, albeit ironically under the capitalist principle of equivalence that neutralizes all beings and things for the purpose of numeric measurements. The point is that with this process of reification, the principles of domination have been internalized and become second nature, not only for those with power only but also for those under domination. Fredric Jameson has a point, then, when he assesses that the ideologies of the market and of consumption today have become so prevalent to the point of becoming “immanent” in the sense of being habitual and thus eliminating a possibility of a critical response (*Valences of the Dialectic* 285). Especially with a “cynical reason that knows and accepts everything about itself” (285), the very external point from which one can engage in critique, or what Jameson also calls as ideological analysis, seems to have disappeared: the immanence of ideology in other words is the sign of the “final penetration of the logic of the system into all these excluded or neglected...vacant lots” (357).

I suggest that Jameson’s observation on immanence is a valid point as long as it does not risk being a definitive statement—or, in the words of Said, a “theoretical overstatement,” which is how he describes Lukács’s theory of reification and of class consciousness, which risks being a dogmatic prescription once it becomes detached from the immediate context of its development and reiterated elsewhere in different historical contexts (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 239). As Said argues, domination is never

absolute because the very recognition of domination as being a part of reality signals that there is a space external to domination from which domination can be observed (240). Likewise, Jameson's very act of observing the overarching influence of the capitalist ideology may itself be the evidence of the ideology's limited influence despite seeming otherwise. This is also why a number of characters in the trilogy are able to work against the grain: Jimmy's mother, for example, who is one of the top scientists in a big corporation, can be critical of the very laboratory projects in which she participates in and ultimately can choose to be part of the resistance movement. There are also several other scientists in the trilogy who work as undercover agents in various private sectors, in an effort to support the green community called "God's Gardeners."

Nonetheless, my point in bringing up the "immanence" of capitalist ideology is to argue how much the ethos of affirmation perpetuates the given reality by continuing to affirm what *is*. Moreover, because the primacy of science in the twenty-first century is so pervasive, this means that what is being exclusively affirmed is the knowledge that is scientifically derived. The conceptual categories such as "life" and "nature" are thus recast as positivistic knowledge, neatly translated into natural and biological laws. I am here suggesting that the spirit of affirmation in the trilogy is akin to that which affirms "life" as a biological will to preserve oneself, one that is hinged on the logic of the survival of the fittest: to specify, the *MaddAddam* trilogy shows that affirmation today adopts the form of a Nietzschean affirmation of life that he likes to describe in quasi-

biological terms.³⁰ As I will show below, it is the reckless affirmation of life as biological processes that ultimately creates the condition for contradictions, in which as I have mentioned earlier, the progress of the Enlightenment results in its extreme opposite by turning into a process of regression.

In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, the affirmation of life is simply the celebration of the “life-affirming impulse” that is also the will to power (100); it is what overcomes and overturns the rigid morality and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In other words Nietzsche puts forward the idea of affirmation against the cultural sublimations that he regards as burdening man with unsubstantiated spiritual and moral codes. This life-affirming impulse is thus what says yes to an “overflowing energy” and a drive that assures “certainty as to the *future*” (114); it is about an unrelenting, instinctive will to a life-sustaining power severed from moralities and consciences. In the words of Nietzsche, this affirmation of life “functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner” (50). It thereby reveals that contrary to his claim that his affirmation of life and a will to power defeats all forms of power in order not to be subordinated to the existing order, precisely because it wants to stand aloof from all powers it must affirm power and become power itself—the affirmation of life thus becomes equated with acquiring power, whose process is *naturalized* by being defined as part of human drive. As Adorno and Horkheimer illuminate, what Nietzsche lays bare is that in its aim at “independence from external power” which is in fact the very

³⁰ For a study of Nietzsche’s biologism, see John Richardson’s *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*. Here he explains that Nietzsche’s philosophical task is the “task of naturalizing... drives and ends” which is also the “task of naturalizing *ends*” (13).

meaning of Enlightenment thinking, it develops *itself* as a “dominant power” that is “despotic” and almost “to the point of proclaiming anarchy” (90).

Perhaps this is something that Atwood insightfully sees as she narrates the story of a world in which that affirms “life” as understood strictly in biological terms, removed of the metaphysical and conceptual baggage that is usually attached to it. At the most basic level this affirmation of life understood as a raw, physical force is found in the ways the dominant culture in the trilogy strives for beauty, health, and youth. It idealizes physical strength and equates signs of infirmities with the utter condition of dystopia itself. All social aspects are seen through the lens framed by the naturalistic understanding of the world. As a result, artists are no longer seen as a social group participating in creative enterprise but as one of the most incompetent kinds who survive by having their artistic activities “[serve] a biological purpose” of “amplify[ing]” their egos so that they can find ways to adapt to the condition of struggle for survival (167-68). As it can be seen from *Crake*, this elevation of nature and the qualities considered to be sustaining that nature such as youth and strength find practical expressions in his science projects that are predicated upon the Darwinian logic of the survival of the fittest. Unsurprisingly, Crake’s underlying working principle is to continue to affirm this logic by selecting certain features of each species that he thinks is particularly strong and valuable. Crake’s design of his new human species thus entails a reassembling of select features of various animals. They include “variable pigmentation filched from baboons,” as well as “the expandable chromosphores of the octopus,” and the “sexual semaphoring of crabs,” to name a few (*Oryx and Crake* 164-65). With genes from jellyfish they can

conveniently glow in the dark and with citrusy scents planted in them, they can naturally keep away mosquitoes (102). The Crakers also have unearthly beauty and are made to be environmentally sustainable as they can recycle their own excrements.

At the more abstract level however, the ethos of affirmation is not only expressed in the culture's elevation of physical strength and the faith in biological principles, but also in the vague yet unbreakable *optimism* in the existing order regardless of how destructive it is. This culture believes that through affirmation new values can be created; it is the overall attitude that exudes positive affect and cheerful mood, propelling the society forward while suppressing any gestures that look backward in the form of speculation and retrospection. This kind of affirmation, I argue however, turns out to be especially amenable and pliable to the needs of capitalism, much in the same ways postmodern subjectivity, initially regarded as the radical potential for its boundless flexibility, reveals itself to be the most apt form of subjectivity for a modern capitalism with its ever changing conditions of the market. Affirmation, therefore, reinforces the logic of the market, and because as Atwood describes so well the knowledge of biology creates new niches in the market today, any biotechnological projects tend to be affirmed as potential creators of new possibilities. Thus in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, affirmation specifically takes the shape of reinforcing the almost symbiotic relationship between science and capitalism. The affirmation of life is thus the means to expand the market and create new values. This ethos dissimulates its motives by promoting the idea of taking risks and embracing the dangers of the unknowable future for the sake of future itself, but what it actually follows is the utilitarian principles that affirm the

greater end by any means possible. In the trilogy, therefore, medical experiments on human bodies that are bound to fail in its preliminary stages are conducted nonetheless for the purpose of developing lucrative medicinal products. The test subjects are commoners from the “Pleeblands” and “the poorer countries,” as well as from places such as “whorehouses and prisons”—they are in other words “the ranks of the desperate, as usual” (296), reduced to specimens living in “one giant petri-dish” (287).

But quite distinctive from this context in which affirmation comes to be evoked in the language of capitalism, understood as a positive ethos that help generate economic productivity as it creates, promotes, and expands, Deleuze, as is well-known, presents the Nietzschean idea of affirmation as being an act of creation that creates new values *in multiplicities*, thereby cultivating difference that is liberating (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 185). Affirmation, put another way, fosters “multiplicity, becoming and change” (197)—all of which are presumably transformative, enabling one to open itself toward chance. Accordingly, Deleuze defends that the usual connotations associated with the concept of affirmation of life and will to power—such as Nietzsche’s admiration for bestiality and his disparagement of both physical and psychological infirmities—do not amount to the justification of power, slavery, and injustice in the literal sense of the terms. Rather, the will to power and the call for yes-saying are what celebrates those creative individuals who create and free themselves by affirming. In reading Nietzsche therefore, Deleuze defines affirmation as “*a mode of being of the one who is powerful*” (179) whose essence lies in “creat[ing] new values which are those of life, which make

life light and active” (185). As Deleuze explains, the “practical proposition” of affirmation is thus the pure “joy of diversity” (197).

Indeed, in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra speaks of the “sacred yes-saying” that enables the “game of creation [of new values]” (17). His yes-saying, according to this reading, is not a reckless reception of or accommodation to everything, but rather a critical “transvaluation of all values” for the virtue of creation as such. Zarathustra thus summons the advent of the overman who constantly overcomes himself, not for the purpose of self-betterment, which for Nietzsche is a form of humiliating subjugation to existing moral codes, but for the purpose of creating new values through the transvaluation of existing morals like justice. Along the similar lines, Michael Hardt, too, in his reading of the Deleuzian take of Nietzsche in *Gilles Deleuze*, argues that affirmation is precisely not the “naïve and irresponsible optimism,” or “uncritical” and even “anticritical” attitude in the sense it is evoked by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, for example (115). Rather, Hardt explains, affirmation is an active action that is opposed to a reaction that immediately binds one to the circumstance that prompts that reaction—affirmation thus “unburden[s]” (117) and counters “control” (48).

On a purely speculative level, affirmation, as they suggest, may serve as the principle of creativity and source of new ethics of being; what we see today, however, and what Atwood has us see in her world that comes to a disintegration, is that the ethos of affirmation is so deeply conflated with the capitalist logic that it works to consolidate the power already in place. The idea of the creation of new values is transmuted into a logic that accommodates capitalism, and because today’s capitalism also increasingly

thrives on the advancement in the knowledge of our genetic constitutions—that is, on the commodification not only of physical labor but also of the actual body parts, ranging from its cellular to genetic elements—it also has the effect of affirming nature as understood by science. Interpretations that attempt to redeem Nietzschean affirmation, I argue, are unpersuasive in this regard. It is not possible to create new values that are neutral and empty of ideologies, for all values are values *of* something with a specific content. The Nietzschean overman, then, does not simply affirm for the purpose of celebrating life and asserting the instinctual urge to live as a forceful existence; he affirms life and wields strength to those deemed weak, and affirms will to power that has political and hegemonic contents. As mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, this is why Crake, whose bearing evokes the figure of the overman by euphorically affirming life as a means to create new values, dreams of creating a new human species *and* simultaneously cogitates on eradicating the human race. Purely on the criteria that measures the competence of life according to the theories of eugenics and of Malthus on population, Crake's projects of creation *and* destruction are both justifiable. The supposedly creative energy of affirmation is easily justified as a means to destroy.

Crake's megalomaniac and Nietzschean personality thus enable us to see clearly the point made by Adorno and Horkheimer, which is that Nietzsche is not an anti-Enlightenment thinker but a thinker who *consummates* the Enlightenment thinking by driving its logic to the end, revealing in the end the “identity of power and reason” (93). Tracing the ways in which Nietzsche's affirmation leads to destruction, they conclude that Nietzsche, along with Sade, completes the project of the Enlightenment by taking

the primacy of “scientific principle to annihilating extremes” and subjugating humans subjects themselves under those scientific principles (74). As they explain, the Enlightenment, which importantly initially emerged in the spirit of countering the myth of authority and religious narratives, is taken to the extreme so that its “radicalism... becomes its own antithesis,” thereby becoming the “agency opposed to reason: its abolition of all absolute ties allows power to decree and manipulate any ties which suit its purposes (72-3). By way of a dialectical reversal, the “antiauthoritarian” spirit changes into affirming any form of power that suits itself (72)—destruction, becomes the “fulfillment” itself (89).

Here I briefly describe what follows as a result of this consummation of the Enlightenment, which will be the topic of the remainder of this chapter: its consequence is that because of the extensive application of the Enlightenment principles on the world through which humans dominate nature, humans end up measuring their own human nature against those very principles. We witness, then, the reification of the human mind itself, whose consequence is the human self-contempt and misanthropy that I further explain below by closely reading the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Yet, in the similar way I argued above about the incomprehensiveness of capitalist logic, I conclude that to be able to *know* the *process* of domination itself points to the possibility of a space that is external to that domination. The recognition of the process is a sign that one not just stay passive and be the receiving end of its operating effect, because knowing is in itself an exercise of reclaiming the human mind that thinks against the grain instead of affirming the existing order. In the words of Said that recapitulate Georg Lukács’s theory of

reification and the importance of the consciousness that *knows*,³¹ this is to say that the human mind comes alive and to its full capacity when it is able to “think through what it is that causes reality to appear to be only a collection of objects and economic *données*” (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 232). Said continues, stating that the recognition of the reification makes us aware that “the very act of looking for process behind what appears to be eternally given and objectified, makes it possible for the mind to know itself as subject and not as a lifeless object, then to go beyond empirical reality into a putative realm of possibility” (232). In Lukács’s own words, the moment when the mind becomes aware of the dialectical contradiction is also “*a point of transition in practice*” (*History and Class Consciousness* 178). I am then, also arguing that what Atwood accomplishes in the trilogy is the task of delineating this process of reification, through which she compels the readers to develop an awareness of the “ways of the world,” a quote from Woolf that Atwood cites in her epigraph in the first volume of the trilogy.

Let me then discuss in detail the consequences of the consummation of the Enlightenment as discussed above: to reiterate, it is that humans come to dominate not only nature but also themselves, in such ways that both who wield power and their victims are affected. The contradiction that I suggested is important in reading the *MaddAddam* trilogy then is the circumstance in which the human mastery through scientific knowledge, which the trilogy shows has achieved an extremely sophisticated

³¹ Lukács, of course, means specifically the consciousness of the proletariat, but I do not specify as so because Said does not use the term in a way that it exclusively refers to the class of the proletariat. Said uses the term more generically, and here I follow his usage. Said’s re-appropriation of the consciousness that has originally been assigned to the class of the proletariat can perhaps be read as the very demonstration of how theories travel in ways that speak to different historical contexts.

level, is so thorough and longstanding that humans *internalize* that knowledge as the absolute truth, thereby allowing themselves to be bound to the very knowledge that they have produced. The intensification of Enlightenment therefore does not confer on humans a power with which they become absolute—it grows larger than humans and now binds humans in the same way humans wield power to have dominion over the world.

As seen in the trilogy, the consummation of Enlightenment objectifies humans themselves as part of the processes of nature that is governed by a set of natural laws. Crake determines human intelligence to be the contingent phenomenon that emerges out of the process of biological adaptation, and the human mind is no longer the carrier of reason that supposedly sets itself apart from the rest of the universe—the mind itself is influenced by the very scientific principles that it first methodically derives, and ends up explaining *itself* as part of nature. Thus Adorno and Horkheimer note the ways in which human thought is rendered as a function prompted by a “chemical agent” (70) and that which has been adapted to be “at the service of every natural interest” (68). Cutting ties off from the cultural narratives that sublimate the human world such as religion and myth, the consummation of the Enlightenment principles reconfigures the world as a “mass of material” (78).

What initially appears as the *human* domination of nature thus turns itself into a condition in which nature dominates humans by rendering humans unable to recognize themselves or the world as anything other than material entities governed by physical laws. Put another way, humans become the victims of their own Enlightenment and

become reified beings with their minds reduced to instrumental rationality. This process which is also that of dehumanization is explained in detail by Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason*, where he describes the ways in which the exclusive use of instrumental rationality results in appraising humans precisely with that instrumental mode of thought, thereby reducing humans into mere things. Calling this rationality also as “subjective reason,” Horkheimer explains that its preoccupation is with achieving ends through any means for the purpose of meeting an individual’s self-interest (3). In other words, cut loose from its ordinary role to foster “spontaneity, productivity, power to discover and assert new kinds of content,” subjective reason falls into being a mere “executive agency” (38). Thus as the Enlightenment culture deepens, subjective reason is further detached from “the concept of objective truth”(9), and it regresses into being subjective in the pejorative sense, which perceives the world narrowly as a “*mundus sensibilis*”—a world “structured by man’s [...] interests and actions or any kind of technical procedure,” as opposed to “*mundus intelligibilis*” (32). The world is taken to be malleable, containing no inherently rational truths one should come to reckon with intellectually; it loses the grasp of its other dimension which Horkheimer calls “objective reason” that roots itself in the idea of universality, thereby “perceiving the true nature of reality and determining the guiding principles of our lives” (13). Subjective reason thus relativizes, neutralizes, and formalizes reason, rendering it as mere instrument (14) whose “operational value [...] lies in the domination of men and nature” (15). As Adorno and Horkheimer describe, this is the process of humans abstracting the world into “logical formalism” and “mathematical formalism” (20),

losing nature's "abundance of qualities" (6). Nature is rarefied into a "system of isolated signs" and a mathematical game that has no intention to transcend the abstracted system (13). Numbers, in other words, are the "enlightenment's canon" and the truthful expression of reality (4).

The consequences of this are not only felt in the ways nature is made to comply with abstract signs and be manipulated. They reverberate in human lives, as clearly indicated in the irreconcilable division within the human mind between the physical and the metaphysical, which is also reflected in the institutional dichotomization between the sciences and the humanities. The world Atwood depicts is thus all too familiar, as it is a divided world in which the "numbers people" dominate the "word people" (25). Science and scientific thinking thus takes over all spheres of society and makes the world mirror its abstracted system. Accordingly the students at the Watson-Crick Institute articulate life in "complex mathematical equations" on their T-shirts, which are intensely purified and rarefied expressions of reality (204).³²

³² The name, of course, refers to James D. Watson and Francis Crick who along with Maurice Wilkins, discovered the double helical structure of DNA in 1953. As a counterpart to the Watson-Crick Institute, Atwood invents the "Martha Graham Academy" for students of the liberal arts. The name is a reference to the modern American dancer Martha Graham, the "dance goddess of 20th century" (186) who expanded the horizon of dance performance by creating modern choreographies. Atwood's choice of Martha Graham as the name of the falling institution is telling of the world that on the one hand idolizes atomized human body parts and on the other hand disregards the holistic understanding of the human body. That is, the prestige of the Watson-Crick and lack of it in the Martha Graham is indicative of the culture in which body is conceived exclusively as a composite of atomic matter and not as a medium for aesthetic and complex psychological expressions. What is more, the performance arts are regarded as a political threat in the trilogy because of the fear of sabotage as people gather in large numbers for performances (187). The downfall of the Martha Graham Academy indicates the extent to which the human bodies are regarded with contempt.

Thus, the trilogy describes the condition in which the human mind comes to resemble the workings of subjective and instrumental reason as it is implemented to dominate nature. The human mind finally comes down to *being* the instrumental reason itself, and because so it has a limited way of seeing the world as it can only organize it as an object onto which instrumental reason can be applied for the desired outcome. Another way to understand this process would be to see it as a process of reification, in which the human mind becomes “reified as an autonomous, automatic process,” so that the mind eventually ap[es] the machine itself has produced” (Adorno and Horkheimer 19). That is, through the mind’s “mimesis” (19) of its own product that is the instrumental reason, the mind in turn becomes the product of instrumental reason. This dialectic thus shows that the human mind not only creates the world but that it itself becomes part of that creation.

Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*, describes the problem of the reification of human consciousness in depth. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Lukács, too, critiques the ways in which the reification of the mind coalesces with the process of the advancement of science and technology. According to him science yields a “methodically purified the world” which because removed from the untidy realm where human activities and interventions occur, render the world pliable to control and domination (120). Lukács sheds more light on this by delineating modern societies’ inadequacy to cope with any forms of “crises” because human activities have been streamlined into predictable and calculable patterns. That is, methodologies in the science laboratories, as well as the economic rationalism of the bourgeoisie, Lukács

argues, necessarily exclude elements considered to be irrelevant and variable—thus, with the contingencies and the uncertainties of life kept out of the formula, modern society is reified in such a way that its course of events is rendered completely predictable and traceable. Accordingly, the purpose of scientific research becomes not to bring the world to light by rendering its complex knowledge intelligible, but to subordinate the world to its rationally derived systems of natural law in order to make it administrable and controllable. The world is understood as a system that conforms and adapts to the patterns that have been already prescribed on it. As such, the human mind becomes incapable of understanding “crisis” that “violates” this prescribed pattern, occurring in such forms as system failures and simply as human interventions and caprice. Lukács makes this point especially clear by illustrating the incompetency of the bourgeois economy, which as “an abstract and mathematically orientated system of formal ‘laws’,” is structurally incapable of expecting or understanding crisis (105).

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the case of the laboratory-born “glowing rabbits” that accidentally and startlingly break free of human control to grow into a species in its own right, is a telling example of the modern ineptitude with regard to understanding the world as a live place that constantly breaks the “natural” pattern that science projects on to the world. The glowing rabbits that Atwood depicts of course are based on the real-life, genetically modified rabbit created by bio-artist Eduardo Kac, [whom I have discussed in “Introduction”]. In his experiment entitled the “GFP Bunny Project,” he gives a rabbit named Alba a green fluorescent protein (GFP) that originally comes from jellyfish *Aequorea Victoria*, and claims that he created this transgenic animal in the

hopes of proving that they are not monsters as the public discourse makes them out to be, but social beings with whom humans can have meaningful relationships. Thus, in his website and elsewhere, Kac explains that the significance of Alba lies in its potential to live up to the “profound concept of interactions” among different species, best described in theoretical concepts such as Martin Buber’s “dialogical relationship,” Mikhail Bakhtin’s “dialogic sphere of existence,” Emile Benveniste’s “intersubjectivity,” and Humberto Maturana’s “consensual domains.”³³ In other words Kac attempts to re-conceptualize the rabbit from being a guinea pig to being a dynamic subject-participant that interacts with its environment. As Adorno and Horkheimer would say, Kac’s attempt lies in proving that nonhuman beings are more than a specimen—a “mere exemplar” that bears nothing more than its “universal fungibility” (6-7). Kac’s re-designation of the laboratory rabbit as an individual being with a name called Alba, then, is an attempt to negate the process of reification. His project, according to his own words, is an example of art that “promote[s] awareness of and respect for the spiritual (mental) life of the transgenic animal.” He also ensures that “[t]here were no surprises in the process” and the project was “safe,” “harmless to the rabbit,” and “breaks no social rules.”

However, even putting aside Kac’s effusive positivism that evokes the ethos of affirmation that I discussed above, the problem in the GFP Bunny Project, as Atwood so well elucidates, is the ways in which Kac falls prey to the very process of reification that he is fighting against by predetermining the role that the glowing rabbit will have, which

³³ See for example *Eduardo Kac: Telepresence, Biotelematics, and Transgenic Art*. See also his professional website at ekac.org.

is that it will fit seamlessly into the kind of social relationships that humans deem as ideal. But as Atwood imagines, the fictional rabbits do not live to prove their worth as sociable beings to humans, but live and interact with their environment entirely on their own terms, and acquire a significance that is entirely different than the one originally conceived: the rabbits, by way of “[breeding] with the wild population,” rather grow to be a “nuisance” (96). Despite Kac’s reassurance that the project is “safe”—which is a vague word, indeed—we have easier time finding Atwood’s scenario more credible than the one presented by Kac.

This is thus another moment where Atwood’s sensitivity to the *processes* enables her to offer insights into the dialectical movements of progress, reversions, and other various forms of sudden “turns” of events. She critiques the mistaken idea that animals, whether bio-engineered or not, would remain static and controlled. Kac’s project, as it turns out, can be “safe” only in the context of a monitored a laboratory experiment. In other words, Atwood shows that the safety Kac guarantees is an illusion created under the condition in which all accidental, erratic, and irrational causes are eliminated. As soon as the reality in its totality is taken into consideration, as illustrated in the novel, the interspecies interaction Kac envisions reveals itself to be an abstract, theoretical contemplation. The unpremeditated breeding of the glowing rabbits then is a reminder of the extreme measure humans must take in order to keep scientific (and artistic) experiments under control. Kac’s estimation that the transgenic rabbit is safe, will be safe, and will remain as a good companion to humans throughout time can only be true under the circumstance in which nature strictly adheres to the hypothetical conditions set

by humans. Kac has eliminated crises in advance, but Atwood highlights the possibility of crises yet again. What Atwood thus elucidates is that art can reify its objects, a condition that Adorno and Horkheimer describe as art “pledg[ing] itself to positivist science, even its specific techniques” (13). Indeed, as the example of Alba indicates, art loses independence by appropriating its techniques and methods from science and formulating its significance from there within.

The consequence of the reification—of animals, social relationships, art, and humans themselves—leads to my second to last point in this chapter about the dialectic of Enlightenment as shown in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. It is that it results in the culture of misanthropy, in which humans become contemptible objects. As I have alluded above, on the flip side of this contempt for humans is the deep awe for nature as scientifically understood, which contradictorily acquires the near mythical status of being the truth. This is how the consummation of Enlightenment becomes its full opposite—the Enlightenment’s initial project of using reason to acquire knowledge, all for the purpose of *emancipating* humans from the mythical existence that binds them to the fear of the unknown, ends up bringing humans under yet another kind of oppression, in which they are no more than contingent parts of nature. Atwood vividly shows this in the trilogy: humans are addressed with derision whose intelligence has basically stemmed from “[m]onkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash, discard—all hooked up to monkey brains” (99). Far from this being an effort to make human intelligence be on a par with other kinds of animal intelligence, Crake’s comparison of humans to monkeys is rather merely a means

to depreciate humans—to render humans abject and “fungible.” This sentiment is widespread in the society, as shown in the attitudes of the self-professed artists Jimmy briefly acquaints with. They show the same range of contempt for humans by being cynical, and they describe the world as having no solutions to its problems, as the society “was a sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble” (243).

Even Crake himself becomes a victim to his own misanthropy by failing to allow himself to have any psychological depths—as a reviewer like Michiko Kakutani describes in *The New York Times* (2013), Crake is a “cardboardy creation” who has no convincing interiority, precisely because he represses his own human emotional dimensions (n.pag.). Just as Crake posits a clinical distance from the rest of the world, Crake assumes a clinical distance from himself, coldly regarding the self as an object. As it has been shown above, we do not remain unaffected by the structures of domination we ourselves have instituted, and likewise Crake is not immune to the kind of misanthropy upon which all of his scientific experiments are based on. He suffers from chronic nightmares, and screams in his sleep, even though he professes that he does not ever dream, and even attempts to eliminate dreams from his new human species (218).

The dialectical process of the Enlightenment that culminates in the seemingly perfect mastery of nature therefore now manifests in the form of self-contempt and cynicism that plays no other role than to affirm the status quo. With the primacy of instrumental reason and the perception of themselves as the matter that are part of natural processes, humans are reduced to biological beings whose main interest they

have come to believe lies in self-preservation. As Lukács describes, man becomes a mere “receptive organ” in other words, that adapts to the environment by adopting laws in a mode that best meets his interest (130). Thus, to reiterate, rather than taking actions in any meaningful sense of the term, man “acts” by adapting to his circumstances.

Lukács describes this process of reification as “the assimilation of all human relations to the level of natural laws,” by which he means the tendency of all human relations to “assume increasingly the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science”(131). In similar ways to Lukács who analyzes the society’s conformity to the “systems of natural science” and man’s reduction to an organ that adapts, Horkheimer characterizes this process of naturalization as the “gradual replacement of natural selection by rational action” (65). Survival and self-preservation becomes the most important goal for man, which necessarily entails a ready transformation of man into “an apparatus that responds at every moment with just the appropriate reaction” (65), or, into an “abstract ego emptied of all substance” (66). Reason becomes a mere “adjustive faculty” (67) and the mind becomes part of the “processes of nature” (85).

But this point about the humans’ self-contempt on the one hand and their cult of nature on the other hand is not the final point upon which the movement of the dialectic of Enlightenment comes to rest. The dialectic does not come to a stoppage at the point of human’s reduction to a natural existence; rather it further illuminates on the fact that this objectification of human is the result and effect of nature playing the role of an *active subject* that resists the status of the object given onto it by humans. This is to say, the

fact that today nature is made into something absolute is the very proof that nature acts as a subject that “revolts” against human domination, as Horkheimer argues. It is the “revolt of nature,” as is the title of one of his essays in *Eclipse of Reason* that the dialectic has us see, through which we recognize that humans are not only subjects that acts but also subjects that can be objectified and be on the receiving end of the action.

The events that unfold in Atwood’s trilogy such as the climate change, the shortages of “authentic,” unprocessed, and non-modified foods, the sudden outbreak of dangerous “bioforms,” and other unanticipated environmental problems, can all be read as examples of the revolt of nature in the most literal sense of the term. The fact that nature in the trilogy proves that it cannot ever be completely vanquished without vanquishing humans altogether is another case in which nature revolts. Nature shows its independence in moments when humans fail to curb its force and discipline it according to human intentions. Despite the fact that humans sacrifice everything by organizing their lives around the principles of domination, nature, it seems, is uncontainable.

But the revolt of nature Horkheimer describes takes place in more profound ways than it does as natural disasters or a breakdown of an ecological system. In a similar way in which Freud explains drives and instincts as workings of human inner nature, Horkheimer elaborates that nature is not only an external feature—that is, the physical environment—but also an internal attribute, and defines nature as human impulse (72), passion (73), and “instinctual urges” (75). Horkheimer analyzes that the revolt of nature also occurs when the domination of external nature leads to the domination of this internal nature—that is, when impulses are merely suppressed rather

than overcome by way of “direct[ing] them toward a definite goal” (78), humans resort to the impulses in a *regressive* manner, often tending to “tabooed urges” and identifying with “repressive agencies” such as that of the Nazi (79). Cases of nature’s revolt along this line can be seen throughout the history, Horkheimer argues, and notes that where they appear they always involve defiance against the significance of human thinking (82). Man’s resentment toward the civilization and contempt for humanity, is one example (74). Nazi’s heroization of the “natural man” that is “atomized” and “anarchic,” as well as its antagonism toward human reason, is another example (83). As a form of regression, man also exalts nature as a “supreme principle” in place of human civilization, and uses nature as a “weapon” to invalidate human thinking (82). Darwinism, in the sense that it reduces reason to an organ that adapts (85), is a good example of this. In other words, the revolt of nature manifests in the form of human admiration for nature’s supposedly unadorned simplicity and its raw qualities. The common strand in these regressions is that they retain the social status quo by reckoning self-preservation and adaptation as the sole duty humans have.

If indeed a regression is one form of nature’s revolt, the re-configuration of the human as a natural being in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is also a version of nature’s revolt, as the new human species is nearly identical to nature, and is unable to have a distinction amongst itself and the world. The Crakers, therefore, although created on the basis of advanced sciences and with the idea of bringing more enlightenment to the world, in fact show themselves to have far regressed: with an awareness only of their own immediate existence, they merely see themselves as harmonious parts of nature, and in that sense

embody innocence that is also ignorance. In addition, having no aspirations for territory or even desire to hoard food, their daily routine consists of living according to the biological cycles that are built in them—they follow their bodily rhythms, by eating, excreting, and copulating according to their biological clock. In fact, the Crakers are made to *be* nature itself. That the end result of the highly advanced society is the birth of the Crakers, then, illustrates not the triumph of highly advanced techno-science, but the triumph of nature—it makes humans admire it and mimic it to the degree that they create a new kind of humans that are indistinguishable from the state of nature itself.

But because Crakers coexist with humans after the pandemic, even preferring them as neighbors, sexual partners, and companions, they learn through mimesis the ways of human culture from the remaining human survivors. This is yet another dialectical relationship in the trilogy, one in which no party, including humans and pigoons, remains unaffected and unchanged in the pursuance of mutual understanding and coexistence. On the basis of the made-up stories passed down from the humans the Crakers therefore create their own myths and religion, despite the “G-spot” that Crake supposedly eliminated from them. They erect “scarecrow like effigy” and mumble what to human ears sound like prayers (360). In order to make sense of their world, they start to regard various humans they come to contact with, such as Crake, Jimmy, and Oryx, and later Toby and Zeb, as deities that they can look up to, and even seek for oracles and counsel.³⁴ As Adorno and Horkheimer would argue, a return to myth means being bound

³⁴ Several critics analyze the significance of myth in the concluding pages of *Oryx and Crake*. Stephen Dunning for example notes in “Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic” that despite Crake’s rejection of the metaphysical, the

to the supernatural force, deities, and the influence of magic, and yet precisely because the construction of myth is a sign of self-consciousness as well as the self's critical distance from its environment, in one sense it is also the beginning of the process of enlightenment.

Thus I come back to the point from where I started this chapter: the *MaddAddam* trilogy ends not with the end of the world exactly, but with the rickety beginning that is a mix of both genuinely new possibilities and a repetition of the past, as the principles of domination do not disappear all of a sudden, even with the near extinction of humans and the expansion of new human species. The foreboding to the repetition of the logic of domination lies in the challenges survivors face as they fare their ways in the world after the pandemic. Nature, although much destroyed, is in the process of regeneration and restoration, and shows signs of thriving. It is suggested that for survival, the remaining species must to a certain degree utilize nature through various means. Pigeons that once existed to provide organs and prolong human lives, for example, are now trustworthy allies but with real potential to be a threat, as they demonstrate intelligence akin to that of humans, as they have human neocortex tissue in their brains. The Crakers, moreover, although designed to merge harmoniously with the environment, are put in a situation

supernatural, and the transcendental, he himself is ironically raised into the status of a deity and together with other "deities" such as Jimmy and Oryx, they "unmistakably suggest the Christian Trinity whose authority science has effectively displaced" (95). For Dunning, the "sacred" (95) turn the first volume takes at the end of its narrative is telling of the necessity of a "qualitative discourse" (96). Danette DiMarco, on the other hand, observes in "Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained" that Jimmy mythologizes Oryx as a benign goddess who can be used as an instrument to "sustain community and love" (186). DiMarco suggests that this new myth, which is not created to exploit the world but sustain it, provides a hope for a new start.

where they must protect themselves against nature. In the first volume, a bobkitten, another ubiquitous transgenic animal in the trilogy, attacks one of the children, and the Crakers are forced to throw a stone at it (157). The Crakers are designed to survive without preying on other animals (101) and they try to retain peace, but the attack of a bobkitten is a sign of possible conflicts that may ensue between them and the environment, especially as Atwood highlights the unpredictable qualities of nature that abruptly and randomly changes its pattern.

But this rickety beginning is also where hope lies, too, for the dialectics is never prefigured and enclosed. It is a movement in continuation, and each moment of its process—progression, regression, reversal and contradiction—can simultaneously be an opportunity of a new beginning in the sense I evoked at the start of the chapter, a point of departure where concrete choices can be made with regard to what to negate and how to ensue. The dialectical processes of the Enlightenment, in other words, offer humans not utter despair as we are oftentimes led to feel but ranges of choices that humans can make. Even *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which begins with the tone of disillusionment—the “wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity,” Adorno and Horkheimer note in their first page (1)—does not quite end with it, for it closes on a note of *recognition* that what propels the Enlightenment toward calamity is the wrongly conceived idea that the knowledge of the Enlightenment leads to power (34). The task, then, as they suggest, is to “devote [knowledge] itself to dissolving that power” (34). By detailing the dialectics in her narrative, Atwood strikes a similar chord: the historical processes that she describes illuminate that we can not only know them but also act upon

them, which in this context involves not the act of affirmation but of negation of the principles of domination. The negation is what constitutes the “beginning” in this context, and the final “lesson” she imparts is that one does not have to wait until the end of the world for the opportunity of a new beginning to emerge, but can always begin again on her own will by finding an appropriate point of departure.

Chapter 4. Allegorical Dog: Reading J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

“No more dogs. I am not any more the dog-man”: these are the words the African farmer Petrus declares in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), at a party he holds to celebrate his recent land transfer (129). This declaration, in the wake of his acquisition of new land and in the context of post-apartheid South Africa in the late twentieth-century, is his assertion of having become a “man” instead of a “dog-man,” with growing political autonomy and increasing possessions. That Petrus's newly acquired independence is articulated in the form of a negation of dogs is important, I argue, for it stands as a critique of the main narrative strand in the novel, which is the protagonist David Lurie's “becoming-animal” by way of bonding with dogs, and his taking of what I will describe as a posthumanist turn to animals.

Of course, Petrus's becoming man is not without problems and can be hardly glamorized, in that Petrus's political ascension can be seen as “[highlighting] the re-emergence of a gangster-like patriarchal-tribal order,” as described by Slavoj Žižek, “which, one can argue, is the result of white rule that kept the blacks in a state of apartheid, preventing their inclusion in modern society” (326). Petrus's story, indeed, induces us to speculate on the numerous pitfalls that South Africa might encounter on its way to a sound political restructuring. Nonetheless, the novel attaches great importance to Petrus's coming into being within the political arena—enough to make us rethink other significant events in the novel, such as David's ethical turn to animals generally, and to dogs specifically. In fact, even as *Disgrace* embraces and welcomes David's turn to animals, it nonetheless critiques it: a turn to animals, as I will argue below, means a

possible turn *away* from *humans*, and especially from humans like Petrus, who is African, black, and evidently different from David in all socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects.

This is also a story of one man's best friend—that is, the dog—being another man's worst enemy. In the context of South Africa, and in other places with racially stratified societies affected or structured by western colonialism, dogs have historically been used to attack certain types of humans with the specific intent to subjugate them. The attacked people include violators like intruders and trespassers, but also black people in general: As David acknowledges, “dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man” in South Africa (110). It is because of this history of the use of dogs as an instrument for human domination—the effect of which is seen in the everyday lives of the characters in *Disgrace*, as I will show—that there is a reason to hesitate about David's embrace of dogs. This is especially true given the strange and suspicious timing of David's embrace of dogs, just when Petrus announces his independence by way of disassociating from dogs, declaring that there are “no more dogs” for him. Whereas for David, a bond with dogs is a sign of a moral growth, for Petrus, it is the *absence* of dogs that is more significant, in that the absence indicates that he is no longer a servant to his master's dogs, and that he is successful as an owner of substantial property.

Despite the high significance I attach to Petrus's story of becoming “man” as he equates it with the negation of dogs, Petrus is hardly the central focus of the novel. If anything, the main plot centers on the story of David's transformation from a self-absorbed man to one who directs attention to the suffering of animals. The novel begins

with a note on David's preoccupation with the "problem of sex" as a middle-aged divorcee, a fifty-two year old professor of Romantics (1). We learn that he solves this "problem" by regularly visiting a prostitute named Soroya, although he is soon rejected by her for probing into her life outside their service agreement. This rejection is followed by the Cape Technical University's dismissal of David's professorship on the grounds of a subtly forced sexual relationship he has with his student Melanie, "the dark one"(9). However, if David manages to preserve his ego by insisting that he was a "servant of Eros" in the act of sex with Melanie (52), he is soon further disgraced by a reversal of this dynamic when he visits his daughter Lucy on her Eastern Cape farm: not only does he become the victim of a gruesome attack by three black intruders, but Lucy is also gang-raped by them and conceives as a result of the rape.

It is only after this deadly incident in which he experiences the vulnerability of human life that animals and their suffering become a concern to David more explicitly; his interest grows as he continues to interact with animal sympathizers like his daughter Lucy and Bev Shaw, with whom he works at the animal welfare center to help care for sick animals and euthanize stray dogs. David's gradual change is evident in several moments, such as in his expression of a desire to initiate a "communion with animals" (126) and in the tears he shed as he engages daily in the act of putting down the dogs: "[t]he more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets" (142-43). As a number of critics note, these changes indicate David's humble embrace of the larger ecology that constitutes the world he lives in, and his affirmation of the ethos of becoming-animal

and of posthumanism.³⁵ Indeed, David's un-learning of speciesism is quite remarkable. If he used to dryly remark that animal rights activism is a kind of fringe philosophy, a "subculture of its own" (73), at the end of the novel David carries himself with a deflated ego and a fresh eye open towards a world populated with diverse beings, each marked with its own singularity. In a frequently discussed scene, for instance, David volunteers to carry the euthanized dogs to the incinerator and put each body into its entry himself, in order to save the corpses from the indignities of being beaten "with the back of the shovel" so that they could fit the mouth of the incinerator and be dumped with "waste from the hospital wards, carrion scooped up at the roadside, [and] malodorous refuse from the tannery" (144). Thinking that "[h]e is not prepared to inflict such dishonor upon them" (144), he resolutely performs this funereal ritual even as he feels "stupid, daft, [and] wrongheaded" (146). And it is in this context of realized humility that David articulates the gain of his new self-consciousness, in a statement that diametrically opposes that of Petrus: he thinks he is becoming a "dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*" (146).

³⁵ Tom Herron, for example argues in "The Dog Man" that David enacts a "turn to animals" (471) by recognizing the "animal's address to the human" and reciprocating that address with "human kindness, sympathy, and finally, love" (489). Herron thus suggests that David engages in the Deleuzian becoming-animal, which is promising in the sense that his becoming cannot be subsumed into the normative social order. Instead, by the end of the novel, David becomes a "'thing' neither fully human nor fully animal: a kind of ghost" (482). For Don Randall, too, the theme of the animal in *Disgrace* urges readers to re-vision the world as a "community of sentient beings" (223), in which human's "animal life or bodily life" is redefined as being a "main site" of "human complexity" ("The Community of Sentient Beings" 214). Randall thus argues that *Disgrace* re-focalizes the political problem as a larger *ecological* problem, demonstrating a new way of countering the chronic conditions of "atrocious modernity" (209). See also Ciobanu (2012) 668-698, DeKoven (2009) 847-875, Coleman (2009) 597-617.

David's change is significant, and perhaps indicates an extension of Levinasian ethics by including human animals, as Calina Ciobanu argues, or a "tectonic shift" in "racist colonialism," as Marianne DeKoven argues, enabled by the "ethical power of dogs" and of female characters (850). Or, in the well-known words uttered by a committed animal-advocate Elizabeth Costello in Coetzee's *Lives of Animals*, David's change perhaps indicates that he has learned to "open [his] heart and listen to what [his] heart says"(4). But if one keeps a critical eye on Petrus, and considers how David's self-identification as a "dog-man" and a "*harijan*" might come across as being a mere hyperbole to Petrus, for instance, perhaps the novel is less about welcoming the emergence of a new relational ethics that supposedly brings on a radical change in species relationships than it is about the dubiousness and inadequacy of that ethics—that is, the novel illuminates the human conflicts and violence that persists even with the most profound love extended to nonhuman animals. Rather than celebrating or even affirming the coming of a new ethics, *Disgrace* explores with a self-reflexive gaze its own reception of the new ethos, and weighs the volatile landscape of human and interspecies relationships in the South Africa of the late 1990s. In this sense, I argue that the novel opens itself to the possibility of a reading in which the story is an allegory for the "structures of feeling" formed from changing social relations. That is, the novel imagines South Africa encountering the challenging question of what it means to be a human and an animal at the cusp of the millennium—a question that is complicated by the onset of a change in human relationships prompted by the end of apartheid. Put another way, if a structure of feeling, as defined by Raymond Williams, is the lived and

felt experiences of particular social processes (64),³⁶ *Disgrace* is engaging particularly with the lived experiences of the fluctuating social structures and social relations, where there is recognition that one must reconcile racial strife and ensure political equality on the one hand, but also a newly felt urge to reconcile the great speciesist divide between humans and animals on the other. I examine the nature of social space within and through which the text and its meanings are produced; and, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, who like Williams pursues a sociological approach to literature, the methodology I adopt here is an “external” and “allegorical” as opposed to “internal” and “tautegorical” reading (177).

It is especially important to read *Disgrace* in this methodological frame and examine the social and historical constitution of its literary world because many recent interpretations make a case for the *singularity* of the world this novel describes. Some argue, for example, that Coetzee’s fiction is unsusceptible to a ready universalization, and is “against allegory” (Attridge, “Against Allegory”). Others describe how the novel encourages “a demetaphorization in which the convention of the fabula or the moral tale is disallowed,” so that what is learned of the “singular alterity of the inhuman” depicted in the novel, for instance, *is* indeed its singularity, or its “difference rather than equivalence” (Khanna 66). Such critics have argued that allegorical reading diverts one’s attention away from the immediacy and the novelty of the event by grafting meanings that represent something beyond the immediacy of objects and events.

³⁶ In *The Long Revolution*, Williams explains that a structure of feeling refers exclusively to neither the structure, that is, the material basis of a culture, nor the feeling, which are the psychologies of characters in the novel; rather, the term implies a dialectical relationship between these two (48).

According to Attridge, a text is not an “object” (39) with predetermined meanings; rather, it is an “event” that *happens* as I, the reader, “*live* the text that I read” (40). But the possibility of this open reciprocity and a production of new meanings in the actual event of reading is lost in allegorical reading, critics have argued, for it schematizes the text with an assumption that it refers to something else, beyond the immediacy of the event.³⁷ In place of allegory that supposedly produces formulaic readings, Rita Barnard, for example, attempts to preserve the values of the “strange[ness]” in literature, which are the “unexpected” and the “unpredictable in terms of generic codes” (223). But it is my argument that what *Disgrace* manifests is the *historically* contingent aspect of any singular event or encounter; it shows how what can be termed as the “strangeness” is in fact shaped by certain historical circumstances, which readers can make sense of by initiating the hermeneutic exercise of learning about the context that has produced such an event. For instance, the event of human-dog encounters in *Disgrace* makes clear the importance of recognizing the historical sedimentation in the idea of dog—that is, dogs are a carrier of sociological and political meanings, and the characters’ modes of relating to them, despite seeming to be singular, are formed in response to and as a critique of the concept of dog that symbolically and materially operates in our world. Neither David

³⁷ For example, Attridge argues that an allegorical reading that posits “racial differences” as a theme of *Disgrace* is a symptom of a “mechanistic attitude,” the very tendency the novel in fact critiques as what permeates all relationships across the species (“Age of Bronze, State of Grace” 106). In “Disgrace Effects” Peter McDonald similarly critiques allegorical interpretation, with cautionary words about the temptation to offer “racialized readings” of *Disgrace*, such as the one produced by the African National Congress (ANC), which alludes specifically to the rape of Lucy by three black males to argue that the novel is an “allegory of ‘white people’s perception of the post-apartheid black man’” (326).

nor Petrus can relate to dogs as though they are a presence devoid of culturally and politically imbued concepts: dog is an idea, a concept, a metaphor, and indeed, an allegory, and to miss these accrued meanings in dog in favor of seizing the singular experience of encountering a dog would be reductive.

It is thus important to situate *Disgrace* first in the context of the post-apartheid South African literary scene, which, as Wendy Woodward explains, was specifically witnessing the rise of stories about dogs with the proposition that dogs, too, have “souls” (261). If, during apartheid, writers wrote about dogs with the risk of appearing to “[foreground] animals at the expense of humans,” Woodward writes that in the post-apartheid era, writers focusing on animals have been relatively freed from the accusations of foregoing the problem of human suffering (236). In other words, *Disgrace* is an engaged response to this changing literary scene in which writers can venture into “more ecologically inclusive narrative[s]” (261).

The prominence of animals in *Disgrace* is also attributable to Coetzee’s own sociocultural disposition, as Bourdieu might say, through which Coetzee has a deep commitment to vegetarianism and to current animal welfare issues. Such dedication is well demonstrated in the discerning choices he makes regarding his affiliations with organizations that address the issues of human violence on animals; for example, as Karen Dawn and Peter Singer observe, after Coetzee’s acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 2003, he granted his only interview to the *Djurens Rätt*, a Swedish magazine dedicated

to promoting animal rights.³⁸ The very geographical features of South Africa may also be an important, although not self-evident, background to the novel's interest in the suffering of animals, for as Steven Best describes, with South Africa's "magnificent wildlife and parks," the animals in South Africa endure excessive human violence resulting from entertainment activities like gaming and hunting, as well as from the economic value placed on animal parts in the black market. In fact, Best explains that the number of animal killings has *increased* in post-apartheid South Africa, with South Africa now the "biggest wildlife trader on the continent"—a fact that he argues evidences a different kind of apartheid that still persists in South Africa, a condition he provocatively calls "species apartheid." This is a strong, effective, and yet a slightly misleading term to deploy, perhaps, especially when there is a persistent conceptual apartheid in operation among humans; but Best's study helps to explain the social milieu on which *Disgrace* depends and to which it responds, where both racial and species stratification is still the norm.

However, perhaps more relevant to *Disgrace* than the history of the exploitation of wildlife is the history of the suffering of dogs that are specifically believed to be native to southern parts of Africa, often pejoratively referred to as kaffir dogs, jackals, or

³⁸ In addition, Dawn and Singer continue, Coetzee is "a patron of Voiceless, an Australian organization that gives grants to animal protection groups, and of the Australian Association for Humane research, an antivivisection group" (110). Coetzee also "has affiliated himself with some of the campaigns of People for the Ethical treatment of Animals, signing a PETA petition, for example, that called for a Thai ban on *phaajaan*, a brutal practice in which baby elephants are broken by means of torture" (110-11).

mongrels.³⁹ The *Africanis*, as it is called today, has a long history of being subjected to the discrimination and ignominy that African people themselves have suffered.⁴⁰

Considered to be vermin both pathologically and socially, they were driven away to the reserves and townships set up for colored people. Doris Lessing's autobiographical short story "The Story of Two Dogs" demonstrates this bigotry towards the so-called kaffir dogs on the part of the settlers in then Rhodesia. As the fourteen-year-old narrator observes, adults such as her mother attempt to segregate the dogs from supposedly good breeds and the native African dogs: "Jock needs a companion, otherwise he'll spend his time with those dirty kaffir dogs in the compound?" (34). The "bad blood" of these dogs provokes real fear, so that when puppies are born between a native dog and a "pedigree bitch," they are shot (56). Lance van Sittert and Sandra Swart write that as a consequence of this kind of prejudice, through the continued processes of "quarantine and extermination" in the twentieth century, the "colonial canine topography" in southern Africa showed "heavy concentrations in both the major cities and overcrowded

³⁹ In fact, "kaffir dogs" pejoratively refers to both Africans and to dogs native to Africa. If these dogs suffered the same ignominy as African people, Franklin and Schweninger observe in *Runaway Slaves* that on the other side of the Atlantic, the "negro dogs" were cherished by their masters for tracking down the runaways—an activity that was sometimes pursued "with the zest of sport" (160-161). As shown in these terms, a human construct of hierarchy is superimposed on dogs—dogs believed to be native to Africa are degraded along with their human counterpart, while some dogs hold a special and even greater status than some humans for being partners to their masters.

⁴⁰ *Canis Africanis: A Dog History of Southern Africa*, co-edited by Sittert and Swart, is particularly helpful in examining the relationship of humans and dogs on the African continent. See also Gallant's *The Story of the African Dog*, and for a broader, non-regional cultural history of dogs, see McHugh's *Dog*.

black reserves, separated by a largely dog-depopulated white countryside” (15).⁴¹ Johan Gallant similarly observes the deep-rooted European prejudice against the *Africanis* breed, noting that the African dogs, considered to be “the worst kind of disease-ridden mongrels” (1), were kept away as much as possible from crossbreeding with dogs believed to be of European origin (77-6). Gallant adds that even today, the stigma against the *Africanis* breed is “rife” in South Africa (77). This prejudice is also evident in *Disgrace*, when David, accusing an African boy named Pollux—presumably Petrus’s cousin—of partaking in a gang rape of his daughter, constantly refers to him as a “jackal” (202, 217) who “sniff[s] around, looking for mischief” (208).

Such is the highly political and emotionally charged background within which the novel explores contemporary inter-species and intra-species relationships, and in examining the changing social scene it also studies the ethical viability of David’s turn to animals. That is, it tests the potency of the posthumanist vision of a new ethics that promises, as argued by Rosi Braidotti, for example, the attainment of a “zoe-centered egalitarianism” that is based on the ethos of affirming the immanent and all-pervading force of life (60). Zoe here means “the nonhuman, vital force of Life,” an all-encompassing term that is intended to be non-speciesist and non-anthropocentric (60). This posthumanist vision, of course, premises the understanding of the *bodily* self, reconceived as a fragile human animal who feels and suffers under the inevitable

⁴¹ Sittert and Swart write that in contrast, there are instances of the rehabilitation of Boer dogs, a crossbreed between African native dogs and the dogs brought in by the European settlers. The rehabilitation was initiated due to the rise of white bourgeois fascination with dogs and their pedigree, as well as with the rise of “settler nativism” that sought to establish a distinctive white nationalism in South Africa (14).

finitude of life, as opposed to the rational thinker who has mastered the world. The divide between the human and the nonhuman is thus an illusionary one, as elaborated by Cary Wolfe (via Derrida), for there is the “generative force of the *nonliving* at the origins of any living being, human *or* animal, who communicates (and this in the broadest sense) with another”—this nonliving being specifically the mortality that makes all beings passive and the technicity or the exteriority of language into which all beings are born (91). With the vision of a non-binary and ecologically tightly knit world, Braidotti thus explains that posthumanism is concerned with the “well-being of an enlarged sense of community, which includes one’s territorial or environmental interconnections” (190). Barbara Herrnstein Smith similarly concludes that the *telos* of the posthumanist thought is to challenge the arbitrary “species barrier” imposed by humans to raise the “appreciation of our irreducibly multiple and variable, complexly valenced, infinitely reconfigurable relations with other animals, including each other” (166-67).

While neither David nor any other characters like Lucy or Bev self-consciously express themselves in these theoretical terms, their modes of relating to the world evidently evoke these philosophical underpinnings. This is well reflected in their ways of creating fellowship with animals and in their perception of the commonality and the interrelationality of all life on earth. They also rely on emotion and intuition instead of reason in their approach to understanding the lives of animals, which Elisa Aaltola has called a form of “poetic persuasion” (132) and Ido Geiger has called “poetic injunction” (146). Lucy, for example, with empathic capacity to imagine herself as one of the mistreated animals, says: “I don’t want to come back into another existence as a dog or a

pig and have to live as dogs or pigs live under us” (74). Rejecting the mode of conceptual and metaphysical thinking, Lucy asserts that “there is no higher life” for humans because “[t]his is the only life there is. Which we share with animals” (74). This poetic and earthly reorientation of relationships is also well reflected in the libretto on Byron that David keeps revising, in the latest version of which he brings his marginal characters to the fore by giving them space to express their unglamorous and belittled lives. David rewrites Teresa, Byron’s mistress, as no longer the “pert, precocious newlywed” but a “dumpy little widow” (181) crying out for the deceased Byron; he also creates a space for Allegra, Byron’s illegitimate daughter, letting her cry out for the affection she was never able to receive from Byron (186). Most notably, David also “dare[s]” to introduce a dog into his work, who is modeled after the limping, music-loving dog with which he came to establish a special bond, allowing it to “loose its own lament to the heavens” (215).

Yet, the point of this essay is to argue that just as much as this signals David’s maturation into a more ecologically aware human being, so too does it indicate a step back, insofar as this inclusion of the marginalized beings by means of “poetic injunction” is simultaneously a renunciation and a loss of faith in politics and political injunction. This is not to say that animal ethics cannot proceed by way of affect and pathos, but that the poetic turn to animals that David and Lucy enact is worrying, because it coincides with their disillusionment with South Africa as an effective polity and thus results in their withdrawal from the political scene. This is all the more problematic in that their withdrawal obviously clashes with Petrus’s belated *entrance*

into the political scene, eager as he is to claim what Lucy, for example, announces she is giving up: the negotiating “cards,” “weapons,” “property,” “rights,” and “dignity” (205). Lucy’s self-denial and renunciation of her rights, especially in the aftermath of the rape that Lucy sees as historical vengeance enacted by those who “see themselves as debt collectors” (158), seems like a profound and radical expiation that can bring on a new model of ethical existence for the new millennium. Her act of self-abnegation seems all the more transgressive in that the new state of existence that Lucy proposes to embody is akin to being “like a dog,” as David offers to explicate, and to which Lucy agrees (205).

But one must inevitably question the *timing* of such expressions of renunciations and its larger political implications for Petrus. Why must it be that the moment Lucy articulates the inadequacy of political concepts such as rights and dignity is the moment in which she is on the brink of losing them, and in which Petrus is on the way to obtaining them? David’s articulation of himself as a dog-man, too, comes in direct clash with Petrus’s detachment from dog-man and dogs, as if to challenge Petrus by suggesting that dogs are inseparable to human ontology, and to indicate that Petrus is on the wrong side after all. Put another way, it seems important to speculate on the ideological ramifications of David’s and Lucy’s announcement that they are dog-men or are “like a dog”: are their dedications to animals a moral provocation for Petrus to do the same, urging him to acquire the state of being like a dog by giving up his “privileged” status of being a human? Or are they from a wiser point of view suggesting that the only viable way to “be” is to be “like a dog” in a place like South Africa that shows itself to be incompetent as a polity after apartheid? Are they, patronizingly, making way for

Petrus to claim his “cards,” “weapons,” “property,” “rights,” and “dignity,” while they watch on with the knowing posture of onlookers?

I ask these questions to suggest that their ethical positions, in a complex way that I would describe as the “cunning of imperialist reason” following Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, serve as a foil to Petrus’s attempt to assert his humanity by implying that the inevitable way to “be” today is to be like a dog. Bourdieu’s and Wacquant’s term refers to the discursive ways in which the historically American concept of multiculturalism in the late 1990s feigns to be universally applicable to societies with vastly different history of race relations, such as Brazil and France. Thus, they begin by stating an important thesis: “Cultural imperialism rests on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such” (41). A similar observation can be made with regard to the ways in which posthumanism, a discourse with a particularly Euro-American provenance, operates as an all-inclusive, egalitarian, and trans-cultural ethos by hinging on such quasi-scientific terms as *zoe* to which all beings are bound.⁴² As shown in the ways David’s and Lucy’s animal love comes into conflict with Petrus’s interests, the turn to animals can be seen as another kind of imperialist logic at work, its implication being that Petrus’s desire to disassociate from dogs is misguided, and worse, anthropocentric

⁴² For a discussion of posthumanism as a thought growing out of anti-humanist philosophies of the interwar Europe and Enlightenment scientism with an undemocratic bent, see Timothy Brennan’s chapter “Borrowed Light” in *Borrowed Light: Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies*. Brennan argues that posthumanist thought, with an undercurrent of antihumanism and scientism that configures the human as one of the mere “expendable features” of nature (233), obliterates the much needed presence of the “civic subject” that can counter the injustices it faces today (234). In this sense, posthumanism is a “diversion from a critique of imperialism” (234).

and speciesist. By doing so, such a turn forces a concurrence with its idea of the posthuman, when Petrus would in fact benefit far more politically by going against it and appropriating the narrative of humanism to end the injustices incurred upon him and mark his humanity.⁴³ In this sense, David's posthumanist ethos is not only in clash with the belated budding of Petrus's humanism, but also works to actively undermine the latter as a thought that is pejorative and retrograde. But as is made clear in the layout of the novel, it is in fact David's posthumanist compassion that is misplaced and inappropriate, as demonstrated specifically in a scene where David sympathizes with the two sheep waiting to be slaughtered and cooked for Petrus's party. The compassion that David is able to display towards the sheep that await death in order to be turned into a party food is unfortunately not extended to a human neighbor Petrus, who means to kill sheep and offer meat dishes to his party guests as a mean to practice hospitality to fellow humans and celebrate his own improved welfare.

Of course, Petrus is hardly a likable character, and David has good reasons to distrust him. Petrus is not innocuous, while a dog and a sheep may appear to be so to David. He is a patriarch with sexist perceptions of women, and shows parochialism by sticking to his own clan: as a peasant in the agricultural milieu, for instance, he wishes that one of his wives gives birth to a boy, because a "girl is very expensive" and means

⁴³This unfair pressure posthumanist critiques might exert on those who espouse humanism is strongly evocative of the ways in which, after World War II, Third-World nationalisms, which essentially comprised an anti-imperialist movement, were denounced by the critics in the West as an intensely authoritarian, chauvinistic, and irrational project. In "Disavowing Decolonization," Neil Lazarus traces in detail this circulation of the Eurocentric view of Third World nationalisms, suggesting its myopia in that it was incapable of seeing such nationalisms as an anti-capitalist and liberatory counterforce (68-143). See also Parry (1987) 27-58, Brennan (1990) 44-70.

“[a]lways money, money, money” (130). Petrus also defends one of the suspects for the rape of Lucy, telling the accusing David that ““he is a child. He is my family, my people”” (201). In general, Petrus seems crass in his insensitivity towards the suffering animals, and appears to run against modern sensibility by ousting dogs in the process of constructing his new identity—a “new Petrus,” as David calls him (151). This all could mean, as Žižek suggests, the “re-emergence of a gangster-like patriarchal-tribal order,” which could be further explained as the consequence of apartheid that excluded the blacks from participating in “modern society” (326).

But the exclusion of Petrus from modernity is only a partial explanation, at least in the context of trying to understand Petrus’s conscious, unfeeling act of severing himself from dogs. In fact, it is far more likely that Petrus’s disinterest and even *dislike* of dogs is a consequence of his *subjection* to modernity and its colonizing force rather than his exclusion from it, in that importantly, it subjugates people like him oftentimes *through* the use of animals like dogs. If, therefore, David’s turn to animals prompts an examination of the cultural milieu in which discourses of posthumanist ethics develops, Petrus’s turn away from animals directs our attention to yet another aspect of the larger social milieu, which has to do with the historical practices in which animals are mobilized for the domination of humans. The use of dogs to conquer humans is well reviewed by John Campbell in “The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War,’ and Abolitionism, 1796-1865,” where he studies the warring relationships between dogs and humans especially in the context of the confrontations between European and non-European people; he cites examples of the conquistadors who used war dogs to

subjugate the peoples of the New World (262), as well as the English colonists in Jamaica using one hundred dogs imported from Cuba to suppress the revolt of Maroons in 1796 (264), and Florida's use of dogs (also from Cuba) to fight against the Seminoles and their African-American allies during the Second Seminole War (268). The use of bloodhounds in this war is particularly noteworthy in the context of U.S. history, Campbell explains, for the ways in which it initiated the use of dogs as a control tactic by the slaveholders themselves (268). Well-known slave narratives attest to how the use of dogs instilled fear in the slaves. Frederick Douglass, upon describing the process of his flight to the north, writes in his 1845 autobiography that one of the gruesome challenges includes the possibility of being "torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible bloodhound" (433). Passages describing a similar fear of bloodhounds are also found in Harriet Jacobs's 1861 autobiography: she recalls her uncle having remarked that "[w]hen a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets that there is a God, a heaven. He forgets everything in his struggle to get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds" (46). Bloodhounds are at the forefront of Jacobs's mind, too, when she herself escapes New York upon imminent danger, so that when she arrives safely in Boston, she expresses her sense of relief by stating that she was "beyond the reach of the bloodhounds" (194).

Despite dogs being the ubiquitous form of control across the Atlantic, and despite the dominators' efforts to turn dogs against blacks, however, there are nonetheless stories of human-dog bonds in both colonized Africa and antebellum America. For instance, in Campbell's study of the antebellum South, "'My Constant Companion': Slaves and Their Dogs in the Antebellum South," he argues that a typical

slave-dog relationship was in fact characterized by shared empathies and interdependence, despite the fact that dogs in the context of slavery were overwhelmingly used to discipline and overpower slaves. Dogs were dear companions to slaves in the South for two likely reasons, Campbell explains: one is attributable to an aspect of African cultures the slaves in the New World inherited, in which dogs were deified and were a positive symbol in human lives (55). The other reason for the slaves' affection for dogs is similar to that of the white people: dogs "offered companionship, protection, and help in hunting" (56). It was through canine companionships that the slaves were able to affirm their humanity and cope with the daily "loneliness and social deracination" (56); and by hunting with dogs, the male slaves in particular could indulge in the sense of freedom, as well as "augment the meager food and clothing allowance given to them by the master" (61). The dogs owned by slaves also helped them by "filching useful items" from white masters (59).

But black people's alliance with dogs must have been a nuisance and a threat to those in power, for there is evidence of the deployment of both legal and cultural means to keep dogs and blacks apart. In Namibia in the early twentieth-century, for example, Robert J. Gordon explains that the settlers implemented a "dog tax system" for the purpose of taxing the owners of hunting dogs, whom many of them were Africans who subsisted by hunting with their dogs. The tax law therefore was a "means of forcing recalcitrant Africans to enter the labour market" (180-81). This put extra strain on the lives of Africans, for because of the colonial wars in the 1900s, they were increasingly dependent on hunting for their survival (177). Clearly, the institutional means through

which dogs were restricted was meant exclusively to further tame the colonized: some settlers, upon learning that they themselves were taxable for owning dogs, complained that the tax should “be imposed upon the Native alone in order to induce them to obtain a livelihood by honest labour” (180). Some thus promoted a “Native Dog tax,” or proceeded to kill the dogs of the *Africanis* breed, “jackals” owned by Africans (180).

Campbell’s study of the antebellum South also provides insight into how dogs were put to use to subjugate black people similarly across the continents of Africa and the Americas. If the ownership of dogs by slaves has been a “customary right” for the first few decades of the nineteenth century in the southern United States, this changed with a new law that was passed in 1859 by the South Carolina General Assembly, called “An Act to Make Owners of Dogs Liable for Sheep Killed by Them” (69). The intention of this bill was quite similar to the aforementioned tax laws regarding canine ownership in Namibia: ostensibly, the Act was aimed at thwarting dogs from harming sheep farms, which were beginning to have lucrative business potential, but what was “uppermost in the minds of lawmakers” was the “social control of African Americans” (68), as the law “plac[ed] a tax on dogs kept by slaves, and not on dogs kept by white people” (68). The slaves succumbed to the pressure of the new law and renounced their dogs.

The systematic persistence of the colonizers and the slave owners to turn black people and dogs against each other is a point that should be emphasized, because it demonstrates the obvious fact that those who dominate humans also dominate animals and nature, and that not all humans participate equally and with the same intensity, efficiency, and means in the subjugation of animals—which is to say that the nature of

human-animal relationship is not only different but also unequal. What is more, under such structures of domination, those who dominate are at liberty to value dogs over humans, both for politico-economic as well as sentimental reasons, thereby entrenching a hierarchy in which the oppressed humans are even more alienated. It is thus a familiar experience for black people across the colonized African continent to be denied the human sympathy that is in fact generously offered to dogs. J. Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele* (1997), an epistolary novel that recounts the story of then Rhodesia's struggles for independence from the British rule, provides episodes relevant to this situation: while a black maid in a white family's house sleeps in a separate "stinking hovel," the master's dog is able to enjoy "all privileges," which, if given to the maid, would be "seen as signs of the servants being too free" (159). Hence, while a dog is "white man's best friend," a black maid is "an ignorant house girl, a barefoot, giggling domestic, a kafir, a nigger, a lowly jungle bunny" (160). *Zenzele* also describes the "insulting" experience of having to witness the dog of a white settler sitting in the front passenger seat of the pickup truck while a black servant sits in the back in the open air (161-63). This legacy of discriminating humans against animals remains part of the problem of human-animal relationships in Africa, as evidenced by the South African president Jacob Zuma's comments in 2012, which had to do with his denouncing the practices of owning dogs as pets because they were a white's culture and were un-African. According to Zuma, black Africans with pets evidenced a "lack of humanity," because their interest in dogs would alienate humans. His remarks were ridiculed, taken as his latest play of a cheap "race card," and his commentators refuted his statements with the example that Nelson

Mandela himself in fact enjoyed the companionship of a Rhodesian ridgeback.⁴⁴ But perhaps what should be taken from Zuma's comments is the historical practice of the use of dogs that still affects the ways in which human-animal relationships are discussed and take actual form in Africa today. As shown in the aforementioned stories of troubled and unequal relationships between blacks and dogs, it is much *easier* for a human to show compassion to nonhuman animals than to a fellow human. It is thus that while David recognizes Petrus as a potential "*neighbor*" (116), he cannot yet trust him, though he can more easily trust dogs. Is not *Disgrace* showing that it is far more difficult to approach one's neighbor and construct a shared reality, than to love a stray dog that wanders around, however noble and needed this act is?

There are thus cultural and historical reasons for Petrus's reluctance to turn to animals in contrast to David's readiness to do so. Petrus has lived through colonial settlements in rural areas, in which dogs were both physical and symbolic sentinels of the white hegemony. Thus Lucy observes, referring to her watchdogs such as "Dobermanns, German Shepherds, ridgeback, bull terriers, [and] Rottweilers" (61) that "dogs still mean something. The more dogs, the more deterrence" (60). In a previously quoted passage, David also acknowledges the history of the use of dogs as a controlling apparatus, pointing out that "dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" in South Africa (110). As a matter of fact, as Sittert and Swart note, many of the watchdogs in South Africa were "trained or even manufactured by the state security apparatus," and by the 1970s, various sorts of training schools were producing "a large pool of dogs for

⁴⁴ See an online article by Jacey Fortin, "South African President Zuma Plays the Race Card: Dogs Are for White People" at *ibtimes.com*.

corporate and private security” (26). De Beers has been the first to mobilize police dogs to patrol its mines in Kimberley, South Africa, and since then, its “canine defense of white privilege and property was miniaturised [sic] to the private farm and home” (29). The extent to which the whites relied on dogs for both physical and psychological security is also indicated by the rise in demand for the “large, fierce” dogs like Doberman Pinscher in the late 1970s, when the black anti-apartheid movement intensified (19).

It is against the backdrop of such uses of dogs that David thinks the three rapist’s murder of Lucy’s dogs that took place without even a “*coup de grâce*” (95) must have been an act of retaliation, “exhilarating” and “heady, like all revenge” (110). As David implies, the murder of the dogs does not only suggest their intention to muffle the barking in order to finish their planned crime, but more importantly to counter the practices of using dogs to subjugate humans. Put another way, the three men’s murder of Lucy’s dogs, as well as Petrus’s dissociation from dogs, must be read as acts of severance from the idea of animals as tools for human domination. By publicly delinking himself from dogs, Petrus thus symbolically denounces the social meanings that dogs bear in relation to him in the context of the post-apartheid world. David’s very first greeting upon meeting Petrus was a question asking whether Petrus was the hired help who “look[s] after the dogs” owned by Lucy (64), thereby prescribing the relationship between Petrus and dogs. Petrus’s declaration at the party that there will be no more dogs for him, then, is his rejection of this imposition of the identity of a dog-man, an

identity that precludes Petrus from forming a relationship with dogs on his own terms, and from gaining economic and political autonomy.

“Dog” is thus a historically constituted being in Petrus’s mind, which is to say that dog operates as a concept with historical objectivity. Upon encountering a dog, Petrus thus not only sees a singular dog but also a symbolic dog, an idea formed historically through the continued processes of human-dog interactions. To highlight this is neither to promote the idea that there is an empirically objective definition of a dog nor to project an arbitrary anthropomorphism onto a dog. Rather, it is to emphasize the fact that when Petrus encounters a dog, he sees not only a concrete, living dog with which he intuitively forms a relationship, but also an idea that has been developed experientially and conceptually through time. A dialectical understanding of dog, which attempts to grasp the truth of an object—that is, the dog—by placing it in the context of its development both as a subject and as a concept, is therefore crucial to understanding the context of Petrus’s turning away from dogs. Put another way, to the extent that humans and dogs have co-existed and co-evolved—as companions and working partners, but also as opponents, as evidenced by the examples discussed above—it is necessary to consider dog’s sedimented history, meaning that we be mindful of the objectivity of the object as “stored in the object,” as explained by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* (163). In “The Idea of Natural History,” Adorno further explains that objectivity here does not refer to the unchanging essence of the object that is empirically confirmed, but rather to a “concrete historical facticity” that manifests in the constellation of ideas that surrounds the object (120). Adorno’s sense of sedimented history speaks to the fact that

understanding human-dog relationships as depicted in the novel requires a hermeneutical exercise that applies an allegorical reading, which uncovers the meanings of the object by examining its historical constitutions.

In the context of reading *Disgrace*, this allegorical hermeneutics entails a challenge, however, for two main reasons. One is related to the prevalence of the popular and colloquial understanding of dog as man's best friend, sometimes considered even more trustworthy than humans. This culture of canine love makes it difficult to see the particularity of dog being man's friend, for as previously discussed, dog can be set up to be man's worst opponent. The other side of canine love is a speciesist idea of its own in which a human, if shown to be lacking in affection for dogs, is taken to be lacking in civilization and humanity. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin thus note how animals "that have special status in one human society is used to vilify, incriminate or marginalize other human groups [...] that regard those animals differently" (137), which is to say that affectionate and ethical regard for dogs is offered at the expense of the humanity of some humans. Similarly, Elder, Wolch, and Emel describe the ways in which certain "[a]nimal practices have...become tools of cultural imperialism designed to delegitimize subjectivity and citizenship of immigrants" (73). One case study they provide is the story of a Hmong immigrant in Fresno, California who, following his belief, "sacrificed" a shepherd puppy by beating it to death, and believed that such act would "appease an evil spirit" and help save his sick wife (74-5). The authors describe that the criticisms that this incident engendered were particularly condemning in racial terms, placing the "subaltern groups ... at the very edge of humanity" by "racializ[ing]

and dehumanize[ing] them through a complicated set of associations that measure their distance from modernity and civilization” (74).⁴⁵

Dogs are hardly merely man’s best friend, then, but carriers of an array of socio-cultural and political meanings. By virtue of their proximity to human lives, dogs are coalesced into the politics of human affairs, and as seen in the several cases of human-dog relationship I have described above, dog constitutes its own political dynamic with humans. It shares the same world as humans, and this shared reality enables us to produce objective canine knowledge, which is to say that we can have an intellectually derived, general understanding of dog. At once we can say that this is not a prevailing mode of thinking about dogs or any other animals today, as much of theoretical studies on animals, especially with a decidedly poststructuralist bent, deem it inadequate to claim to “know” dogs as an idea for the reason that the concept of dog or animal amounts to an epistemic violence. This allergic reaction to conceptual understanding is

⁴⁵The reverse of this story has also been told, in which the minority group, by way of establishing an affectionate relationship with dogs, “redeems” itself. I am here thinking of Ahmed Tharwat’s article “Love My Dog, Love Me” in *slate.com* that explains how he finds that it is a great advantage for an Arab-American to own a dog in the post-9/11 era, with rising antipathy against Muslim cultures, because walking with a dog helps him appear more benign and less suspicious. He describes dog ownership as thus comforting, even though owning a dog as a Muslim is an “exhausting proposition,” because of the religious requirement to cleanse himself whenever a dog touches him. The benefit is that in the U.S., owning dogs as companions gives the illusion that he and other Americans are “one community of civilized dog lovers,” which “many diversity training programs have failed to do.” In conclusion, Tharwat wryly advises that Arab-Americans all obtain a puppy, as a “post 9/11 homeland-security blanket” (n.pag.).

For more on the cultural and religious meaning of dogs in the Muslim world, see Richard C. Foltz’s *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, which cites Tharwat in order to describe how dogs, popularly man’s best friend in Western modern societies, can be a means to impose a system of belief that Muslims themselves do not endorse (141).

the second reason for the difficulty of engaging in allegorical reading, as discussed earlier, and it promotes the unmediated, singular *experience* of an animal—hence an aversion to metaphor and allegory.

As shown in theoretical terms such as Deleuze's and Guattari's "becoming-animal" and Derrida's "*animot*," there is a tendency to de-conceptualize so as to regard animals as concrete, bodily beings with which we form earthly relations. The term "*l'animot*" as explained in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is devised to highlight precisely the "unsubstitutable singularity" (9), for example. With the French suffix *mot*, meaning "word," it is also meant to remind us of the violence that is enacted every time there is an attempt to articulate an animal with human language (48). Derrida's resistance towards "the Animal spoken of in the general singular" (40-1) thus suggests an imperative to give due recognition to an animal—a particular animal that cannot be subsumed under a generalized category, and which in fact is "an existence that refuses to be conceptualized" (9). The cat Derrida encounters in his bathroom, for example, is not the "*figure* of a cat" or an "allegory for all the cats on the earth" but "*truly a little cat, this cat ... which is also a female*" (6). Derrida continues that the gross subsumption of animals into *the* animal "is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority," but "also a crime ... against animals" (48).

A similar pursuit of the real animals against the conceptual animal is also found in the idea of becoming-animal—although, of course, this itself is a concept, with an emphasis on the affectability of an animal having "real" consequences on humans. Deleuze and Guattari explain in *The Thousand Plateaus* that becoming-animal is not a

“metaphor” (273-74); rather, it denotes a “perfectly real” process in the sense that a human subject experiences the dissolution of the fixity of terms between man and animal, thereby resulting in the creation of an “alliance” much akin to the “symbioses” that take place in the process of evolution and involution (238). Becoming-animal is thus real, although it may be occurring “beneath the assignable relations” (238), and it arouses in humans a sensation of “*affect*”—the “incredible feeling of an unknown Nature,” or the “violence of these animal sequences, which uproot [him or her] from humanity” (240).

In *Disgrace*, this emphasis on the realness of a particular, irreplaceable animal is re-imagined into a kind of detailed attention that David gives to each of the euthanized dogs as part of a funereal ritual. Attridge suggests that David, “like Derrida,” is defying “the generalization implicit in the category ‘animal’ . . . preferring the impossible task of acknowledging the singularity of each individual creature” (“Age of Bronze” 116). David’s act thus has a subversive dimension in that it connotes a “commitment above all to the singularity of the other . . . that obeys no logic and offers no comfort” (“Introduction” 318) and which “exceeds systems and computations” (“Age of Bronze” 117). The argument is that David’s empathy with dogs is an indication of his experience of becoming-other: it is this moment that David claims that he has become “a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*” (146).

On the other hand, however, it must be asked—especially with particular consideration given to Petrus, as I have shown—whether *Disgrace* is really pursuing a commitment to the singularity of an animal and embracing the virtue of becoming-animal. Consider David’s commitment to caring for the corpses of euthanized dogs, for

example: is not his service based on a certain *principle*, or his universal understanding that any living dog, whether it is *this* dog or *that* dog, deserves to be *not* beaten so disgracefully after its death? He states that it is “for himself” and “his idea of the world” that he performs his burial act, a world in which “men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing” (146). Here it is as much a philosophical perspective regarding “the animal” that prompts David to tend to dogs as his recognition of the singularity of each being. In this sense, the novel is tracing not so much David’s self-renunciation and becoming-animal than his process of gaining a perspective through which he can act according to a principle, regardless of being faced with unsubstitutable singularity of each dog. After all, singularity is itself a concept that is based on an abstracted idea of animals and their lives, and to that extent it betrays its own principles of resistance to generalization and systematic understanding. Derrida’s explanation of *animot* itself testifies to this, when he specifies that *animot* designates “[n]either a species nor a gender nor an individual” but an “irreducible living multiplicity of mortals”(41), which evidently is a statement regarding the attribute of “life” that all living beings have. The “notion of an ‘ontology of singularities’” is therefore “oxymoronic,” as Gary Steiner points out, because of its inevitable reliance on the general understanding of life that contradicts its own insistence on the irreducibility of each living being (130).

Finally, then, given the dubiousness of David’s turn to animals that the novel subtly has us see, we can conclude that the final note on which the novel ends is that dogs operate as a cultural, historical, and political idea that has been shaped in the

colonial past and that continues to evolve in the contemporary context of post-apartheid South Africa. To argue that the role of dogs in *Disgrace* is an allegory may seem counterintuitive and even retrograde, given the ways in which dogs are, on the one hand, colloquially considered to be the best companions to humans, and on the other hand, theoretically argued as being the non-representable singularity. But dogs in *Disgrace* make known their overtly political bearing on the world—the precarious existence of dogs is a reminder that “on the list of the nation’s priorities, animals come nowhere” (73); but the everyday lives of David, Lucy, and Bev, demonstrate that animals garner great attention from humans, indicating a shift in the general conception of what human and animal are, and a readiness to expand their ethical consciousness. At the same time, this turn to animals hints at an overshadowing of conflicts among humans, and indeed more critically a substitution of human issues with animal issues, such that the significance of Petrus’s political ascension, announced in the form of symbolic severance from dogs, is greatly diminished both by David, the main voice in the novel, and by some of critics alike.⁴⁶ The novel then also shows how dogs are used hegemonically to maintain the unequal dynamics of human relationships. This ideological operation of the animal ethics that manifests in the form of David and Lucy

⁴⁶ In “Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,” Gayatri Spivak suggests that the centrality of David in the narrative, in comparison to the “denied focalization” of Lucy’s or Petrus’s story, is a reflection of the novel’s “politically fastidious awareness of its own limits of power” (24), meaning that the novel knows itself to be inadequate, thus making it unrealistic, to centralize the internal worlds of marginalized characters like Lucy and Petrus. *Disgrace* is thus “relentless in keeping focalization confined to David Lurie” (22). However, Spivak suggests that the “denied focalization” of Lucy’s story, for instance, is a cue, or a “rhetorical signal” for readers to “counterfocalize,” through which readers can produce an “alternative narrative” and a “running commentary” (22).

becoming dog-men or pledging to be “like a dog” is not lost on Coetzee. In spite of Coetzee’s dedication to the urgent problem of animal suffering, the structure of the novel in which Petrus stands for a contraposition, and especially its ending in which David makes a symbolic decision to put down a music-loving dog, indicates the novel’s hesitation about being euphoric just yet about this emergence of new structures of feeling. For despite the fact that claiming to be a dog-man and be “like a dog” is a commitment to exert no more violence in the post-apartheid South Africa, it is at the same time an expression of a withdrawal from politics, a defeating and even misanthropic form of thinking that posits that one cannot be ethical while remaining “human”—that, as a matter of fact, one cannot be “like a human” and simultaneously be a good neighbor to a fellow human and animal being.

Thus, in spite of the thoroughness of David’s self-abnegation, it is inadequate, in that it is immersed in an introspective gaze that only looks after its own ethical status, dissolving the historical context precisely by claiming to start with “nothing.” As Katherine Hallemeier rightly suggests, although the novel “shames” David by depriving him of privilege and thus shows “the ethical promise of extending an equality” (113), because David’s determined self-renunciation also resembles “the extreme ascetism and cynicism espoused by Diogenes,” it leaves a room for doubt that “like Diogenes,” David enacts a kind of “paradoxically prideful shame” (114). Hallemeier continues that although *Disgrace* might be successful in using David’s shame to “extend the promise of cosmopolitan feeling,” it is “both dubious and tenuous in its equalizing effects” (120).

The inadequacy of David's ethical transformation is something at which the novel itself hints. Not falling into naivety, it suggests that no amount of animal love or self-renunciation as such is likely to be a saving grace for the problems he and his human neighbors face. In his brief discussion of *Disgrace*, Žižek also alludes to this inadequate transformation of David. First he suggests that the "wager of the novel" is on the "very radicality of the white hero's utter resignation," a "total loss," which "confers on him a kind of ethical dignity" (326). The novel's wager was right, Žižek suggests, except that David's acquirement of ethical dignity is just that—it only amounts to an inner peace, and is not a game-changer.⁴⁷ For these reasons, Žižek suggests that the novel is without a "moral compass"—it can neither rely on David's radical self-renunciation nor Petrus's political ascension, for the manner of his coming into being proves too dubious for him to be the vanguard of new South Africa, just yet (325).

Such is the complicated state of the matter—structures of feeling, as described by Coetzee—although I should mention as the last point of this essay that there *is* some inkling of moral compass in the novel, which I argue is found in the very way that David acknowledges the need to transform his mode of perception. That is, David resolves to "educate the eye," for he realizes a bias in his worldview—he is trained to see only the "pretty girls" working on the land, for example, "despite all his readings in Wordsworth" (218). Acknowledging that his eye is "not much of an eye for anything," he asks himself, regretfully, "where has that got him?" (218). If there is any possibility of remediation

⁴⁷ In typical Heglian-Lacanian language, Žižek argues that the concluding pages of the novel lack a negation of the negation, or the "pure figure of the undead drive" that would prompt David to negate the very peace and tranquility he has just acquired via his complete renunciation (326).

and reconciliation, it is found in David's growing wish to re-educate the eye so that it not only perceives the immediate appearance of things, but within and beyond the appearances—that is, to avoid merely seeing “pretty girls” working on the field but to see things in informed perspective by looking at the whole picture that is the “rural life” (218). Another indication of the “moral compass” of the novel may be in David's decision to put down a dog with whom he had a special bond and whom he included in his libretto. This counterintuitive decision to euthanize his beloved dog can be read as David's symbolic act of rethinking his own turn to dogs, lest such a turn becomes his source of new ethical authority, undermining a position that differs on the point of human-dog relationship. Of course, as suggested, the renunciation of a dog, and ultimately his self as such, does not guarantee a change; it can end as a pessimistic gesture to merely equilibrate all living conditions, not for the better but for the worse, as if to suggest that he, too, is nothing and has nothing, like mistreated stray dogs and like Petrus, and that all are thus equal. But with David's wish to reeducate the eye, it may be possible that he be led out of the way of the state of self-abnegation.

By depicting humans' budding fellowship with dogs, *Disgrace* highlights the absence of such fellowship among humans. In this sense, the presence of dogs in human affairs as depicted in the novel prompts the understanding of human problems as situated in their historical context. It reveals that dogs are not merely man's best friend and an innocent companion. Marjorie Garber's recent work titled *Dog Love* perhaps best represents this popular view: she explains that dogs “in need can bring out the best in people” (16), thereby concluding that “it is the dog that makes us human” (42). But the

opposite of this statement holds almost an equal truth: as reading *Disgrace* has helped us to see, dogs also bring out the worst in people, as illustrated by the ways in which humans have appropriated dogs to dehumanize and demoralize other humans, which is doubly violent in that it is also a way of instrumentalizing dogs by means of exploiting certain canine attributes.

In his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, Coetzee articulated that the “excessive talk” about the love for South African landscape attests to the very “failure of love,” or a failure of “fraternity” in South Africa (97). That is, the love for the South African land does nothing to contribute to the establishment of fraternity with those who share the land, which “ineluctably comes in a package with liberty and equality” (97). Perhaps the allegorical dog brings us the same news in *Disgrace*: excessive talk about becoming like a dog and becoming-animal may grant ethical indulgence, but does not bring on liberty and equality, and even dilutes the human conflict at hand. If it is deemed easier to love dogs than to love humans, this perhaps attests to the failure of human fellowship, a fraternity. Reconciliation with the Other, whether with a human or a dog, then, does not lie in merely becoming the Other or becoming like it. It begins from knowing the Other in its full dimensions that include its material, singular presence certainly but also its conceptual operation as the constellation of ideas.

Conclusion. Posthumanism and the Re-Enchantment of the World

It is perhaps a matter of course that Henri Lefebvre, who in the second volume of *Critique of Everyday Life* writes about the politics of everyday life and theorizes the everyday life as the site of both oppressive banality and liberation, should also be interested in the everyday life of the hypothetical “man-made human being” (58). Yet, what is remarkable about his very brief discussion regarding this cyborg-like figure, is that he shows less concern about the novelty of this human identity who is “created artificially ... and given consciousness” than about the political realm within which it will be concretely living the everyday life (58). That is, Lefebvre regards this imaginary human as a being already incorporated into the rhythms of everyday life, bound to material conditions and striving to “*appropriate* life ... against whatever *disappropriates* it” (58). Lefebvre, in other words, already sees this novel figure as being determined by the same sets of socioeconomic conditions as other humans are and deserving of equal political regard. The identity of the “man-made human being,” regardless of how different it seems to be from the normative understanding of the human, is irrelevant in the face of the question of how it lives the everyday life, important for Lefebvre because it is “the time and the place where the human either fulfills itself or fails” (19). All social practices, no matter how much in “higher realms” they seem to be taking place, are generated and confirmed in the everyday life—the everyday is thus the “intermediate and mediating *level*” that traverses the totality that cannot be “defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, or by ideological and political superstructures” (45). And it is only by having critical knowledge of this everyday life

that its agents, among whom Lefebvre also includes man-made beings, would develop a desire to transform it because “*knowledge encompasses an agenda for transformation*” (98).

I find Lefebvre’s focus on the everyday life of this artificially made human and the praxis that this being will engage in, to be carrying much more political import than most posthumanist endeavors today, which end up fetishizing nonhuman beings, postulating them as having subversive power merely by being *not* human. I have discussed this in detail in Chapter 1: posthumanist scholarship de-historicizes nonhuman beings and ousts them from the everyday life where they are inevitably situated. Instead, posthumanism confers upon them an overwhelming ethical agency and power that can convert, so to speak, humans to be more humble, non-speciesist, and environmentally aware. As the cases of Crakers in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (Chapter 3) and dogs in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (Chapter 4) demonstrate however, the status of their being nonhuman alone does not overturn anthropocentric paradigms—the genetically engineered Crakers for example, however radically unlike humans, turn out to be the product of human imagination and technology, who as a result of the failed calculation of scientists end up actively imitating human behaviors. Dogs in *Disgrace*, too, although seemingly guiding David Lurie to the posthumanist ethics of humility in the face of universal suffering and finitude of life, turn out themselves to be deeply implicated in the racial discourses regarding blackness and animality. The becoming-dog of David Lurie, as I have shown, results in further alienating the farmer Petrus whose proximity to dogs has always historically been a sign of enslavement and sub-human

status. In other words, nonhuman beings, merely by being *not* human, cannot exert a transformative influence on humans. As explored in Chapter 2 with regard to Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, then, only the radical biological rewriting of the human species appears to have a chance of cultivating a posthuman sensibility, which opens one's eyes to a world that is much more multivalent, complex, and dynamic than humans, mired in their anthropocentric bias, can ever hope to know. But as argued, human metamorphosis by way of bodily unification with aliens is to hardly have resolved the root of human problems that have brought the world to final destruction in the trilogy—mainly, the problems of species and racial exclusivism and Cold War jingoism.

As I have suggested throughout my dissertation, the only viable way to implement a more egalitarian and life-affirming world with manifold ways of living, is to implement institutionally and socially, the means that ensure this vision. But this would be impossible with the current posthumanist, and quite misanthropic, efforts to turn humans against themselves with the reason that humans are enemies to themselves, whose falsely and arrogantly conceived rational agency leads to nothing more than self-destructive choices. Posthumanism instead casts an optimistic and even romantic light on nonhumans such as animals and cyborgs, whose existence it argues humans can model themselves upon, because they are believed to be more deeply in congruity with their environment and therefore more likely to be able to coexist in this multivalent world. But of course, this is based on the unfounded conviction that animals and cyborgs inherently contain some power to convert humans to becoming-animals and becoming-

cyborgs as the Deleuzian language goes, who will lead themselves out of the anthropocentric paradigm. But to this Lefebvre retorts, anticipating that even those who are outside of the category of the normative human, under material circumstances of the planet, will come to have an “experience of need and want,” which is to say that it will also experience “actual or potential privation and destitution”—which is also a beginning of the development of “consciousness, and freedom” (5) and an initiation into the “domain of history” (6). Indeed, whether human or posthuman, unless they are otherworldly beings who transcend the immediate context of the everyday, they would inevitably be involved in the same experiences of needing something against adverse material conditions, who then will inevitably form social experiences and develop historical consciousness. Regardless of what we choose to call ourselves, and what we are in the process of becoming, we must face the same question of “How do we live?” (58) as Lefebvre explains, whose answer requires comprehensive knowledge regarding the society as experienced and lived, in several sociological and psychological levels (58-9).

In other words, whether human, animal, hybrid, cyborg, or alien, once we take into account the everyday realm in which the specificities of relationships unfold, we realize that we remain in a familiar territory in which the concern is the fulfillment of self and the collective in correspondence and in opposition to material circumstances. This understanding of humans and nonhumans in concrete politico-historical and cultural realm is something that is consistently missing in posthumanist discourses, and it is with this observation that I offer the last commentary on posthumanism, which is

that the posthumanists want to *re-enchant* the world and to make the everyday rather charming in a compelling, poetic, and poignant way. What I argue is that the absolute primacy posthumanism gives to nonhuman beings and things is a reflection of a desire to efface oneself amongst the marvelous agency and force of the nonhuman, whose complex ways of operating humans can only partially know. There is a wish to redeem the world that is too disenchanting by the human calculative, rational, and domineering mind, and moreover, to be an immanent part of intricately webbed reality. The posthumanist re-enchantment however does not take place through mysticism and magic, but through and by the allegedly scientific knowledge of our material world, whose research speaks of the elaborately interactive ways in which the world operates. For example, Andrea Nightingale's essay "Broken Knowledge" in *The Re-Enchantment of the World* argues that modern scientific studies yield knowledge about nature that is so intricate and variegated that they paradoxically confirm, *not* the high intelligence of the human observer but rather the vulnerable condition in which the human is "left scattered in a fragile and frightening world" (25). The recognition of human frailty compared to the immensity of nature however is salubrious for modern humans, for it creates opportunities for humans to exercise a "discipline of attention" and increase a "capacity for enchantment," which will help humans establish an "ethical" and "erotic" relationship with the world (37). In other words, with "broken knowledge" of science we can construct what Thoreau in *Walden* calls "beautiful knowledge," which provides the enchanted experience of "surprise of wonder" again (26-27).

Nightingale's emphasis of partial, broken knowledge as a passage to an enchanted world evokes what I have argued in Chapter 1 as posthumanism's aesthetics, which is the poetics of excess that valorizes precisely what is unknowable and exceeds human cognition. What I argue in the chapter can be reiterated here again to observe the same theoretical tendency to poeticize what we do not know and to celebrate our nescience, presumably in the hope of recovering what never existed in the first place, which is innocence and even relief derived out of such innocence. This is also demonstrated in the way Jane Bennett extrapolates the cultural significance of nanotechnology in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. Here she argues that nanotechnology's exposure of "nano-things ... below the purview of the senses" (85) may make it a "site of enchantment" (84), as it provokes "wonder at matter" and generates "new opportunities for creative human intervention into matter it creates" (88). Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, in their introduction to *New Materialisms* also argue that knowledge produced by contemporary natural science demonstrates not a lucid understanding of nature, but a more "indeterminate and complex choreography of matter" (9).

The world is thus alive in the fullest sense of the term, which Jane Bennett describes as "vibrant" in *Vibrant Matter* and Mel Y. Chen as "animate" in *Animacies*—the minutest material forms, such as the "fats" and "foodstuff" in Bennett (43), and toxins such as lead and mercury in Chen's text, all tell the stories of what Bennett calls vital materiality, which is the "energetic vitality" inside things that is "not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them" (5). As the vividness of

these things is not immediately clear to the human eye, vital materiality solicits human's ethical reconstitution, in which one cultivates a "certain anticipatory readiness" and a "perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power" (5). Following Bennett, Chen too highlights the animacy of the supposedly dead matter lead in his chapter "Lead's Racial Matters," with the example of how lead-containing toys made in China become symbolically animate once they land in the homes of white American middle-class families, threatening to contaminate young and healthy white bodies. Referring to the U.S. "lead panic" that emerged around 2007, Chen thus concludes that lead comes to develop its own racial, imperial, political, and economic semiotics—growing to be animate and "transitive" as it travels through China-made toy products and mediates "in and around the category of 'life'" (187).

These accounts offer great "inverted" perspective on the way certain things exist in the world: for example, if the problem of obesity is conventionally attributed to the behavior of the human subject who with sovereignty and determination decides the amount and quality of food to be consumed, Bennett tells the story of dietary fats that quite unbeknown to the human subject, do their own things, so to speak, operating as the "cause of a quantifiable and invariant set of cognitive or behavioral effects" (41). The point here is that, in human bodies nonhuman agencies of all kinds work together to produce certain effects, which means that "human power itself is a kind of thing-power" (10). Here in Bennett too, we see a familiar posthumanist move to attenuate human agency in the material world—in other words to de-personalize and de-historicize the human to render it just another kind of materiality. She is not in denial of "humanity's

awesome, awful powers” (10) as Bennett herself notes, but rather highlighting the “impersonal affect” (xv) or the “impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us,” creating the “complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies” (4).

Since, however, it is difficult for humans to grasp this impersonal affect that “cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons” (xii), she argues the necessity of being “caught up in it” (xv), which in other words, is also to be enchanted (xii) and to retain “methodological naiveté,” which is withholding judgment in order to be fascinated by the vitality of things (17). A great emphasis is thus given to the impersonal over the personal, as a concept that helps efface the anthropocentric human and captivate the human in fascination of the force of things. The opposite of what Max Weber famously stated almost a century ago is taking place: techno-scientific progress no longer generates the process of disenchantment; rather, it becomes the source of cultural re-enchantment of the world in which the human is in a prolonged state of wonder in the midst of impersonal forces. Weber explained that the process of disenchantment involves the elimination of “mysterious incalculable forces” by science, which “in principle, master[s] all things by calculation” (139). This is no longer the case: from posthumanist accounts of nonhuman animals and self-organizing systems to the new materialisms’ elevation of objects as vital and agential, the recent cultural theories instead emphasize the awe-inspiring workings of things, whose spellbinding complexities are highlighted by nothing other than science itself.

Let me offer one more example of the theoretical effort to re-enchant the world through scientific means, which has to do with the use of knowledge about bacteria by

cultural and political theorists today, such as Bennett, William Connolly, and Timothy Morton.⁴⁸ In their accounts, bacteria are no longer merely overlooked microbes that occupy the lowest rank in the scale of life; rather, they are re-imagined as the fundamental material stuff that gives life to organisms, in both regulative and contingent ways that are surprising and unknowable to human calculation. Despite their invisible status, bacteria are made into a sublime thing of great, albeit indefinite, importance. By being reminded about the presence of bacteria that constitute the body, humans get a glimpse of an intricate material reality operating within their bodies: it is an insight that leads them to rethink the conventional idea of the human mind that is external to biological bodies and contingent realities. In the words of Bennett “bacteria colonies” within the human body remind us how “human subjects are themselves nonhuman, alien, outside, vital materiality” (120). In the words of Connolly, “microbes not only work on us; many become infused into our neurons and viscera to help *constitute* our very moods and performances” (49).

One must, however, be wary of such glamorization of the complexity of the world, where the whirlwind movement of tiny microbes and particles wondrously generates events of large scale. Bennett writes in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* that one of the positive effects of letting oneself be enchanted by this very lively world is the possible attenuation of existential angst, for enchantment increases joy in the Nietzsche’s Zarathustran sense of the term: in Bennett’s words, “affective fascination with a world” helps mitigate “the sense of victimization that recurrently descends upon

⁴⁸ See especially, Bennett (2010) 112, Connolly (2013) 49, and Morton (2010) 181.

the tragic (or absurd or incomplete) beings called human” (12). Allowing oneself to be enchanted by the world is thus a remedy against the “enervating cynicism” that is created when the “disenchantment story” gets combined with “a sharp sense of the injustice of things by the Left” (13). But it is hard to see Bennett’s theoretical preference of joy over resentment and angst anything other than as an evasion of the problem at hand, for it opts to change the way one sees the world rather than the world itself. Moreover, cynicism that she ascribes to those disenchanted in fact seems to be coming more from herself as shown in her curious generalization of the human as being caught in the victim mentality and paralyzed by existential agonies. Bennett, along with other critics of posthumanism and new materialism thus prescribe that we cultivate a capacity to be enchanted so as to be able to let go of our human selves, which hinder us from entering into the very dynamic, lively, and vital world.

The vital working of matter is no doubt enchanting, but against the posthumanist proposal for enchantment it would be helpful to bring up Lefebvre again, whose nonchalance regarding the extraordinary is quite instructive here. That is to say, Lefebvre reminds that no matter how heightened our sensitivity becomes to the microbial and atomic workings of things, the visceral and microscopic perception of the world alone would not mean much when placed in the context of everyday problems, which cannot ever be transformed without “knowledge of society in its entirety,” without a “radical critique,” and without the understanding of “negative concepts (distance and omission, dissatisfaction, frustration or, more generally, alienation)” (11). In fact, Lefebvre helps us to predict that no amount of nanotechnology and its wondrous

discovery of matter at its minutest level, for example, is really likely to drastically change the everyday, by observing the simple historical fact that “very few people’s lives have been changed by air travel, and even then only in minor ways” (3). He continues, by asserting that the future “interplanetary travel [will] prove to be the same” (3). That is, as revolutionary as the space travel may sound, it would not so easily transform the everyday life—for “such journeys will be the preserve of a technical, social and political ‘elite’...while on earth actual men, for example, will still be hoeing the land, transporting things on donkeys and mules, and perhaps living in hunger” (3). In other words, the problem of everyday life is also a problem of “uneven development,” which is hardly a problem that can be resolved by enchanted human subjects appreciating the complexities of the world. If interplanetary travel seems a farfetched example, one can only think of the advancement of assisted reproductive technology (especially surrogacy) today, which although increasingly portrayed as benefitting all women involved (both the women who employ the surrogates and the women who choose to be surrogates) raises the troubling issue of exploitation, especially when looked at globally and structurally. When the lower-class women in India (today’s rising hub for fertility tourism) choose to undergo several pregnancies in order to be able to make a living and have savings for future, can we say that the everyday life has in any way changed and that the problem of uneven development has been addressed?⁴⁹ As Susan Markens notes in *Surrogate Motherhood*, the advancement of assisted

⁴⁹ For more on the surrogacy industry in India, see for examples, Sayantani DasGupta’s and Shamita Das Dasgupta’s *Globalization and Transnational Surrogacy in India: Outsourcing Life*, and Amrita Pande’s *Wombs in Labor: Transnational Commercial Surrogacy in India*.

reproductive technology in itself does not unburden women from various moral, legal, and political issues—in fact, in many ways, the same old questions persist, from the issues of women’s freedom to choose to social obligations to have legal matter settled to the “best interests of the children.”

Nonetheless, irrespective of the remarkably *unchanged* everyday life the reproductive technology sustains, facts such as of surrogacy, egg and sperm donation, and the new *in vitro* fertilization technique that includes three persons,⁵⁰ all tend to be understood as carrying a radical import that changes what it means to be human in the twenty-first century. This is because these technologies literally break down the barriers among individual human bodies, oftentimes raising questions difficult to handle within the existing juridical, religious, and political understanding of the human. Thus the argument goes, our understanding of what constitutes the human needs to be changed, in order to better accommodate the increasing bioethical and biopolitical challenges we face today in the age of posthumanism.

This, as I have been arguing throughout the dissertation, is a customary move in theory today, in which any ethically and politically challenging question becomes an occasion *not* to change the structural social problems but to change the definition of the human to accommodate the changing reality itself. One of the newest example of yet

⁵⁰ See an online article by James Gallagher, titled “UK Approves Three-Person Babies” at *BBC.com*. This technology, the first to be legalized in the world in 2015, refers to the IVF procedure in which “DNA of the two parents,” of whom the mother has “genetic defects in the mitochondria,” is combined with “the healthy mitochondria of a donor woman” in order to prevent the inheritance of mitochondrial disease. According to the article, this procedure “results in babies with 0.1% of their DNA from the second woman and is a permanent change that would echo down through the generations.”

another theoretical endeavor to re-define the human is found in Roberto Esposito's *Third Person* published in English in 2012, where he reasons that we can no longer maintain the idea of "person" because contemporary predicaments, such as the "growing number of deaths from hunger, war, and epidemics" (4) and the constant failure to ensure the personhood of humans all demonstrate the inadequacy of the discourse of human rights in bringing dignity to life and instituting affirmative biopolitics. The current understanding of the human in fact is the very cause of so much political inadequacies, so argues Esposito, and thus we must return to the very origin by analyzing our *linguistic* practice itself, with particular attention to the use of pronouns "I" and "you," because these are what fundamentally cause the speaking subjects to bind one another to the scheme of full personhood, which maintains the status of "first person" by way of "keep[ing], or push[ing], other living individuals to the edge of thingness" (10). Against this, Esposito's aim then is to mobilize the category of "third person" or the impersonal, into a "power for deconstructing the ancient—and new—dispositif of the person" and for "alter[ing] existence" itself (17). What the altered existence may look like is not fully fleshed out in the book, but the political potency of the category of the third person is well explained, especially through the reading of Emil Benveniste's theory of pronouns in language, which observes the uniqueness of the third person as a concept that can defy the dialectic of the "I" and "you" that keeps subjectivizing and desubjectivizing each other in their exchange (106).

In this scheme of I and you that continues to produce the notion of the person as full-fledged unity of "human beings and citizens, body and soul, law and life" (4), the

potency of the third person lies in that it “extends out of the logic of the person, in favor of a different regime of meaning” (16). Indeed, as many examples from the Indo-European languages evince according to Benveniste, the third person functions like a non-person that can simultaneously be one specific person *and* any person (107). This is extraordinary not merely because it counters subjectivism implicit in I and you, but also because it is the only category that is truly “plural”: that is, unlike “we” and “you” whose plurality is merely an extension of the I and you “with the same identity-related connotations” (108), the plurality of the third person is genuine. It alludes to the possibility of establishing a community of the impersonal that includes everyone and everything, regardless of rights, citizenships, race, or species. The impersonal in other words does not require that one be incorporated into the category of I and you and be assimilated into its dynamic where the only way to establish oneself is by way of alienating the Other. In fact, the impersonal achieves a level of community and sociality precisely by *not* entering into the reciprocal and dialectical relationship between two subjects.

In this sense I argue that the category of third person merely gives us opportunities to conveniently naturalize our failure of creating more positive intersubjective relationships, not to mention that it also reinforces the condition of alienation prevalent in modern life by relegating human to the position of the third person that never becomes I or you. Esposito claims that rendering all persons impersonal and placing them on a common plane brings into life the “*living person*—not separate from or implanted into life, but coextensive with it as an inseparable *synolon* of

form and force, external and internal, *bios* and *zoe*” (151). But here again is the desire to re-enchant the human life by rendering the human contiguous with life itself and in identity with life: the third person is meant to enable the human to move beyond itself so as to be coextensive with the rest of the world. The impersonal is thus likened to being the figure of becoming-animal, who is in the constant process of acquiring “multiplicity, plurality, assemblage with what surrounds us and with what always dwells inside us” (149-50). Similar to the gestures found in the arguments of Bennett, Connolly, and Coole and Frost, then, I argue that Esposito’s evocation of the impersonal is a means to re-enchant the world by downplaying on the one hand the agency of first and second persons who anthropomorphize and disenchant the world, and highlighting, on the other hand, the impersonal force of all beings and things in their fascinating hybridity, assemblages, and associations. In other words, effacing the I and you in the midst of vibrant materiality is taken to be a way toward re-enchantment and ethical re-grounding. The present day penchant for re-imagining the human and re-enchanting the world however is like being in denial of the inevitable need to assert oneself and be in charge of the debris of our obviously disenchanted and disenchanting world. Re-enchantment through nonhuman agencies of things, then, is a form of escapism from the site of everyday life where its constituents, whether human or posthuman, first person or third person, as Lefebvre shows, are inevitably situated and that they cannot transcend.

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