The Prosthetic Novel and Posthuman Bodies: Biotechnology and Literature in the 21st Century

By

Justin Omar Johnston

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(English)

at the UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2012

Date of final oral examination: April 19, 2012

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:
Anne McClintock, Professor, English
Susan S. Friedman, Professor, English
Robert Nixon, Professor, English
Jon McKenzie, Associate Professor, English
Tomislav Longinovic, Professor, Slavic Languages
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS........................................................................................................... ii

ABSTRACT........................................................................................................................... iii

INTRODUCTION................................................................................................................... 1

   The Biopolitical Context.................................................................................................. 6
   Prosthetic Humans and Posthuman Bodies................................................................. 14

A FEELING OF ATTACHMENT: THE POSTHUMAN POLITICS OF FENCES IN KAZUO
ISHIGURO’S NEVER LET ME GO.................................................................................... 21

   Hailsham: The Disciplinary Fence.................................................................................. 28
   The Open Fence............................................................................................................. 41
   The Service-Station, Chemical-Substances and Subjectivity........................................ 44
   Wet Prosthetics and Vital Objects.................................................................................. 48
   Affect, Agency, and “England, late-1990’s”................................................................ 52
   The Litterary Fence and Two Visions of Posthuman Politics....................................... 60
   Counterpuntal Posthumanism....................................................................................... 68

SPECIES TROUBLE IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S ORYX AND CRAKE............................ 71

   Corporate Domesticity.................................................................................................. 82
   Oryx and Difference...................................................................................................... 104
   Evolution and Extinction.............................................................................................. 110

THE HUMAN AILMENT:
A NOTHER WORLD IN INDRA SINHA’S ANIMAL’S PEOPLE...................................... 121

   Neoliberalism, Environmental Technologies, and Human Capital............................ 126
   In the Shadow of Human Rights.................................................................................. 133
   “It’s a new way of seeing that gives us a new way of touching,”................................. 140
   Ambivalence: Humanism and “Something Different”................................................ 145

ECOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENTS: CYBORGS, HUMANS, AND BIOPOLITICS IN
JEANETTE WINTERTON’S THE STONE GODS.................................................................... 154

   Unlimited Finitude and Cyborg Feminism................................................................... 159
   Unexceptional Exceptions, Easter Island, and Metaphor vs. Synecdoche.................... 169
   The Biopolitics of Evolutionary Time........................................................................... 174

WORKS CITED.................................................................................................................... 183
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to register my great appreciation to my dissertation committee: Anne McClintock, Robert Nixon, Susan S. Friedman, Jon McKenzie, and Tomislav Longinivic. Throughout my graduate career, each of these professors has encouraged my intellectual growth, helped me cultivate my own critical voice, and shown great patience as I completed my dissertation.

Anne McClintock, my dissertation chair, deserves special thanks for her generosity and insight. From the outset, Anne trusted the intuitions that motivated my research and challenged me to crystalize my analysis into a coherent argument. Over the years, I have been impressed by her understanding of cultural change and inspired by her commitment to shaping that change. Thank you, Anne, for your encouragement and vision.

Finally, I’d like to thank Katy Johnston for engaging in a continuous conversation with me, for sharpening my ideas and writing, and for knowing how and when to interrupt the dissertation with laughter and love.
Abstract

The Prosthetic Novel and Posthuman Bodies: Literature and Biotechnology in 21st Century

The human clone, the animal-human hybrid, the toxic body, the human-machine hybrid: these biotechnologically transformed bodies proliferate in the novels of many contemporary, Anglophone writers. Like the biologists (Ian Wilmut, E.O. Wilson, Craig Venter), academics (Francis Fukuyama) and journalists (The Economist and Time) who’ve labeled the 21st century “the biotech century,” several celebrated contemporary writers have also underscored biotech’s influence in their novels. Moving beyond the fear and excitement elicited by new developments in embryology, stem cell research and regenerative medicine, these novelists not only expose biotech’s roots in 20th century biopolitics (Foucault, Agamben) but they also anticipate still emergent forms of biotechnological subjectivity. Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go (2005), Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake (2003), Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People (2007), and Jeanette Winterson’s The Stone Gods (2007) all focus on the prosthetic quality of biotech to imagine four very different posthuman bodies. While these writers represent a range of Anglophone novelists with very different literary projects, they all locate the fleshly body as the prosthetic meeting place for biotechnology and political subjectivities. Taken together, I claim, these novels describe a prosthetic society where humanist institutions are challenged by new technologies of reproduction, mobility, kinship, and ecology.
In the first chapter of my dissertation, “A Feeling of Attachment: Biopolitics and Fences in *Never Let Me Go,*” I analyze the novel’s passage from a tightly regulated English boarding school to an open network of clinics, motels, and expressways. As the narrator, Kathy H., and her friends leave the disciplinary architecture of the boarding school, with its emphasis on human creativity, they discover they’re clones whose internal organs will, someday, be harvested. Kathy travels England’s expressways, clinic to clinic, caring for clones and waiting for her “donations” to begin. This biomedical network produces a form of mobile discipline. Indeed, Kathy’s transition from being human to becoming an object of prosthetic circulation, helps map a slow historical trend away from humanist institutions toward a prosthetic society of mobile surveillance and posthuman identities. Chapter two, “Species Trouble in *Oryx and Crake,*” builds on this argument by reading Atwood’s double vision of biotech’s future. Her dystopian vision of corporate biotech, I argue, stems from a late-capitalist ordering of species according to the prosthetic image of the tree of life. Biotech companies employ this upward, outward metaphor of pure individuation to patent new species and manage their consumer’s bodies. In an apocalyptic turn, Atwood levels this dystopian world and offers readers a symbiogentic model of evolution, revealing the possibility of horizontal, interspecies forms of prosthetic kinship. Chapter three, “The Human Aliment: A ‘Nother World in *Animal’s People,*” reads Indra Sinha’s fictionalized account of Union Carbide’s toxic chemical spill in Bhopal, India, to frame the limitations of humanist postcolonial discourse in face of environmental devastation and corporate colonialism. Reading Dow Chemical’s ad campaign, “The Human Element,” alongside the narrator’s critique of human right’s discourse, I argue that humanism obscures the extra-legal forms of prosthetic touch that radically transform bodies in neocolonial environments. In Chapter four, “Ecological Entanglements and Biopolitics in *The Stone Gods,*” I trace a “robo-sapien’s”
adventures in the neo-liberal “Tech City” and the anarchist “Wreck City,” to summarize my dissertation’s contention that just as prosthetic techniques increasingly manage the formation of social subjectivities, these techniques can also be queered or hacked to compose alternative prosthetic assemblages.
Introduction:

Prosthesis, Posthumanism, and the Biopolitical Context

“Michael Foucault’s biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field”
- Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto” (150)

“We are facing a new kind of capitalism that is hot, psychotropic and punk. These recent transformations indicate new micro-prosthetic mechanisms of control emergent from advanced bio-molecular techniques and media networks.” - Beatriz Preciado, 107 “Pharmacopornographic Politics: Toward a New Gender Ecology”

The twenty-first century has widely been hailed as the biotech century. My dissertation, The Prosthetic Novel and Posthuman Bodies, explores how four distinctive literary figurations of posthuman embodiment—the human clone, the animal-human hybrid, the toxic body, and the digital-human—have come to proliferate across a range of internationally acclaimed Anglophone novels published between 2003 and 2008. Kazuo Ishiguro’s Never Let Me Go (2005), Margaret Atwood’s Oryx and Crake (2003), Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People (2007), and Jeanette Winterson’s The Stone Gods (2007) all focus on the prosthetic potentials and limits of biotechnology to explore the human animal’s entanglement within technological environments. Moving beyond the fear and excitement elicited by new developments in embryology, stem cell research, and regenerative medicine, these novelists not only expose biotechnology’s roots in twentieth century biopolitics, but they also anticipate still emergent forms of biotechnological subjectivity. While these writers represent a range of Anglophone novelists with unique literary projects, they all locate the fleshy body as the prosthetic meeting place for technology and social subjectivity. Taken together, I argue, these novels portray a prosthetic society where humanist institutions are challenged by technological changes to reproduction, mobility, kinship, and ecology.
In the background of this dissertation is the proclamation made by various scientists, historians, and journalists, that the twenty-first century will be the biotech century. *Time Magazine*’s first issue in 1999, for instance, was a “special issue” dedicated to “The Future of Medicine: How Genetic Engineering Will Change us in the Next Century” (time.com). On its front cover *Time* displayed a bright green serpent twisted into the shape of a double-helix and wrapped around a tree branch. This reference to the ancient symbol for medicine, the Rod of Asclepius, is complicated by the snake itself, which curls off the branch to position its eye directly at the reader. Unlike the iconographic serpents that appear in logos for the American Medical Association, the British Medical Association, and the World Health Organization, this snake has a personality and a presence of its own; it knows it’s being watched and, therefore, appears both threatening and seductive. By animating the classical icon for medicine with a sinister reference to the Christian story of Man’s seduction by a satanic snake, *Time* subtly associates biotechnological knowledge with the genesis of Man’s mortality, forced labor, permanent exile, sexual humiliation, and gender assignment. Indeed, if the cover wonders “how genetic engineering will change us in the next century,” then this evocation of Man’s fall suggests a rather perilous and far-reaching shift in the human condition.

Nevertheless, despite the ominous cover, *Time*’s chief editor Walter Isaacson goes on to minimize the historical impact of biotechnology in his article “The Biotech Century.” He argues, instead, that “the 20th century’s revolution in infotechnology will…merge with the 21st century's revolution in biotechnology” in what appears to be harmonious historical progression (time.com). In other words, this issue of *Time* captures a recurrent tension between those representations of the twenty-first century that treat biotechnology as a contiguous extension of existing norms and those representations that imagine it as a transformational technology,
promising to reorganize social norms by disrupting the coherence of “the human” as a centripetal category of belonging.

Eight years later, *The Economist* magazine published a similar issue, focusing on what they called “Biology’s Big Bang” (economist.com). On its cover, *The Economist* reproduces a portion of Michelangelo’s painting “Adam’s Creation” from the Sistine Chapel, which also references Man’s genesis by depicting the hand of God reaching down from heaven to touch the outstretched hand of Man. On the magazine, the two hands are front-and-center and a rainbow colored strand of DNA fills the gap between Adam and God’s fingers, like a squiggle of light or spark of electricity. Like *Time*, *The Economist* also imagines biotechnology in quasi-Christian terms, suggesting that the metaphysical divide between Man and God can be breached by the prosthetic powers of biotechnology. Whether it is embodied as evil snake or a magical white man, both *Time* and *The Economist* figure biotechnology through an encounter with the supernatural that promises to alter the western, Christian, status of the human.

Tellingly, the article “Biology’s Big Bang” goes on to put forth the historical analogy that “what physics was to the 20th century, biology will be to the 21st” (Economist). In this context, the idea of a techno-scientific “big bang” recalls the image of a mushroom cloud and the weaponization of twentieth century physics through the creation of the atom bomb. In other words, “what physics [became] to the 20th century” was a nuclear arms race that, after 1989, established the United States as the sole global hegemon. Put differently, one way to interpret the repeated Christian vision of Man’s fall or ascension due to biotechnology is as an anxious analog for a hegemonic world order that is rooted in the cultural traditions of Euro-North American humanism.

Indeed, the suspicion that biotechnology could challenge the cultural authority of western
humanism is best expressed by the historian Francis Fukuyama in his cautionary book *Our Posthuman Future*. In the late 1990s, Fukuyama famously argued that “after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, older, more familiar patterns of [human] behavior reasserted themselves,” which led to a “worldwide convergence on liberal democracy,” thus proving the “tenacity of human nature” to reject socialist “utopian political movements that sought to create an earthly heaven by radically rearranging the most basic institutions of [human] society” (14). Rather controversially, Fukuyama characterized this supposed alignment of liberal democracy, global capitalism, and human nature as “the end of history.” However, in a stunning reversal, Fukuyama now asserts “that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will…move us into a ‘posthuman’ stage of history” (7). Indeed, under the heading “Biotechnology and the Recommencement of History,” Fukuyama echoes a sentiment shared by the aforementioned prognosticators: “we appear to be poised at the cusp of one of the most momentous periods of [bio]technological advance in history,” and at least for Fukuyama, this means that “social engineers and utopian planners” might yet utilize biotechnology to upset the hypothetical alignment of capitalist democracy and human nature (15).

No less hyperbolically, many biologists have also sought to frame biotechnology as establishing a new social order for a new century. The renowned Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, for example, has predicted “this is going to be a century of biology,” adding, “we are entering an age of synthesis” (earthsky.org). And, according to Sir Ian Wilmut, the embryologist credited with cloning the Finnish Dorset named Dolly, “‘Dolly will take humanity into the age of biological control’” (Franklin 24). Wilmut’s proclamation, in particular, is rich with ambiguity. One reading of his statement might, for instance, understand Dolly, a cloned sheep, as “taking” or *herding* humanity toward its future as a biologically controlled species. Here the phrase “age
of biological control” would connote the animalization of man or the reduction of man to its biological processes. However, “the age of biological control” might also be interpreted triumphantly as a stage of history wherein humanity overcomes the contingencies of its own embodiment through the mastery of biological material. In either case, once again, biotechnology is here represented not only as a force for historical change, but more importantly, as a force that will change the definition and ontological status of what it means to be human.

And so, amid the clamor to label the twenty-first century the biotech century, several key fault lines have begun to emerge. Will the power to clone, genetically mix, implant, and otherwise hybridize the materiality of life ultimately decenter western definitions of human individuality? Or, on the contrary, will biotechnology subject bodies to even more severe regimes of policing so that “human capital” becomes a new and more flexible form of neo-humanism? Significantly, this speculative dimension concerning biotechnology poses these utopian and dystopian questions in the future tense, not far away, but not yet here.  

However, the novels I examine in my dissertation treat biotechnology as an already existing feature of contemporary urban and suburban life. They accomplish this in two ways. Narrowly, as in *Never Let Me Go*, human cloning is simply inserted anachronistically into the otherwise recognizable setting of early twenty-first century England. But more broadly, these novels all treat biotechnology as emerging from twentieth century biopolitics. And therefore, to the extent that posthuman bodies like the animal-human hybrid anticipate new biotechnological futures, these figures also interrogate present and pressing attachments between the human animal and

---

1 On the tenth anniversary of the human genome project’s completion, the New York Times ran two stories, “A Decade Later, Genetic Map Yields Few New Cures,” and “The Genome at 10; Awaiting Genome Payoff,” both of which express disappointment that biotechnology has yet to cure any major genetic diseases, but both of which also affirm a continued belief in the biotech revolution just around the corner.
technological environments. Rather than speculating about the future outcome of interspecies splicing, these novels employ posthuman bodies to explore the technological hybridity that already and increasingly entangles bodies in prosthetic networks. In this way, these novels are set in what Antonio Gramsci called an “interregnum” or a moment of historical transition when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (276). Here, the old is an arrogant anthropocentricism that views the human as unbound by limited resources and untouched by technologies of class, gender, health, and wealth. The old is a “freedom loving” obsessive-compulsive hand washer who seeks to purify the public sphere by evicting communities of touch and rejecting universal health care. But behind a haze of pepper spray, the new are a diverse assemblage of urbanized bodies that channel popular affect through social networks to rediscover town squares and the messy power of technological entanglement. So in the interregnum, Starbucks deals caffeine on every street corner to transform workers’ bodies each morning, on-the-go, and from the inside out.

The Biopolitical Context

The literary analysis of posthuman bodies in this dissertation participates in a larger intervention within the field of twenty-first century biopolitics. Here, I echo Donna Haraway’s assertion that “Michael Foucault’s biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field” (“The Cyborg Manifesto” 150). Over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many critics have embraced the term biopolitics, and yet, most of these thinkers have also foregrounded its inadequacies. Along with Haraway, Gilles Deleuze, in his essay “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” argues that “we are in a generalized crisis in relation to…environments of enclosure” and that “societies of control…are in the process of
replacing disciplinary societies,” thus marking an historical transition away from Foucault’s model of modern civil society (3-4). Consequently, for Deleuze, disciplined individuals—recognizable by their “signature and rank”—are being transformed into “dividuals”—coded selves or passwords that can be technologically reprogrammed. Likewise, in 2000, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri embraced the idea that in “capitalist society biopolitics is what is most important,” but they are quick to add, “Foucault fails to grasp…the real dynamics of production in biopolitical society” (27-28). Then again, Beatriz Preciado, in her 2008 manifesto, “Pharmacopornographic Politics,” points out that although Foucault’s formulation of “biopower…is critically sharp,…it is also true that the valuable insights he offers begin to blur the closer the analysis comes to contemporary societies” (109). And by 2011, the anthology Beyond Biopolitics: Essays on the Governance of Life and Death comes to register multiple reformulations of biopolitics from Brian Massumi, Jabir Puar, and Luciana Parisi, to name a few. Nevertheless, as Patricia Clough explains in the introduction, “biopolitics…gives the ground for today’s reformulation of governance, the platform for the extension of biopolitics beyond itself” (3).

To account for the ambivalence surrounding the concept of biopolitics, it is important to recall that Foucault’s view of biopolitics “evolved in two basic forms” (History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 139). The first is “centered on the body as a machine” and is characterized by the disciplinary or “anatomo-politics of the human body” (139). Here, the practice of disciplining bodies coincided with new architectures of surveillance, which, at least in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was made possible by industrialization and the regular confinement of bodies within institutional enclosures such as the factory, prison, hospital, home, and school. Walled-in by such boundaries, bodies could be organized, parsed, isolated, ranked, and ultimately treated as
individuals according to standardized parameters.

Moreover, a critical effect of this disciplinary technique was the formation of individuality as a central marker of modern man. For Foucault, modern man “is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that [disciplinary] power exercises over the body” (*Discipline and Punish* 30). Put differently, the docile and disciplined body is imbued with individuality (a soul or hidden kernel), which is little more than the mystery and alibi to excuse ever more probing investigations of the body. In disciplinary regimes the body must be tamed in order to discover the individual human soul hidden somewhere behind or within the body.

But biopolitics, for Foucault, is not constituted by discipline alone. The second piece of biopolitics proper, according to Foucault, “formed somewhat later” and focused instead on “the species body” and “regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population” (*History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* 139). This data-centric, actuarial form of power not only measures “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity,” but it also identifies “all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (139). Indeed, in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault coined the term “environmental technologies” to indicate how targeted populations can be manipulated by altering their living conditions (259). This form of biopolitics is therefore associated with the distribution of “life chances” across various populations, and it can be summed up in Foucault’s description of the power “to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (*History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* 138). Instead of focusing on individual subjects, this biopolitics of the “species body” evaluates the riskiness of investing in one cross-section of the population versus another. Where should the police, politician, advertiser, Internet provider, and insurance company invest their time, money, attention, and services? And whether it is Apple’s twin data centers in North
Carolina; Google’s giant databases housed in Finland, Singapore, and Iowa; or the NSA’s enormous data center currently under construction in Utah; these instruments of digital data collection are stunning examples of contemporary biopolitical power over the “species body.”

Given this dichotomy within Foucault’s definition of biopolitics, one strategy my dissertation employs for developing a twenty-first century formulation of biopolitics is to examine how contemporary biotechnologies re-describe the division between the “anatomo-politics” of individual bodies and the “species body” that regulates populations. In this vein, my dissertation draws on the work of Deleuze, Preciado, and Hardt to examine how technological changes have altered the anatomo-politics of disciplinary power during the post-industrial era. If Foucault diagnosed human individuality as a symptom of disciplinary institutions where architectural enclosures (such as the prison or hospital) constructed fixed subject positions, then the novels I look at figure contemporary biotech as a form of mobile discipline on-the-go that expands beyond institutional walls across diverse but technologically connected landscapes. Here, small mobile technologies (such as cell phones, debit cards, Viagra pills) become “wet prosthetics” that not only travel intimately alongside bodies, but also link these bodies to dispersed technological networks capable of programing new forms of hybrid subjectivity. That is, the prosthetic quality of contemporary technology blends together (as in the cell phone) the anatomo-politics of targeted surveillance with the data-driven manipulation of populations and living conditions. Although bodies remain surveillable via g.p.s. tracking and street cameras, other bodily habits, diets, purchases, communications, and friendships are now also accessible to corporations, governments, activists, and other connected parties.

Moreover, the coded subject that emerges from data rich tracking is also modifiable in new ways. Instead of training docile bodies, coded subjects understand their bodies as
reprogrammable from the inside out, through gluten free crackers, energy drinks, stem cells, Adderall, and yoga. Preciado claims:

if in disciplinary society, architecture and orthopaedics served as models to understand the relation of body-power, in the pharmaco-pornographic society, the models for body control are micro-prosthetics: … from the silicon that takes the form of breasts, to neurotransmitters that modifies our way of perceiving and acting, to a hormone and its synthetic affect on hunger, sleep, sexual excitation, aggression and the social codification of our femininity and masculinity. (110)

Preciado, and others who locate a shift in disciplinary technology, point to the “codification” of subjectivity made possible by the distribution of prosthetic technologies and the technological networks that (re)program these prosthetic bodies. Significantly, to the extent that bodies are represented through codes, the boundary between humans, animals, and machines becomes increasingly hybridized because DNA and other interoperable codes are manifestly exchangeable and mixable.

To be clear, I do not argue in this dissertation that discipline no longer operates within civil society. On the contrary, what I view as an emerging prosthetic society might rightly be characterized as an intensification of discipline or a blending together of “anatomo-politics” with the data centric biopolitics of the “species body.” Borrowing Raymond Williams’ distinction between dominant, residual, and emergent forms of culture, I read discipline as a residual form of culture that “formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present” (122). The prison industrial complex, for instance, remains a key component of dominant culture in the United States, but at the same time, the growth of mega-prisons has shown how incarceration is now
supplemented by the increased distribution of prescription medications\textsuperscript{2}, like the antipsychotic Seroquel, as well as the proliferation of digital video surveillance and expanding forms of data collection\textsuperscript{3}. So while Foucault emphasized the psychological classification of criminals as individuals, these prisons emphasize the psychiatric codification of criminal bodies as a “species body.” Prosthetic biotechnology, therefore, operates both above and below the level of individuality, just as a prisoner who is deemed, according to population analysis, “at risk” for depression might be prescribed an antidepressant to alter their serotonin levels, with only minimal consent necessary. And crucially, this sort of prophylactic use of prosthetic technology is not limited to institutions like the prison, school, or hospital. Not only do Visa and Google have algorithms to predict the likelihood that someone with my shopping habits might miss a payment or be particularly susceptible to an advertisement for ice cream, but so too does my local grocery store, who tracks my every purchase with a virtual loyalty card on my cell phone. These are sticky entanglements with networks that access my bodily habits in ways that are automatic and difficult to block. Even though this form prosthetic technology is an emergent cultural process that can be utilized to organize popular resistance, I also argue that much of its potential is incorporated by the dominant culture, where it is obscured by a neo-humanist ideology (Williams 126).

What and who is not incorporated within the “species body,” therefore, is especially important to my analysis of prosthetic technology within contemporary Anglophone literature.

\textsuperscript{2} The U.S. Department of Justice’s 2005 “Audit of the Federal Bureau of Prison Pharmacy Service” showed that even though total health care costs rose eleven percent from 2000-2005, medication costs rose twenty-three percent during that same period, only a portion of which could be attributed to higher drug costs (2-3).

\textsuperscript{3} The Florida Department of Corrections’ website publishes some of the reports they’ve produced using their database. These sorts of publications demonstrate the multitude of data points that prisons now collect about their inmates (http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/index.html).
Here I draw on an alternative strand of biopolitical criticism, promoted by Giorgio Agamben, Jasbir Puar, and Achille Mbembe, to explore the limitations of Foucault’s rather tidy definition of biopolitics as the “power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (History of Sexuality Vol.1, 138). In light of the “war against terror,” which “makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective,” Achille Mbembe argues that a vitalist conception of biopolitics is promoted, primarily in the global north, to hide and justify a slew of necropolitical projects directed at the global south. Mbembe borrows Giorgio Agamben’s concept of a “state of exception” and Foucault’s own elaboration of biopolitics in relation to racism, to argue that “racism is above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of … ‘that old sovereign right of death’” (17). For Mbembe, “the management, protection, and cultivation of life [is] coextensive with the sovereign right to kill,” and “the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous function of the state” (17). Following Mbembe, Jasbir Puar not only seeks to “keep taut the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics,” but also “attend to…the deflection of death,” even where death appears “in the service of the optimization of life” (35). Puar points to the “anatomical, sensorial, and tactile subjugation of bodies” and expands the necropolitical quality of biopolitics to include “the detainees at Guantanamo Bay or the human waste of refugees, evacuees, the living dead, the dead living, the decaying living, [and] those living slow deaths” (35). As Puar’s list of subjugated bodies suggests, the power to disallow life to the point of death is everywhere present and constitutive of the biopolitical mandate to optimize life. Although the posthuman characters that circulate in the novels I examine clearly embody forms of technological investment, they also experience severe social abandoned as less-than-human species of life. They provoke anxiety and disgust not because they are so different, but because they are too familiar; they
make visible the prosthetic networks of touch that must remain invisible in the dominant social order.

The undead zombie-like bodies that live on despite social and political abandonment remain products of prosthetic technologies because it is precisely such codifications that allow governments and multinational corporations to determine which populations to invest in and which populations to abandon. Nevertheless, I argue, it is insufficient to rely on technological change to analyze the meaning of such abandonments. Here, it is crucial to examine a dominant neo-humanist ideology that is legible in free-trade agreements, international advertisements, and other artifacts of neo-liberal governmentality. In particular, the concept of “human capital,” used to compare the economic health of various populations, not only reinforces humanism as the decisive feature in twenty-first century biopolitics, but it also functions to obscure the material affects of attachment and abandonment that define posthuman embodiment.

The novels I examine operate within a biopolitical context that is infused with a reactionary and virulent neo-humanist ideology. For this reason, the clones, animal-human hybrids, toxic bodies, and digital bodies in the novels all encounter forms of abandonment and rejection due to their less-than-human status. Additionally, this dominant culture is informed by a residual allegiance to disciplinary notions of individuality. Here the concept of human capital posits a nominal form of individuality to shift the risk and responsibility from unstable networks of power back onto individuals. For instance, in Animal’s People Indra Sinha illustrates how individual workers are blamed for a deadly chemical spill, even though the factory owners conditioned the spill by firing staff, cutting back on safety procedures, and subjecting the local community to massive amounts of environmental risk. However, alongside this dominant culture, I read an emergent form of prosthetic biotechnology that both supports the dominant
culture by connecting bodies to networks of power and also opposes the dominant culture by critiquing its ideological coherence. The posthuman bodies I examine in this dissertation are figures that expose and heighten the contradictions between what I call neo-humanism and prosthetic subjectivity.

Prosthetic Humans and Posthuman Bodies

Because prosthesis is an organizing trope in my dissertation, it is important to explain how the term has been used to mean very different things: substitution and assemblage. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, for example, Sigmund Freud turns to the concept of “prosthesis” to assess modern man’s technological achievements: “man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times” (44). Ostensibly, Freud’s use of the term “prosthetic” situates technology according to its investments in living bodies as “organs,” but Freud also qualifies this type of attachment as “auxiliary,” “kind of,” “not grown,” and “trouble at times.” Instead of transforming man into God, the “magnificent” character of prosthetic technologies actually allows Freud to reconfirm man’s essential and original humanity. Even though he claims that man “has almost become a god himself,” this assertion is “only...true,” Freud explains, “in the fashion in which ideals are usually attained according to the general judgment of humanity” (44). In other words, prosthetic technologies are here judged as a measurement of humanity’s ideals, which already assumes the anthropocentric ideal of humanity itself. In this scenario, technology is reduced to a symptom and yet another psychoanalytic mirror for reflecting the wounded image of man. Freud, therefore, treats technology as prosthetic not because it touches living bodies, but because man has suffered an originary injury, and
technology serves as man’s pathetic bandage. In this way, Freud understands prosthetic technology as a substitute that can only partially compensate for an always already missing organ.

Although Freud’s evocation of technological prosthesis might presage the sticky and networked quality of contemporary technology, any revised understanding of the concept must confront the humanist constraints Freud placed on the term. From stem cells to cell phones, contemporary entanglements of flesh and technology involve what Beatriz Preciado calls, “micro-prosthetic mechanisms of control emergent from advanced bio-molecular techniques and media networks” (107). Such “micro-prosthetics” cannot readily be explained by the logic of phallic substitution, nor can bodily attachments be treated simply as compensatory figures in the psychodrama of human self-consciousness. Indeed, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, “prosthesis may also be regarded, not as a confirmation of a pregiven range of possible actions, but as an opening up of actions that may not have been possible before, the creation of new bodily behaviors, qualities, or abilities rather than the replacement of or substitute for missing or impaired organs” (147). For Grosz, prosthesis is a form of transformative touch without clear analogy to human autonomy or anatomy—an assemblage. Indeed, “the living being and the objects now rendered prosthetic transform each other, and each undergoes a not entirely determinable becoming through their interaction” (151). In this way, life becomes entangled with the material conditions of life, the sticky environments that are inextricably part of living bodies. Grosz concludes, “it remains ambiguous…whether it is the nonliving, the inhuman which functions as prosthetic for living beings, or whether, on the contrary, living beings are the prosthetic augmentations of inert matter, matter’s most elaborate invention of self-reflection (152). This ambiguity not only decenters human touch as a sign of mastery, but it also reveals the complex circulation of life
within environments of touch.

If Grosz’s conception of “prosthesis” is powerfully reimagines the relationship of touch that persists between living bodies and the environments that intensify, block, monitor, and direct such life, then in many ways, Grosz’s view also remains unsatisfyingly ahistorical. Here, prosthetic entanglement is merely a fact of life (and nonlife). Nevertheless, Grosz’s view might be characterized as “posthuman” in what Cary Wolfe calls, “a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies…of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon” (xv-xvi). Indeed, Wolfe’s expansive definition of posthumanism not only helps historicize Grosz’s exploration of prosthetic entanglement, but it also highlights the role of “prosthetic” attachment within posthumanism as such:

My sense of posthumanism is thus analogous to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s paradoxical rendering of the postmodern: it comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technical world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture)…and all of which comes before the historically specific thing called ‘the human’ that Foucault’s archeology excavates. But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (xv-xvi, my emphasis)
The “imbrication” and “decentering” of human life within “technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks,” which Wolfe sees as an “impossible to ignore…historical development,” not only links the posthuman to a particularly postindustrial form of prosthesis, but it also echoes the prognostications that the 21st century will be the age of biotechnological control. Here, Wolfe draws on Foucault’s analysis of “the human” as a historically specific form of subjectivity, one that is closely aligned with the practices and technologies of industrialization, discipline, and the rise of the human sciences during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Alternatively, posthumanism is an historical force “thrust…on us” by both the postindustrial “imbrication” of life within new technological networks, and by the “embedded and embodied” condition of life that is made once again apparent by such technologies. That is, posthumanism is a form of subjectivity that is derived, first and foremost, from the biopolitical organization of civil society.

In my dissertation I examine posthuman bodies as the products of a specifically postindustrial form of biological and technological embodiment. The prosthetic novel, therefore, understands biotechnology as an entanglement of the bodies within “technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks.” Biotechnology is a new phase of biopolitics; it marks the integration of anatomo-politics and the species body. Consequently, this more flexible form of biotechnology produces strange, hybrid, subjectivities – the clone who feels kinship with mass produced plastic toys because they are both born of asexual reproduction or the animal-human hybrid who awakens to the already pervasive forms of symbiogenesis and interspecies mixing that link species on the evolutionary tree of life. At every turn, these prosthetic bodies recognize the material finitude that forges life out of non-life and partial identities out of coded assemblages. Very simply, the posthuman can feel the finitude and interoperability of materiality that connects their body to postindustrial ecologies or technological environments.
In the first chapter, “A Feeling of Attachment: Biopolitics and Fences in Never Let Me Go,” I analyze Ishiguro’s passage from a tightly regulated English boarding school to an open network of clinics, motels, and expressways. As the narrator, Kathy H., and her friends leave the disciplinary architecture of the boarding school, with its emphasis on human creativity, they discover they’re clones whose internal organs will, someday, be harvested. Waiting for her “donations” to begin, Kathy travels England’s expressways, from clinic to clinic, caring for clones and reflecting on her childhood. This biomedical network produces a form of mobile discipline that keeps Kathy and others moving along their pre-programmed paths. Indeed, Kathy’s transition from being human to becoming an object of prosthetic circulation, helps dramatize the slower historical trend away from humanist institutions toward a prosthetic society of mobile surveillance and posthuman identities.

Elaborating on Ishiguro’s historical framework, chapter two, “Species Trouble in Oryx and Crake,” interrogates Atwood’s double vision of biotechnology’s future. Her dystopian vision of corporate biotech, I argue, stems from a late-capitalist ordering of species according to the organic image of Darwin’s tree of life. Biotech companies—many of which grew from Reagan and Thatcher’s deregulatory response to the oil shocks of the 1970s—employ this arboreal model of upward, outward, expansion and pure individuation to justify patenting new species and to help manage consumers’ bodies. Atwood, however, reimagines the figure of hybrid-species to deconstruct the dystopia of corporate domesticity and arboreal species segregation. For Atwood, evolution can no longer be read as a process of species divergence, but instead, must account for prosthetic webs of lateral-gene-transfer and interspecies kinship. Echoing the microbiological work of Lynn Margulis, Atwood posits a symbiogenetic model of evolution that resists the commodification of species.
The third chapter of my dissertation, “The Human Aliment in Animal’s People,” examines Sinha’s fictionalized account of the 1984 toxic chemical spill in Bhopal, India, to critique Union Carbide and Dow Chemical’s evocation of humanity in a series of ad campaigns, with special attention paid to Dow’s massive rebranding effort, “The Human Element” (2006-present). When the toxic chemicals enter the narrator’s body his spine is twisted forward, and he adopts the name “Animal.” Walking on his hands and feet, Animal offers up an often over-looked perspective on non-human relations as he empathically converses with dogs, trees, and other others. Not only does Animal refuse to be recognized by Western definitions of what constitutes the human, but he also helps transform a community of local activists by broadening their coalition to include non-human subjects. Sinha’s version of postcolonial environmentalism, I argue, treats the toxic event as a chemical prosthesis that unites a powerful community of very different extra-human activists.

“Ecological Entanglements: Cyborgs, Humans, and Biopolitics in Jeanette Winterson’s The Stone Gods” concludes my dissertation by framing the political stakes posed by twenty-first century biotechnology. Focusing on the sexual relationship between Billie, the lesbian protagonist, and Spike, a “robo-sapien,” I trace the couple’s adventures in the neo-liberal “Tech City,” the anarchist “Wreck City,” and the unexplored “Blue Planet.” Winterson’s portrayal of the Tech City’s ambitions to colonize the Blue Planet effectively critiques the use of biotechnology as a tool for linear progress and scientific mastery. However, the antisocial, anti-progressieve modes of biotechnology practiced in the “Wreck City” are also suspiciously unsustainable. Against these extremes, Winterson reinvigorates Donna Haraway’s vision of the cyborg to reimagine an ironic but socially committed bio-technics. Ultimately, I argue that the novel’s ending—with Billie and
Spike’s arrival on a prehistoric Earth (The Blue Planet)—recognizes biotechnology as a form of historical repetition with a difference. Escaping both the linear utopianism of scientific mastery and the socially dystopian vision of libertarian resistance, Winterson identifies a prosthetic strategy for queering evolution through feminist experimentation.
Chapter One

A Feeling of Attachment:

The Posthuman Politics of Fences in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*.

In a key scene near the end of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy H. and her friend Tommy are driving quietly on an “obscure back road” (272). They have just learned that, without “deferral,” they will have to surgically “donate” their internal organs as part of a shadowy, omnipresent “organ donation programme” (272). The program raises human clones to harvest their body parts, and whatever else there is to learn about this obscure health care system, Kathy and Tommy prove the program makes no exceptions for clones that are educated, creative, in love or otherwise exhibit the symptoms of human individuality. Kathy realizes that even though she and her fellow clones have been allowed to travel more-or-less undetected in mainstream society, their difference has been stalked so that at any instant they might be culled from the world. As Kathy muses: “that night it seemed these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafes were for everyone else” (273). This two-tiered network of roads—one fully-fueled by the commercial speed of “super cafés,” the other hidden and slow—becomes an analogy for the two-tiered health care system they’re trapped in, suggesting they can neither move fast enough to escape the path constructed for them, nor stop the planned propulsion toward their deaths.

Nevertheless, moving slowly on this “obscure back road,” Tommy does abruptly ask Kathy to pull the car over. He gets out and walks into the “blackness,” where he begins unaccountably to scream and curse (273). Kathy follows him into the dark.
I couldn’t really see anything, and when I tried to go towards the screams, I was stopped by an impenetrable thicket. Then I found an opening, and stepping through a ditch, came up to a fence. I managed to climb over it and I landed in the soft mud. (274)

This dark terrain, uneven and barricaded, is difficult to traverse. Unlike the smooth surface and mechanical speeds of the motorway, this “impenetrable thicket” is “soft” with an organic fleshiness. The mud sticks to their feet as they climb over the fence into a cow field. “The wind here was really powerful, and just pulled at me so hard, I had to reach for the fence post” (274). If, from the outside, the fence poses an obstacle, from the inside it becomes a crutch to hold Kathy upright. Indeed, from every angle the fence works to situate and describe their bodies. In relation to the fence and the manure-rich territory that the fence inscribes, Kathy and Tommy’s bodies become increasingly encumbered: “I tried to run after him, but the mud sucked my feet down. The mud was impeding him too.” As Tommy shouted, he was “flinging his fists and kicking out…[and]…when he kicked out, he slipped and fell out of view into the darkness” (274). There is a great comic physicality to this scene, two bodies clutching and falling under the moonlight, mired in cow shit. Significantly, the fence here proscribes an “animal space” that is also experienced as a sort of over-embodiment. The material body is heavy with all that actually sticks to it, all that “dark matter” which breaches boundaries between species, gets under the fingernails or into the stomach via hamburgers served up at “super cafés” along the motorway. Indeed, these cows are ghostly figures that, just like the clones, scream and shit until their bodies are milked, slaughtered and reprocessed for the pit-stop eatery or the local hospital, respectively. The fence here powerfully assembles a conjunction between the clones’ bodies in the health care system, the cows’ bodies in an industrial food system, and the dark, sticky aesthetic of abject materiality that cloaks both systems in darkness.
Eventually Kathy manages to grab ahold of Tommy; he stops screaming, and they embrace for a moment. Along with the emotional attachment they achieve, there is a substrate of manure that also, literally, attaches them, not only to each other, but also to the uncanny symbiosis of a cow’s two-stomachs filled with billions of micro-organisms. As if to sever the frightening over-attachment of the “soft mud,” Kathy teases Tommy, “you stink of cow poo,” clearly marking that it is “you” (not me, not we) who “stink” like an animal, like shit (274). Here Kathy’s friendly jab parodies the neo-humanist rejection of the clones as soulless, animal life, even though human clones are, by definition, positively the same as humans; they pose a difference that is not one, as Lucy Irigaray might put it.

Therefore, the scene in the cow field illustrates one of the novel’s central contradictions. Despite presenting the reader with ever more sites of embedded attachment, Ishiguro also dramatizes the violent disavowal of such prostheses. Although the clones’ organs are literally embedded inside human bodies, the clones are also excised from a political system reserved for humans. While the brightly lit super cafés and highways promise new public speeds of mobility and exchange, they also cast dark shadows over the less-than-human back roads that fuel this promise. I argue that, in this way, Ishiguro uses the clones, especially the narrator, Kathy, to diagnose a symptomatic subjectivity that plagues contemporary politics. Buried in animal manure, having become a fenced object of consumption, Kathy nevertheless abjectly displaces her non-human attachments onto Tommy: “you stink of cow poo.” Here she represents a torqued subjectivity that uses a neo-humanist reaction to bypass the recognition of the non-human relations that situate her (posthuman) body within the world.
Although the fence around the cow field organizes a set of key conjunctions within the novel, it is neither the first nor the final fence to arrange the bodily subjectivities of the clones within *Never Let Me Go*. In its formal composition as a line, boundary, enclosure or path, the figure of the fence becomes a motif throughout the novel for diagramming the various spatial arrangements, represented or invisible, that dictate who moves where (inside or outside) and various cultural values (what counts for what). In this way fences are figures for an organizational force that can then distribute, care, protect, jail and guide bodies according to different discourses of knowledge. In *Never Let Me Go* the fence functions as a post to hold up a series of changing regimes of power and resistance.

To argue against the depoliticized logic of a neo-humanist response to biotechnologically created bodies, this chapter tracks three major iterations of the fence within *Never Let Me Go*. Throughout the novel, the fences serve as signposts, grounding the novel within the thematic territories it seeks to traverse. Indeed, at each fence, the reader confronts a liminal edge in the novel’s representational structure; therefore, these are fences to climb, sit on, peer over and sometimes cut. As a motif in the novel, the fence reappears as a figurative echo, always the same fence, always a different fence. By emphasizing the contextual differences between each fence, I hope to draw out the changing significance of the clones’ bodies as they move from their childhood boarding school to their post-adolescent lives as “carers” and “donors” within the diffuse health care system. Across these transitions, I diagnose a historically specific neo-humanist subjectivity that emerges as the clones uncomfortably transition from a disciplinary architecture of fenced enclosures to a prosthetic regime of mobile and open fences. As both a
circulating and encircling figure, the fence not only structures Ishiguro’s investigation of clones in “England, late 1990s,” but it also structures my analysis of the political arrangements that exclude biotechnologically created bodies from sites of power.

The first of the three major fences is located at Hailsham boarding school where the clones spend their entire childhoods ringed inside a fenced institution. Here they are governed by a traditional humanist ethos committed to enriching students’ minds and valuing individualistic creativity. I will argue, however, that *Never Let Me Go* uses the familiar trope of the fenced boarding school to deconstruct the historically intertwined relationship between specific disciplinary techniques, particularly those of enclosure, and the production of the human soul—above and against other animals, machines or less-than-human species. The clones are trained to accept a form subjectivity that emphasizes creativity, autonomy, originality and individuality. Indeed, within the fenced institution, such a hidden psychic kernel or individualized soul becomes the sign not only of discipline but also a sign of human exceptionalism. Responding to Michel Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary institutions, I will argue that although such institutional forms of power persist today, alternative architectures of power and subject formation are steadily replacing the “disciplinary fence” as such.4

Indeed, after the clones leave Hailsham, they also leave behind a rigidly fixed form of inhabitation and begin to live in increasingly mobile ways. Within the diffuse health care system, they travel incessantly around the country, from hospitals to clinics to shopping centers.

---

4 Gilles Deleuze’s “Postscript a Society of Control,” Michael Hardt’s “The Withering of Civil Society,” Beatriz Preciado’s “Pharmaco-Pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology,” and Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” all, in their own way, argue that we’ve entered a post-disciplinary society.
to cafés; they consume potent chemical fuels, caffeines and gasolines, and, in turn, are themselves consumed by organ removal and exhaustion. On one such trip, several clones encounter a torn fence that opens onto an encroaching marshland. I argue, this liquid, muddy territory of (im)mobility, points to a form of “prosthetic hegemony” that does not so much enframe the clones’ from the outside as it directly attaches to or merges with their bodies, often from the inside. The torn fence opens new forms of mobility and attachment, and it proscribes a pathway rather than a boundary. Even the solidity of the ground itself is mobilized as it absorbs water from below and slowly consumes the sinking clones’ feet from above. In this way the “prosthetic fence” prefigures an interoperable attachment of mostly small, mass-produced objects that travel with, inside and through bodies on-the-go. The clones’ hold on to and are held by technologies that merge with the moving body: small, mass produced objects, like cassette tapes, are held close as kin or limb, and insinuating technologies, like popular sitcoms, hold together and modulate the clones’ social relationships without them even being aware of it. These forms of power are prosthetic because they attach to the body, not by seeking a hidden psychic core, but by modifying the body’s social connections or capabilities by altering the body itself. For instance, the health care system that governs the clones’ movements during this period is a network of small, ubiquitous institutions (clinics, labs, hospitals, centers and pharmacies) that project hegemonic control over various prosthetic interconnections, monitor circulation, and proscribe mobility. Unlike the disciplinary architecture of fenced enclosures, prosthetic hegemony seeks to intensify the scope of power by tearing open the fences and turning them into pathways which can direct flows of movement and attachment.
But this historical and metaphorical argument about the transition from disciplinary to prosthetic regimes is really only the backdrop for a more entangled “litterary” problem: the formation of a reactionary, neo-humanist fence, which filters human from non-human life. The final sections of the novel are filled with the imagery of litter, but these references are only crystallized on the novel’s final page, when Kathy encounters a line of fencing that bisects a flat field and snags pieces of litter blown by the wind. But “litter” has two meanings in this context, functioning both as a word for trash and also for animalistic mass-reproduction; in this way, “litter” becomes a sign for the troubles facing posthuman politics. The fence on the final page of the novel works as a filter to sort out less-than-human life from the flow of human affairs, and therefore represents the imposition of a neo-humanist division between humans and other species.

And herein lies a crucial disjunction within contemporary forms of neo-humanism. On the one hand, without the veil of a disciplinary humanism to affirm their individualities, Kathy and her classmate Ruth become depressed by the prosthetic systems of attachment which make their bodies so readily consumable. Kathy, in particular, expresses great melancholic nostalgia for the safety and community of Hailsham’s humanist habitat. Keith McDonald argues that “there is little hope or interest in life after the boundaries of Hailsham” in large part because the clones, and especially Kathy, have “internally normalized” their status as exceptional students and so “remain passively in the grip of [their sense of] duty” (78). Kathy’s tragic nostalgia, however moving, is nevertheless an ineffectual form of resistance because it merely reinforces the same humanist legacy that underpins the disqualification of clones from the normal human
population. Kathy is a well-trained humanist trapped in a posthuman body, a predicament that creates, as McDonald puts it, “the relentlessly bleak tone of the novel” (78). Indeed, the combination of humanist cultural traditions and new prosthetic economies works in tandem to produce a neo-humanist political limit around which surplus (or less-than-human) bodies can be commodified.

Still, litter also refers to a positive form of non-human reproduction where excessive bodies are not trapped in a negative, “less-than-human” formulation, but instead can actively articulate their own kinship relations, their own evolutionary histories. The clones cherish mass-produced objects (cassette tapes, pencil boxes and magazine pictures) because, in part, they themselves are also mass-reproduced and, therefore, share an uncanny cyborgian genealogy with these objects. As Deborah Britzman points out, *Never Let Me Go* “can be read as a commentary on…the carnival of the internal world of object relations that can imagine the society which invents them” (309). I argue that the series of small drawings littered throughout the text to indicate scene breaks further crystallizes such a “litterary” re-imagining of society from the point-of-view of the clones. Although Kathy apparently narrates the story, these contrapuntal drawings of “mechanical-animals” are Tommy’s creation; his illustrations open a small but potentially powerful “litterary” aesthetic and an affirmative vision of prosthetic posthumanism, which I will explore in the final section of this chapter.

**Hailsham: The Disciplinary Fence**

For Michel Foucault, “there are two images… of discipline. At one extreme, the
discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution [and]...at the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism” (*Discipline and Punish* 209). The discipline-blockade refers to an architecture of enclosure that makes individuals and individuality visible through the dispersal of bodies within a partitioned space. The blockade begins with the “specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” and then uses this institutional wall to further divide and define its internal spaces (*Discipline and Punish* 141). By contrast, the “discipline-mechanism” captures the broader social effects of living amid multiple disciplinary institutions. When the school, factory, hospital, military and prison all adopt a micro-economy that judges “individuals” by “assessing their acts with precision,” then the disciplinary practices of ritualized surveillance and hierarchical classification become embedded in the skeletons, muscles and language of workers, students, soldiers and patients. In other words, the discipline-mechanism is a “society of discipline” that emerges when the subject “inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles [as the omnipotent judge and the exposed inmate]; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (*Discipline and Punish* 202-03). Both of these architectural and subjectifying elements of disciplinarity are developed in the image of Hailsham as a boarding school.

Although isolated in a remote countryside, Hailsham’s territory is physically defined by a fenced perimeter, an architecture of enclosure that maps the students’ emotional and intellectual boundaries. The “horror stories” that circulate between students about the fence are illustrative of a discipline-blockade’s multi-valent powers (50). One boy, who had “run off beyond the Hailsham boundaries,” was found “two days later...tied to a tree with [his] hands and feet
chopped off,” while a young girl who “climbed over a fence just to see what it was like outside…wasn’t allowed” to reenter (50). The lesson here is clear: the fence functions to protect your bodily integrity and guarantee the recognition of your individuality. Only within this disciplinary space can your body and identity remain safely intact and visible. Like an enveloping mirror, the fence regulates and standardizes the body-image of all those interred.

Furthermore, the custodial power of the school’s organizing limit makes the students visible in relation to forms of classificatory knowledge. When the fence surfaces again during a literature lesson, it is clear that the Manichean line that physically encloses the institution also produces representational dichotomies.

We’d been looking at some poetry, but had somehow drifted onto talking about soldiers in World War Two being kept in prison camps. One boy asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified…[then] Laura… did a hysterical impersonation of someone reaching out and getting electrified. For a moment things got riotous, with everyone shouting and mimicking touching electric fences. (78)

Here, the students enact a relation to the imprisoned soldiers without really knowing it. Or rather, they seem to know what is yet unthinkable to them. Laura expresses the students’ intensive knowledge of bodies at the threshold of their recognizability, knowledge that Hailsham’s fence has inscribed on the clones’ bodies. The voltaic power of imprisoned bodies can be felt, if not represented, throughout the institutional field. Importantly, however, their teacher (and guardian), Miss Lucy, is troubled by her students’ reaction, and softly says, “it’s just as well the fences at Hailsham aren’t electrified. You get terrible accidents sometimes” (78). By
virtue of the classroom’s structural design Miss Lucy can see the “whole class in front of her”—she can classify, analogize and represent what is, at a phenomenological level, unknowable to her. Namely, she can think the political analogy between the prison camp and Hailsham. From her position in the disciplinary architecture, peering above and beyond the fence, her students’ relation to the outside world is visible; Hailsham’s participation—as a clone rearing facility—in the Organ Donation Programme is knowable, and its analogical fit to the harshest of disciplinary institutions is representable.

But the perimeter of the Hailsham plot is only part of the disciplinary-blockade. This enclosure must be multiplied and internalized if it is to produce unique subjectivities. The students’ pent up energies must be sequestered, normalized and productively redirected. Therefore, Hailsham’s physical containment inscribes a whole table of psychological and political boundaries. Again and again, Kathy comes up against a representational line or territory that threatens to destabilize her institutional identity. For instance, when the students become curious about where Madame takes their artwork, they immediately sense that “to probe any further…would get us into territory we weren’t ready for” (37, my emphasis). Similarly, when they wonder why it is strictly prohibited for them to smoke, they still “knew just enough to make [them] wary of that whole territory” (69, my emphasis). Hailsham’s territorial fence reproduces itself by mapping knowledge into representable and unrepresentable spaces. In this way, visibility, movement, knowledge and identity become powerfully linked within the bounded logic of a disciplinary fence. The students sense “how beyond that line, there [is] something harder and darker,” and that they “were near territory [they] didn’t want to enter, and the
arguments would fizzle out” (55, 139). Just as “horror stories” about the fence kept the younger clones from physically escaping, the older clones express similar paranoia about the dangers outside knowledge might wreak on their identities. At some level, their bodies register what they cannot yet consider—that when they leave Hailsham they will cease being students, and their organs will be harvested.

The broader social effects of Hailsham’s internalized fencing appear through a series of institutional regulations that partition, classify, and survey the student body. Here, space and time are cordoned and monitored according to sex and age. Among other social effects, this arrangement of bodies in space limits sexual intercourse between students, even if it is not officially prohibited.

We couldn’t visit the boy’s dorms after nine o’clock, they couldn’t visit ours. The classrooms were all officially ‘out of bounds’ in the evenings, as were the areas behind the sheds and the pavilion. And you didn’t want to do it in the fields…because you’d almost certainly discover afterwards you’d had an audience watching…[with] binoculars. (95)

The darkening of various internal spaces through regulation forces the students’ bodies into a field of visibility, where there is always an “audience watching.” This specter of surveillance produces a form of quasi-public sexuality that can be measured against a normative arch. Just as Foucault describes in the “Repressive Hypothesis,” the students at Hailsham talk about sex routinely, even as the act is indirectly regulated: “If everyone who claimed to be doing it really had been, then that’s all you’d have seen when you walked around Hailsham—couples going at
it left, right and centre” (97). The persistent and normalizing discourse around sex, then, can be understood as the beginning of a disciplinary-mechanism or an instance of disciplinary architecture spreading its reach into the language, practices and subjectivities of its inmates.

Still, nowhere is the image of a disciplinary subjectivity more evident than in Hailsham’s emphasis on, and standardization of, “creativity” through the Exchange program. That is, “How you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’” (16). Artworks of all kinds, “paintings, drawings, pottery” and poetry were collected, evaluated and exchanged for tokens. “For each thing you put in, you were paid in Exchange Tokens—the guardians decided how many tokens your particular masterpiece merited” (16). In micro-economies of “awards and debits,” such as this one, there “operates a differentiation that is not one of acts, but of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value” (*Discipline and Punish* 181). The Exchange program gives the guardians a panoptic view over the students so they can envision, all at once, each individual soul as well as the population as a whole. The artwork, which is created under classroom supervision, is then evaluated according to a set of institutional norms that are economically reinforced. In effect, each student under this regime receives a number (a deviation from the norm) and a name (an individualizing expression of that number). In due course, the students internalize this standardizing gaze. It becomes the normative and unquestioned backbone of their social interactions. They even learn to police themselves by developing a “keen eye for pricing up anything [they] produced,” so the guardian’s “pricing eye” becomes part of the student’s priced “I” (38). And because, within this economy, the students
“decorate…[and] personalise” their dorm rooms with token artworks, they begin to demand and desire a form of regularity expressed in the name of difference (38).

Later in life, Kathy comes to realize that “the Exchanges had a more subtle effect on us all…being dependent on each other to produce stuff that might become your private treasures—that’s bound to do things to your relationships” (16). The “subtle” effect of becoming a docile subject of cultural norms is also an enduring one. And although Kathy and her mates do finally leave the architectural organization of power at Hailsham, they nevertheless struggle to shed their internalized subjectivities. They have been systematically educated to pursue enfranchisement in humanity through the appreciation and production of normative culture. Thrust into a health care system that refigures the value of the human, Kathy, “heroically” never lets go of her humanist upbringing, even as it is severely torqued.

Species of Discipline and Spider Webs

Because the status of the “human” is central to my argument, it is important to examine how it becomes intertwined with Hailsham’s disciplinary project. Alongside the elaboration of its formal features, Foucault argues that discipline is historically joined to the rise of the human sciences and a “genealogy…of the modern soul” (Discipline and Punish, 29). Because disciplinary architecture opens fixed bodies to discourses of “psyche, subjectivity, personality [and] consciousness”—not to mention the libido, masculinity and femininity—discipline’s real power comes from its ability to measure, name and judge an internal, unique, and organizing kernel within each individual (Discipline and Punish, 29). In other words, disciplinary power comes from the production of knowledge about humans-as-individuals. Here each soul becomes
an imaginary landscape carved out by the bright light of human science and made, finally visible, against a topography of species “norms.” Man, then, “is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A ‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body” (Discipline and Punish 30). In this way, discipline is the basic operating mechanism for reproducing a form of humanist knowledge that continually tests and reaffirms a normalized image of the unique, undivided human soul. Discipline, in this regard, is species-test.

Hailsham’s Exchange program, of course, makes explicit the connection between the disciplinary soul and an image of the human as such. As Miss Emily explains near the end of the novel “we took away your art [to show to the general public] because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all” (260). The evidence of a soul is the essential element in Hailsham’s argument that clones be treated more “humanely.” Therefore, according to this formulation, the soul marks a form of interiority that is both the sign of the human and the sign of discipline. Implicitly, the Hailsham project asserts that disciplinary apparatus can produce subjectivities organized under the banner of the human—or rather discipline is the means for determining what counts as “human.”

However, it is at this point that Hailsham’s status as a disciplinary institution begins to unwind somewhat. Of course, Hailsham fails to reform the Organ Donation Programme and is eventually closed, but moreover, as the novel progresses, and the institution’s participation in the broader health care system is revealed, Hailsham looks much more like a laboratory investigating species-boundaries than a schoolhouse promoting the liberal arts. Indeed, by the end of the
novel, Hailsham ceases to be referred to as a “school” but instead, a well-intentioned “clone rearing facility.”

Nevertheless, Hailsham’s guardians are keen to remind their students that they are exceptional for being reared “as if” they were proper humans. These statements of exception persist, even late in the novel, when Kathy and Tommy visit Miss Emily to seek a deferral of their organ donations. Despite Hailsham having long since closed, Kathy and Tommy are reminded that “all around the country… [clones are] reared in deplorable conditions, conditions…Hailsham students could hardly imagine” (261). Indeed, Hailsham was the first clone-raising facility that, as Miss Emily puts it, “challenged the entire way the donations programme was being run … an example of how we might move to a more humane and better way of doing things” (260, 258). Significantly, the “humane” treatment of clones brings together the “conditions” of a clean and healthy environment with a liberal-arts curriculum. The “humane,” like discipline, begins with a basic management of the body by controlling the “conditions” of its confinement, which, in turn, makes possible the celebration of expressive interiorities—creativity, individuality and originality. The “humane,” then, is a procedure of transformation, a becoming-human and not necessarily an end in itself. Miss Emily illustrates this point when she explains how Hailsham meant to “demonstrate to the world that if students [clones] were reared in humane, cultivated environments, it was possible for them to grow to be as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being” (260). Within this disciplinary apparatus, at the far-end of the “humane” is the sensitive and intelligent “ordinary human being.” Normal humans simply possess what must be actively cultivated elsewhere; they are the standard
around which a “humane” politics is formulated. Once again, Hailsham’s disciplinary work cannot be separated from this more general species-test.

Cary Wolfe critiques this same covert humanism as it appears within parts of the animal rights movement. In the “animal rights philosophy of Peter Singer and Tom Regan,” for instance, “our responsibility to the animal other is grounded…in the fact that it exhibits in diminished form qualities, potentials or abilities that are realized to their fullest in human beings” (53). For Wolfe, this is a poor method for confronting the “question of the animal” because it continues to map forms of life within a modernized great chain of being. Such an anthropocentric regime produces a political ontology of sameness that measures all forms of life according to their likeness to an idealized human. Ironically, this form of animal liberation treats animals as poorly copied human clones, basically human but without the same level of development. Not only does this erode real species differences by positioning all species in relation to a single and unquestioned “human” value, but it also qualifies and contains the “rights” of various human others. Wolfe persuasively argues that linear and anthropocentric models of human-animal gradation only function to co-opt the importance of other differences and predetermine the signification of difference more generally. Any difference, and especially inter-human difference, is subject to a species positioning within humanist discourse and can therefore be hierarchically graphed as a symptom of abnormality, animality or soullessness. The “question of the animal,” then, is fundamentally a social question, where the social must include but cannot be exhausted by human relations. But moreover, as Wolfe points out, this is a question that must not only be asked by humans about animals but must also be posed by
animals to humans.

Indeed, an “animal-question” of this kind is posed early in *Never Let Me Go* when Ruth suggests that Kathy and their friends surprise one of Hailsham’s administrators, Madame, to see if she’s “scared” of the students. Even as Hailsham is bent on determining the student’s “humanity,” the students plan their own inquiry of Hailsham’s human authorities. It is well known that Madame regularly visits the school to inspect and collect the students’ best artwork, as judged by Hailsham’s ever-present guardians.

The plan we’d come up with to test Ruth’s theory was very simple: we—the six of us in on it—would lie in wait for Madame somewhere, then ‘swarm-out’ all around her, all at once. We’d all remain perfectly civilised and just go on our way, but if we timed it right…we’d see—Ruth insisted—that she really was afraid. (34)

Already in the planning stage, there is a tension between “swarming” and remaining “perfectly civilized.” The “swarm” recalls an animal collectivity. Bees, flies and wolves swarm, according to instinctual, bodily organization. There is no uniform individual subjectivity here, but rather, like Deleuze description of a pack of wolves, there is “an intensity, a band of intensity, a threshold of intensity” (Deleuze, Thousand Plateaus 31). In contrast, to be “civilized” requires an individual replication of standardized practices. The “swarm” is a flash of intensity meant to excite Madame’s unpracticed response, even as it is immediately concealed by civilized behavior. The students’ test depends upon perceiving something non-disciplined, non-linguistic and non-unified in Madame. They are not interested in Madame’s assured outward performance, nor are they even interested in her exoskeletal composure. Instead, they
seek a relay from her liquid body – her pulse, her nerves, her adrenaline. To test Madame’s reaction is to seek a bodily disturbance, a modulation or interruption amid her organs. It is to excite the swarm of animals in her.

And this works; Madame is scared of them. “She didn’t shriek, or even let out a gasp. But we were all keenly tuned into picking up her response…[and] the shudder she seemed to be suppressing” (35). Kathy and her friends are shocked not only because they find that “Madame was afraid of [them],” but moreover, they are shocked by the unusual fear they seem to arouse in Madame. “She was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of a spider. We hadn’t been ready for that. It had never occurred to us to wonder how we might feel, being seen like that, being the spider” (35).

It is interesting to ask why the spider, in particular, is used here to describe a fear of clones? The spider’s relation to the human body is complex. On the one hand, the spider’s supposed lack of subjectivity, its radical species difference, serves as a justification for violently killing it. An arachnid’s life is hardly a life at all. This justification, however, elides a deeper fear that, although spiders inhabit a radically different form of life, they are nevertheless capable of, in some phenemenological unimaginable way, “thinking” nevertheless. The spider’s web, for example, is at once inhuman and intelligent. The chaotic materiality of the earth is transformed and territorialized, by the spider, in a way that resists hierarchy. The spider exhibits a complexity that cannot be reduced to a great chain of being or any linear organization of life where man stands firmly at one or another pole. The spider’s web suggests a field of relations between living bodies. A spider web might create a living connection between a ceiling and a
wall or a tree and a leaf or a car seat and rearview mirror. These assemblages threaten to
decenter the great chain of being with new axis of meaning, value and kinship. The compulsive
craving for spiders as a validating symbol of one’s metaphysical
superiority serves to preempt a confrontation of the human and their de-centered relation to
spiders, making the ability to quickly kill a spider proof enough of one’s metaphysical
superiority. In horror movies, spiders often attack when someone is sleeping or unconscious; the
fear is that the spider will crawl unnaturally close to the human, perhaps even enter (or merge
with) the human, that the material creature will find an opening (perhaps the mouth) in the
territorial boundary between human life and animal existence, that the human will be caught in a
web of unusual connections.

For Madame and others, the clones’ bodies are caught precisely in this inhuman web of
animal life, and they seek, through discipline, to reorganize the clones’ kinship within a humanist
chain of being. But as posthuman or cyborg bodies, the clones do, indeed, represent a new trans-
species kinship web. Like the OncoMouse and Dolly, the clones “belong to a new order of
animate, trans-viable, existence that is defined by being designed and made, or grown and built,
rather than born and bred” (Franklin 28). In the old model of kinship through sexual heredity,
these clones are indeed orphans, but when somatic cell nuclear transfer becomes the “technique
to transfer genetic traits nongeneologically,” a new webbing of kinship emerges between sheep,
mice, humans, cows and the transgenetic, trans-species code that connects them all (Franklin 28).
In many ways, Never Let Me Go can be read as the story of Hailsham’s failure to restore an
effectual image of human dignity as the technologies for managing material life undergo a
serious transmutation. After all, when the clones’ trans-genetic organs are themselves
transplanted into sick human bodies, the inhuman web of trans-kinship only further infests an increasingly posthuman assemblage of prosthetic bodily exchange.

The Open Fence

After Kathy and her classmates leaves Hailsham, the school bankrupts and closes, permanently stifling and stirring the clones’ deep-seated desire to “return home.” Indeed, “Never Let Me Go” can be read as the banner expression for this desire to stay within Hailsham and preserve all the values it comes to represent. As Kathy notes, “it definitely felt like Hailsham’s going away had shifted everything around us,” imbuing Hailsham’s demise with the historical significance of “a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes…But a harsh, cruel world” (213, 272). If Kathy and her friends were encouraged to think of themselves as “students” at Hailsham, then once they join this new world they inevitably become “clones.”

Of course, such systemic change does not occur in a single instant, even if it can be reduced to a single image. It is incremental, uneven, and filled with retrograde movements. Nevertheless, new symptoms are immediately evident. For instance, when the clones arrive at the cottage they undergo a process of apparent deregulation. That is, their bodies are no longer consolidated and recognized by the walls of an institutional plot. They can move: “If you’d told me … that within a year, I’d not only develop the habit of taking long solitary walks, but that I’d start learning to drive a car, I’d have thought you were mad” (118). Previously, Kathy would have found the idea of her body in motion (either by motorization or contemplation) to be a sort of maddening freedom. Here, with the introduction of cars to an environment without
boundaries or rules, subjectivity is no longer predicated on remaining more or less observably fixed, but rather becomes increasingly flexible and floating. Moreover, once the clones leave the cottages to become “carers and donors” at multiple hospitals, clinics, and centers all around the country—once their internal organs are freed from the enclosed architecture of their skin—they again, experience an intensification of bodily mobility in relation to a world-system.

Central to my reading, then, is a scene where Kathy takes Tommy and Ruth into the woods, past a torn fence, to see an old, marooned boat. Here, they “came to a barbed wire fence, which was tilted and rusted, the wire itself yanked all over the place” (222-223). Chemically transformation by oxidation and loosened by a moving ground, this fence, which once posed a uniform impediment, now reaches out “all over the place” for balance. Unlike the disciplinary fence, this fence is embedded by all it touches, the touch of water and soil, the touch sought by its wild stretching. And while its dilapidation is clearly compounded by the “cracking…[and] crumbling” boat, which Kathy imagines “is what Hailsham looks like now,” these images of corrosion should not be read simply as signs of institutional death and decay (224). In fact, the fence has not vanished; on the contrary, it has been “yanked all over the place,” extending its reach to prescribe pathways rather than perimeters.

Once the clones pass through this permeable membrane they encounter a new zone of ecology at work, a liminal space where chemical actions are marshaled for economic purposes. Not long ago, the woods must have extended further…ghostly trunks poking out of the soil…when we started to move toward the boat, you could hear the squelch under our shoes. Before long I noticed my feet sinking beneath the tufts of grass. (224)
While this unsettled and unsettling margin does represent a new and severe form of immobility, it is also powerfully absorbed by the forces of mobility. The countermovement of the marsh encroaching and “sinking,” emerges as both the limit to and extension of mobility’s carbon footprint as sea-levels rise due to global warming. Illustratively, while standing in the marsh, Ruth remembers her dream of being safely trapped in Hailsham during a flood, “rubbish floating by under [her] window, empty drinks cartons, everything” (225). These drifting “drink cartons” clearly juxtapose the marooned boat, but they also tug on the dream-logic of the swamped tree stubs and the ghostly “life-cycle” of reprocessed paper. Therefore, the open movement of the torn fence and encroaching sea in the context of ever expanding trade routes, massive migrations of human capital, and global warming troubles any preservationist or originalist notion of “nature” or originality. Here, a static “nature” can not ground political orders because “nature” itself is everywhere touching and being touched by open systems of consumption and mobility. Indeed, in contemporary neo-liberal and biopolitical regimes, with the imperative to ‘make live’ or manage life, natural cycles and economic cycles are unquestioningly fused together.

For this reason, the image of decay that connects the fence, boat, trees, Hailsham, and ground should not be read as merely a representation of loss. Instead, these symbols of discipline and nature “decay” into the chemical waters of various supply lines that seek to manage their flows. Of course, this is not to deny that this scene forecloses the possibility of a

---

5 Rebecca Walkowitz draws out a similar notion of mobility and circulation in relation to the publication of Never Let Me Go itself. As a piece of contemporary “world literature,” Ishiguro’s novel was published nearly simultaneously in “Spanish, Danish, Polish, English, German and several other languages” (224). In this way, not only does the novel lack any fixed linguistic “nature” but it also travels globally; this is the context of global circulation and transformation in which the novel as an object is embedded.
“pastoral escape.” It many ways it does. But even more importantly, the very idea of escaping to a place has been radically altered by the promise of an escape through sheer mobility. Within the novel, there is nowhere specific for the clones to escape to; only the speed of circulation seems to offer an intensive sense of escape and a “deferral” of death. It is unsurprising, then, that as the clones prepare to leave the marsh Kathy and Ruth notice an airplane overhead, apparently presenting them with a new threshold of escape through mobility: “At first I thought she was staring at the boat, but then I saw her gaze was on the vapour trail of a plane in the far distance, climbing slowly in the sky” (225). The attention of their gaze encompasses both the plane’s flight and the trace of fuel it leaves behind. This image of “vaporized” fossil fuels and soaring mobility is contiguous with the expanding marsh and the sinking fossilization of the boat, fence, and clones. And while the plane appears distant, the “vapour trail” traces the clones’ own sense of mobility to their residual role as a reprocessed fuel for the extension of another’s animation. Whether “sinking” into the soil or “climbing slowly in the sky,” mobility is continually coded as either fuel or life. Yet, this distinction is ultimately precarious. Never Let Me Go imagines both a health care system where all mobility threatens to become the fuel for “life” and a system where “life” becomes synonymous with mechanical animation.

**The Service-Station, Chemical-Substances and Subjectivity**

When Kathy leaves the cottages, she becomes a “carer” within the health care system. Carers are clones who provide emotional support to “donors,” clones already undergoing surgery, but they are also cyborgs who have become inseparable from their cars, “car-ers.” As a
carer “you’re always in a rush…you spend hour after hour, on your own, driving across the
country, centre to centre, hospital to hospital, sleeping in overnights” (207). Although Kathy
travels beyond and between strict institutional enclosures, this range of space does not, in any
case, provide her with more freedom. Mobility becomes a coercive force that keeps her traveling
through a continuous network of bodies being opened and excavated for their vitality. While
Kathy certainly becomes much more mobile, she also becomes the fuel that circulates and
animates the health care system.

Moreover, the motorways that connect various clinics and hospitals are neither empty nor
free; they are saturated with micro-institutions of power “to go”. Littered with small malls,
drugs, enhanced beverages and the fractured daydreams of possible identities, these motorways
increasingly ensnare bodies with a power that is consumable, transportable, and convenient.
Kathy repeatedly recalls “having coffee in a service station, staring at the motorway through the
big windows” (116); “more and more these days…drinking [her] coffee in front of a huge
window in a motorway service station (45); and “go[ing] over it…while sitting at quiet tables in
service-station cafés” (252). At such “service stations” or “super cafés,” the “car-er’s” body is
physiologically transformed to keep moving. We buy small, highly-designed and digestible
technologies to travel with us, inside us: extra-strength ibuprofens, sugar and salt snacks,
nicotines, flavored gums, energy drinks, and colorful, carefully designed plastics. And perhaps
above all, we, like Kathy, buy potent mixtures of caffeine and gasoline to spur faster speeds of
transportation and deeper zones of transfixation along the bio-chemical motorways that link the
health care system.
Even more significantly, the institutional and disciplinary boundaries between service stations and hospitals begin to blur, each offering up similar chemical transfusions to keep our bodies moving. The political power to go (convenient power/ potestas) is also the raw power to keep going (potenza). At every exit ramp, the ignition of an eco-chemical fuel is modulated into bio-chemical prosthesis. For example, enormous quantities of genetically reproduced coffee beans, often cloned, are reprocessed to travel thousands of miles and almost effortlessly spike the blood of hundreds of millions of bodies on the go. All along the health care motorway, the raw power to keep moving becomes the power to keep living and to keep making a living. In this way, *Never Let Me Go* imagines a sort of prosthetic biopolitics where the metabolic powers of life are modulated by continually altering bodies from the inside out.

Indeed, by targeting the soft and wet chemical body, the bio-chemistry of mobility becomes metamorphic. As opposed to fixed disciplinary subjectivities whose identity is core to their productivity, prosthetic subjects are addicts; they are hyper, distracted subjects governed by their manic chemical states, their affectations. The ontology or market value of a substance in motion is mutable. When “walking along the windswept car park of the service station” Kathy spots “Laura, sitting behind the wheel of one of the parked cars, looking vacantly towards the motorway” (208). This is a moment of recognition in a drive-through landscape. But Laura, like Kathy, doesn’t like being “bumped out of [her] daydream” (209). You become “too exhausted to have a proper conversation…the long hours, the traveling, the broken sleep have all crept into your being and become part of you, so everyone can see it in your posture, your gaze the way you move and talk” (207-208). Unlike a docile body inscribed with power through focused
external attention, these bodies are broken open and “crept into” with micro power, with the continuousness of invasive force. Rather than targeting our bones or muscles, the microbiology of control targets our blood sugar levels, our heart rates, insulin, digestive enzymes—our cellular and liquid bodies. Mobility requires a chemical fuel that “becomes a part of you,” metamorphically, from the inside out. Beatriz Preciado calls these possessed bodies “pornographic subjects,” who are “defined by the substance (or substances) that dominate their metabolism” (108). But where Preciado’s focuses her examples on designed bodies (“silicon subjects”), the clones’ bodies are designed specifically to become the prosthetic substance for the re-design of other bodies. In a folding over of the prosthetic logic, the clones are not only infused with the substances of a “pornographic” life, but they are ontologically interpenetrated to become the pornographic substance itself, the substance to be metabolized.

Clearly, the chemical infusions that capture and mobilize the clones’ bodies represent a form of prosthetic technology that drains the posthuman subject of its agency. Furthermore, the novel purposefully obscures any direct insight into the design of the health care system beyond its biopolitical imperatives. If discipline offered us highly-visible and localized figures of authority to interrogate and strike against, the world of prosthetic interconnections is comparatively elaborate and remote. In the commotion of mobility and the disruption of fixed identities, the reader, like the clones, is left wondering whom to turn to for representation in a system so seemingly automated. In the next two sections, by exploring alternative models of kinship and affect, I hope to begin a process of slowly reading against the tide of inescapable control. We should also bear in mind that forms of prosthetic technology can be used for
multiple configurations and that not all resistance can or must return to the rigid formulations of “heroic” humanism.

**Wet Prosthetics and Vital Objects**

Donna Haraway’s focus on the intersection of post-disciplinary power and lived bodies in the “Cyborg Manifesto” proves especially pertinent (albeit divergent) to forms of posthumanism in *Never Let Me Go*. Under this regime, bodies are made available to new forms of coded knowledge, particularly the binary codes of computing and the DNA codes of all living species. The power inherent in the manipulation of bodies through coded imaging and splicing is the context within which cyborg politics is contested. The figure of the “cyborg” exhibits the ability to strategically open up relationships with others—and, indeed, embody those relations. A posthuman feminist-socialist politics is activated by finding new coded kinship relations with animals, machines and others. More radically, this has the potential to be a lived and embodied kinship or a kinship of partial subjectivities. Of course, Haraway imagines this possibility ironically and remains suspicious of a slew of capitalist or patriarchal configurations. Nevertheless, the implicit image of a “surgical” intervention in the construction of posthuman bodies makes her work particularly relevant to *Never Let Me Go*.

However, the differences between the figures of the “clone” and “cyborg” bodies could not appear starker. Where the cyborg emphasizes multiple differentiations between and within bodies, the clone, as a figure, imagines posthuman bodies as a repetition of the same—minus a human soul. The surgical interconnections and differentiations associated with cyborg bodies are antithetical to the mass reproduction associated with cloned bodies. Instead, clones point to a new vector of kinship grounded on asexual and commercial reproduction. Here the “vitality”
of the commercial product is affirmed, even as the “human clone” becomes objectified. In other words, the clone body is tied-up in a reconfiguration of fetishism.

In general, the clones from *Never Let Me Go* show great enthusiasm for mass-produced objects and images, and after they leave Hailsham, these items take on strong fetishistic attributes. Kathy reports, “even now, I like… a large store with lots of aisles displaying bright plastic toys, greeting cards, loads of cosmetics, maybe even a photo booth” (157). Obviously, the reader is meant to link these goods to the clones’ bodies, both of which are reproduced asexually and meant for commercial consumption. But, interestingly, these products all share a glossy coating of thin plasticity that produces a flexible and fleshy membrane. Although this does suggest a form of commodity fetishism—so that the object takes on a surplus of subjective qualities, and the subject, likewise, becomes objectified—it also points to a convergence of materiality at work. Here, “cosmetics” are merely an artful melting of the “bright plastic toy” onto the face. And the photo booth, in turn, strips a small and flat slice of ‘brightness’ from the fleshy plastic visage. It too is now wrapped in the membrane of a reproducible prosthetic flesh. This is fetishism in the age of plastic surgery, where the commodity becomes a wet-prosthetic and chemical membranes drip with global compatibility. Where Marx and Freud saw the fetish as a form of psychological displacement—be it a compensatory displacement of symbolic castration or an ideological displacement of one’s “real” relation to modes of production—the posthuman clones discover a new liveliness in mass produced objects. Indeed, mass reproduction becomes a genealogical node around which a distinctly consumerist vision of posthuman kinship is articulated. Because posthuman fetishism disrupts the human/non-human division that Marx and Freud use to disentangle fetishistic relationships, a contradiction emerges. Increasingly, as the extension or reproduction of life is intertwined with the mass reproduction of
commercial prosthesis, the materiality that constitutes the “human body” includes the liveliness of non-human prosthesis. From new portable dialysis machines to prosthetic legs for sprinting to fertility and erection technologies to smart phones, the fetish emerges as a feeling of attachment towards that which reproduces your life or is reproduced like you, as part of you.

Interestingly, however, mass reproduction has as much to do with the reshaping or mutability of mass as it has to do with the scale of reproduction or the simple repetition of a form. One of the major subplots in Never Let Me Go follows Kathy’s relationship to a cassette tape, specifically, track number three (“Never Let Me Go”) of Judy Bridgewater’s Songs After Dark. From the outset, the tape’s material reproduction is stressed: “I suppose it was originally an LP—the recording date’s 1956—but what I had was the cassette, and the corner picture was what must have been a scaled down version of the record sleeve” (67). Here, reproduction isn’t simply replication; it implies a commercial chain of reproductive change, “evolution” even, from record to cassette, charging the tape with an adaptive vitality. The cassette is smaller, more mobile, private, and unlike the record, it folds up and unspools deep inside a larger interlocking device. Even though Kathy owned the tape a “few years before Walkmans started appearing” at Hailsham, the tape’s dimensions allow it to infiltrate disciplinary monitors and produce an unseen privacy. By listening to it on a “portable cassette player” in her dorm room, and not on the “big machine in the billiards room” (70), Kathy is able to be “secretive about the tape.” She is secretive, in part, because the tape shows a picture of Judy Bridgewater smoking on the cover, which is strictly prohibited at Hailsham. But, in many ways, the tape’s very shape suggests a form of insertive and secret consumption. “Scaled-down” to fit in one hand, it is “wound to just that spot” (70) for producing a “private nook…out of thin air” (74). Indeed, the logic of the tape’s stealth and mobility implies an increasingly intimate interface with living bodies.
The tape’s function is legible in Kathy’s interpretation of the song “Never Let Me Go.”

I didn’t used to listen properly to the words…And what I’d imagine was a woman who’d been told she couldn’t have babies, who’d really wanted them all her life. Then there’s this sort of miracle and she has a baby…She’s so afraid something will happen, that the baby will be taken away from her. (70)

One interpretation of Kathy’s “misreading” here might relate the tape to the song as a “stand-in” for a psychological lack or wound. In classical psychoanalytic terms the image of the baby and tape would function, as Freud suggests, as a sort of female phallus, compensatory and full of neurotic suspension. Apart from the reductive phallocentrism of such a reading, Freud’s theory of fetishism also insufferably ensures an irrevocable loss at the heart of desire. For Freud, the fetish is always an imperfect or unsustainable compensation, always less-than the “real” or “original” loss. However, in a posthuman context, the clones’ fetishistic relation to mass-produced objects cannot be said to be merely compensatory or negative. Instead, there is an element of positive identification and non-displaced sexuality at work. The ghost of a long lost phallus need not triangulate the baby and tape, when the phallus itself belongs to an entirely different mode of reproduction. Indeed, the “miracle” of the baby already suggests an alternative source of fecundity. It emerges, like Kathy and the tape, asexually.

Reproductive kinship with commercial prosthetics brings fleshy assemblages alive and does offer a positive connection that promises to revalue the clones’ lives. The clones’ bodily affinity with mass-produced objects opens the door to a politics of materiality that re-imagines what counts as life or reproduction. It promotes a cyborgian sense of partial and interconnected bodily egos where agency is both embedded in and enhanced by a strong, indeed, embodied sense of community. I will return to this alternative posthuman politics at the end of the chapter,
but there is no use denying that, however much *Never Let Me Go* glimpses this garden of prosthetic life, it quickly turns away.

**Affect, Agency and “England, late-1990s”**

If Donna Haraway imagines genetic and informational codes as, at least potentially, producing a form of posthumanist agency in the figure of the Cyborg, then Gilles Deleuze, in “Towards a Society of Control” explores how these same codes can pool agency within corporate and capitalist bodies. Deleuze claims that post-disciplinary power operates by targeting a person’s “dividuality” or those distinctive and coded qualities that characterize a person’s liability or susceptibility. Here, bodies are represented algorithmically, not as a single position on a table, but as a probabilistic function of their credit score, cholesterol levels, GPS movements, browser cache and genetic profile over time and in movement. Therefore, these bodies (and the qualities within them) are malleable and searchable without recourse to a fixed conception of identity. What makes someone vulnerable to cancer or a particular advertisement is both a question of statistical extrapolation and deep embodiment. Therefore, governing such life systems by cross-referencing databases of movement, allows reclusive corporations, strategic advertisers, and paranoid defense departments to target bodies from the inside out. What do such bodies desire? How do they live? What makes them “at risk” or “risky”? How can such bodies be channeled? The biometric and socioeconomic character of a given population is now open to continual monitoring and modulation like never before.
*Never Let Me Go* explores these modulations of control in the affective quality of various social relations. First, consider Kathy’s job as a “carer” within the health care system. Carers are responsible for channeling the emotions of their fellow clones, called “donors,” whose organs are surgically removed over the course of several months or years. Typically, a clone will briefly serve as a “carer” before being called on to switch roles and donate. Kathy, however, serves as a carer for nearly twelve years before finally receiving her notice to prepare for donations. Her longevity of service as a carer might or might not have to do with the “fact they’ve been pleased with [her] work” (3). Who, exactly “they” are that provides Kathy with feedback remains vague, but Kathy does “boast” that hardly any of the clones in her charge have been “classified as ‘agitated,’ even after the fourth donation”; her donors tend to stay “calm” (3). Although the language of “classification” here might recall a disciplinary mode of identification, it is actually an echo filled with important distortions. Rather than training docile bodies to execute detailed sets of observable behaviors or psychoanalytically seeking to uncover some interior identity, the “carer” alters their patient’s state of being through emotional persuasion. Kathy has “developed a kind of instinct around donors. [She] knows when to hang around and comfort them, when to leave them to themselves; when to listen…and when just to shrug and tell them to snap out of it” (3). Her empathetic “instinct” aims neither at measuring behavior nor discovering identity, but instead at modulating the donors’ embodied feelings by sharing, listening, and strategically entering into her patients’ emotional lives. Therefore, Kathy’s humanist valuation of an internal identity is re-contextualized to become an instrument of non-individualistic control over the donor’s affective state.
In this medical context, Kathy’s affective powers actually bypass donors’
individual identities and therefore function much like a drug might. They generate a
feeling of social connection without actually recognizing the patient’s social identity. For
instance, Kathy recalls how a particularly ill donor, who had “just come through his third
donation,” asked her to recount her childhood experiences from Hailsham. It is not just
that the donor found Hailsham to be a “’beautiful place’” to hear about. Rather, as Kathy
explains:

What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to remember Hailsham,
just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and
so that’s what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they’d really
sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and
the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were
his. (5-6)

Effectively, this transplantation of memories, from Kathy to the donor, is accomplished
by blurring an individualistic form of identity through affective modulation. Certainly
Kathy’s memories represent a form of individualism, but perhaps more importantly they
produce autonomic and somatic reactions in the donor. Ultimately, it is the translation of
linguistic forms of representation into chemical or circulatory forms, into packets of
dopamine, that “calms” the patient and alters his internal bodily state. And it is the
patient’s affective state, his “calmness” and not his fixed identity, that matters most in the
operation of the health care system. Like the drugs, pain, and exhaustion he experiences,
these continually repeated memories are also meant to “sink in[to]” the patient’s body to
modulate its emotional state, its temperature. Indeed, the affective flow that constitute
this social relation between “carer” and “donor” might be characterized as a sort of medical procedure—a “clean” surgery to repair the patient’s feelings from the inside out. Just as Ritalin has replaced the disciplinary ruler to control the mood/behavior of school children or anti-depressants have partially disguised the rampant domestic violence that was once customary in subduing/disciplining wives, the Carer also works to control the patient’s mood by modulating their affective body.

By broadening our focus, it becomes clear that such affective modulations are very often technologically amplified to spread across targeted populations. Here, moods are shaped by advertisers and politicians to govern the (re)formation of various communities. Because the institution was centralized and rule-bound, “television at Hailsham was pretty restricted,” and everyone watched the same thing at the same time (121). But at the cottages, “there was an old set in the farm house and another in the Black Barn,” affording ample opportunities for private consumption (121). And so, while living at the cottages, Kathy quickly notices how “so many of [the veteran couples’] mannerisms were copied from the television…the way they gestured to each other, sat together on sofas, even the way they argued and stormed out of rooms” (120, 121). What is copied here are not identities or even behaviors as such, but affectations or ways of being. Unlike formal manners, these “mannerisms” do not self-consciously constrain social behavior so much as briefly structure an emotional expression. Where manners re-inscribe a symbolic order based on a hierarchy of fixed identities, “mannerisms” are contagious signals of affect modulated by the faint irony of an uncertain allusion. And it is this sense of reference within mannerisms that modulates its affect— not by containing it but by displacing it. For instance, “there was… this one gesture Ruth picked up from the
veterans” where she would tap Tommy on his elbow with her knuckles as away of saying goodbye (121). The tap-gesture refers to an affect that has been coded as a password. Affectations modify, in small and constantly changing ways, your expression of feeling and how those feelings register meaning for a period of time. The tap not only signals the entrance of Ruth and Tommy as a couple at the cottages, but it also brings that relationship into a market flux of affectations. It does not matter that “this custom had faded out by winter,” because the “gesture” is merely a fashion, a low-wattage electrification to sync the sitcom and cottage for one market cycle (121). Next season a new affectation will modulate the feeling of community as a demographically coded password.

Ultimately, however, Never Let Me Go is interested in depicting affective modulations in their severest form, as a technology for shutting down or denying the social ontology of specific populations. Rather than being an instrument for connecting communities, the modulation of affect can also constrict the affective flows constitutive of community. For instance, when Miss Emily explains how the Hailsham program failed she says,

That awful television series, for instance. All these things contributed, contributed to the turning of the tide… So long as the climate was in our favor, so long as a corporation or a politician could see the benefit in supporting us, then we were able to keep afloat…after the climate changed, we had no chance. (emphasis added, 264)

She continues later:
There was a certain climate and now it’s gone. You have to accept that sometimes
that’s how things happen in this world. People’s opinions, their feelings, they go
one way, then the other. It just so happens you grew up during a certain point in the
process.’ (emphasis added, 266)

The agents of power and the actual history of the institution’s failure are unnervingly
obscured by repeated references to the “climate” and “tide” of public opinion. Like the
language of “carers,” “donors,” and “completion,” these euphemistic terms tend to bypass
any sense of concrete agency. Even concrete factors, like the loss of corporate and
political support or the effects of a particular television show are glossed over as
“contributing” events in what is depicted as a more generalized shift in attitudes. Real
infrastructures of power cannot be easily mapped in this post-disciplinary space, so they
are often described in a vague language that combines commercial circulation with the
forces of environmental change. Miss Emily cannot really account for Hailsham’s
demise because its humanist ideals have not so much been actively rejected as swept
along.

This is not to say, however, that humanism has been swept away. After all, it is
precisely the ghostly image of speciesism which persists as a contradiction within the
health care system to justify the segregation of the clones. Here, a technologically
transformed humanism provides a species distinction that can constrict and exclude living
bodies from political representation.

You must try and see it historically…by the time people became concerned
about…about students, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared,
whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too
late. There was no way to reverse the process. How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. (262, 263)

This view is founded on a torqued or contorted subjectivity—caught somewhere between “the time people became concerned” and “too late.” Indeed, as the novel is set in the millennial fever of “England, late 1990s,” readers also arrive too late to their own historical moment. And if, as Rebecca Walkowitz argues, “seeing clones as humans is not the point” of the novel, and instead “we are urged to see humans as clones,” (226) then the humanist reader also arrives ill-equipped to represent how, in Miss Emily’s words, this “just so happen[ed]” (266). Like the clones who are simultaneously “told and not told” about being clones, readers, like Kathy, are left to reconstruct the always alreadyish “when” of their becoming posthuman (81).

If we accept Miss Emily’s urging to “try and see it historically,” we might, at first, make note of all the images of cloning taking place in late-1990s popular culture. From the rapper Eminem’s global hit “Will the Real Slim Shady Please Stand Up,” which mocked his fans’ propensity to dress and dye their hair like him, to the trendily reproduced “Rachel Haircut,” spawned by Jennifer Aniston’s sitcom character, to the wide-spread use of new mood controlling drugs like Prozac, Ritalin or Viagra, to a more generalized discourse about the homogenization of global culture due to a growing consensus around free trade and economic integration—all of these events (among many) conspire to remind us how central the figure of the clone was to the “irrational exuberance” of the late-1990s.
But in the United Kingdom, in particular, an actually existing clone emerged to crystalize what we were being “told and not told.” In 1997, Ian Wilmut and Keith Campbell of the Roslin Institute introduced Dolly the sheep to the public. Dolly’s image and story were broadcast around the world, and she quickly became a symbol for scientific innovation and hubris. In turn, these passions provoked an onslaught of new prohibitions and regulations around genetic experimentation. Significantly, Wilmut and Campbell “did not start out trying to clone a mammal…but to find a more efficient way to make a transgenic dairy animal that would carry and express a human gene…and produce] valuable human proteins” (Franklin 36). According to Sarah Franklin, “these proteins would then be used to make pharmaceutical products…for cystic fibrosis…and diabetes and hemophilia” (36). If we return then to Miss Emily’s “contributing” factors—the corporation, the politician and the television show—it becomes more clear how these ill-defined figures do indeed modulate the tide of feelings that constitute the political climate of “England, late-1990s.” By the time Dolly came out of her bio-corporate womb and appeared on global television it was “too late” for anything but rear-guard political measures. Only a reactionary neo-humanist response to ban human cloning could recursively hide the realization that we were already posthuman, already a trans-genetic flock of clones and cyborgs.

Indeed, only the image of the exceptional human, dramatically re-inscribed in the 2005 United Nations resolution against human cloning, could provide the necessary contradiction for breeding and killing clones. Just like the clones at Hailsham, this human public “has been told and not told. [They’ve] been told, but none of [them] really understand…and some people are quite happy to leave it that way” (81). Of course, like
the clones, this public is already posthuman—animated by prosthetics and mobile to the point of becoming fuel—but they hold on to their exceptionalism as long as humanly possible.

So long as the question is “are clones human,” the clones’ political fortunes will be subject to a feeling of the “human” that is fickle. Kathy addresses this problem when she says, “It might be just some trend that came and went…but for us, it’s our life” (266). A small but wide-spread affective spike in intolerance combined with a two percent dip in consumer confidence—these are biopolitical forces that ramble across populations with violent complexity. As a trend becomes a tremor, the mechanisms of affective modulation can become frighteningly immoderate. Where institutions (whether corporate or state run) seem to open up to allow for more mobility, they do so only because they know they can now grab hold of your body all the more tightly when and if the tide turns. We are subscriber-citizens who depend upon the social utility of a remote corporate infrastructure, our direct deposits, our passwords, our wireless signals, our medications phoned-in. For the clones, public opinion is not an amalgamation of rational actors, but a volatile and moody force that can suddenly contract and cut off their access to the resources of life.

The Litterary Fence and Two Visions of Posthuman Politics

*As Never Let Me Go* attempts to unwind the torqued subjectivities produced by the transplantation of Hailsham’s humanist values into a health care economy of consumption and mobility, the clones, and Kathy in particular, begin to understand their bodies as nothing more than tossed off disposable packaging, containing perhaps three or four consumable organs.
Indeed, the last quarter of the novel is brimming over with images of rubbish and trash, and the novel ends with a lengthy meditation on relationship between litter and life, as the clones encounter the novel’s *literary fence*.

I found I was standing before acres of ploughed earth. There was a fence keeping me from stepping into the field, with two lines of barbed wire, and I could see how this fence and the cluster of three or four tress above me were the only things breaking the wind for miles. All along the fence, especially along the lower line of wire, all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was like the debris you get on a sea-shore: the wind must have carried some of it for miles and miles before finally coming up against these trees and these two lines of wire. I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half-closed my eyes and imaged this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up . . . and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy…The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn’t let it—and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (288)

This third fence—after the fence around Hailsham and the dilapidated fence in the marsh—marks a new limit inscribed by the novel’s crushingly humanist turn. The fence here does not inscribe an interior space nor does it melt away into the environment; instead it stands steadily and arbitrarily on a totally smooth and flattened plane. These two wires function as a net to snag
fleshy trash that flies too speedily across the biopolitical boundary of life and death. Here the posthuman body emerges as the posthumous body, an abject composite of mobile materiality. Even Kathy’s repressed grief, then, is emptied out in the last sentence as she leaves to “wherever it was I was supposed to be,” imbuing the materiality of life, the it-ness of her I-ness, with a tremendous sadness (my emphasis, 288). Here, there is no agency, save the nameless call that supposes her to be somewhere else.

As Keith McDonald points out, “some readers…will undoubtedly find heroism in [Kathy’s] ability to recount her experiences in a world that goes so far as to disenfranchise her from the human mass, where she is reduced to a cog in a bioconsumerist culture” (81). Indeed, a reader no less than Ishiguro himself seems to endorse something like this tragic-heroism in an interview with Michael Silverblatt.

Even if the answer is a bad one, it might be better to ask certain questions…[to] think carefully about who you are…and maybe you get a sense of dignity from answering these questions… They [Tommy and Kathy] do ask these questions that the rest of the clones don’t ask…they find out a little bit more than everybody else and it doesn’t get them any further in any practical terms…except they have this knowledge…they at least they found out a little bit about who they were… Maybe that’s of some intrinsic value for human beings. (emphasis added, Bookworm 09/08/05)

In other words, even as Kathy comes to recognize the utter materiality of her life, she escapes this embodied truth through the “intrinsic” exception of that very recognition. Or as Earl Ingersoll puts it, the clones seem “intent on serving with distinction…because they believed that
if death is inevitable they could certify the value of their lives by dying with dignity and thereby
demonstrating their superiority to other animals. When the possibility of survival is denied the
next best hope often lies in avoiding the futile attempt to survive at the cost of one’s humanity”
(53). Such tragic-heroic humanism, however moving, is entirely complicit with “normal”
humans’ justification for killing clones because they lack the great, intangible soulfulness of
proper human beings. Giorgio Agamben critiques this perverse and recklessly negative
humanism as an “anthropological machine,” which “defines the human not through any nota
characteristica, but rather through his self-knowledge [so that]…man is the being which
recognizes itself as such, that man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be
human” (Agamben 26). One reading of Never Let Me Go, then, might see the novel as yet
another anthropological machine, enfranchising yet another minority group by depoliticizing
their political suffering with the tragic aesthetics of soulful humanity. Here, Kathy, the clone,
“must recognize [herself as]…non-human in order to be human” (Agamben 27). Ironically, by
becoming human her difference as a clone is erased in favor of an undifferentiated notion of
universal humanity.

But perhaps this too neatly resolves a novel that clearly critiques the constructedness of
the human soul. Here, the figure of the clone appears open, derivative, and in need of being
filled-in or substituted. Like the orphan-figure, the clones contain an easily activated search
engine to seek their “origins” or the “original” humans from whom they were cloned. However,
where these origins are foreclosed (aren’t they always), the engine becomes paranoid, exciting
multiple clues and proliferating analogical possibilities. The analogical clone, then, has a sticky
body image—linking, as it were, the analogical and the anatomical. Human-clone encounters are, therefore, scanned for possible partial matches. And since Ishiguro’s clones are situated in the recognizable social field of “England, late 1990s,” these analogical referents come into a sharp and fragmented focus as bits of overlapping social code. Indeed, the clones in Never Let Me Go refer to their suspected originals as “possibles,” highlighting a field of multiple dividual identifications.

Moreover, this analogical search engine moves only where it can within the novel’s social milieu, finding “possibles” in the maneuverable passageways of a stratified social terrain. And, because these clones are placed in the historical setting of “England, late 1990s,” the power of analogy is narrowed, intensified and fragmented. As the clones’ struggle to apprehend how and where their “difference” is socially tracked, they partially awaken to their torqued position within multiple cultural oppositions. The novel traces some of the discursive forces that code the clones’ bodies as non-human materiality (soul/body, human/animal); as exhibiting a non-sexually reproductive sexuality (hetero/queer); as instead performing a sacrificial reproduction as donors, affective labor, and carers (male/female); as unofficial laborers without recourse to economic opportunity or political rights (citizen/immigrant). These divisions are neither abstract nor symmetrical. Instead they are symptoms of what Sarah Franklin calls the “pejorative associations” of clones, where the term is used “to refer to illegitimate sexuality based on narcissistic identification (gay clones) and slavery (either as ‘slavish imitation,’ or in the association of clones with a worker class of slaves or drones)” (27). If, in the end, the clones do somehow attach themselves to the family of man, it is here, on the outskirts of the human, where
humans are treated as less-than-human, that they find a place to die with “dignity.”

In fact, after leaving Hailsham, the clones become obsessed with finding their “possibles.” Kathy explains, “since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life” (139). At the cottages the clones speculate intensely about where these “normal” people might be or what might be the significance of locating one. Despite deep uncertainty, “we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you’d get some insight into who you were deep down” (140). And for this reason, “when you were out there yourself—in towns, shopping centres, transport cafes—you kept an eye out for ‘possibles’—the people who might have been models for you and your friends” (139). Impossibly, then, the clones are compelled to find their “deep down” identity only as it appears on the surface of a social milieu. The implied promise of discovering one’s “possible” is not predicated on finding one’s genetic or biological identity, but rather on locating oneself within a social order.

In particular, Kathy’s strong sexual urges lead her to look through porn magazines to seek her “possible.” The intensity of Kathy’s sexual desires unnerve her, and she confesses to Ruth, “sometimes I just really, really need to do it” (128). Kathy uses this perceived propensity to search a population deemed likely to share her dividual quality. Not only does this analogize internet pornography’s powerful coding of various sexual acts, situations, qualities and bodies, but also forms of a more general social network. Kathy “moved through the pages quickly not wanting to be distracted by any buzz of sex coming off those pages. In fact [she] hardly saw the contorted bodies because [she] was focusing on the faces” (134). Ostensibly, Kathy is reading
against the pornographic effect. She is focused on faces, not genitals despite Tommy’s estimation that “it doesn’t really work if you go that fast” (136). And yet, the ability to quickly search various faces for an intensive link constitutes an alternative form of pornographic reading. Kathy believes that finding her pornographic double will help “explain why I am the way I am” (181). In other words, she is very much interested in satisfying her sexual desires by displacing them onto someone else, which is precisely how masturbatory readings function. The porn star seeks to justify spectator’s desire by feeling it ahead of time and explaining away the viewer’s bodily urges. In this way, pornography socializes sexuality by translating bodily feelings into various identifications or practices.

However, if Kathy’s search for a “possible” is pornographic, it is not yet socially satisfying. Only after the “buzz” of sexual searching is replaced by a more intensive identification with one or more dividual sexualities (blonde, black, anal, reality) is the body’s feeling finally displaced by a social representation. The expansive searchability of bodily qualities, proclivities and acts makes pornography a basic and flexible site for coding imagined communities, making pornography a political structure that connects aspects of lived bodies with populations of qualities. And yet, Kathy does not find an intensive link to her pornographic possible. Her social-sexual identity isn’t accessible even in the pornographic sphere. Her body is left buzzing without explanation, without a linkage to the “body of the population” or species. This absence of pornographic representation exemplifies the forms of severe social abjection the clones’ experience. That is, the anxiety around pornography is that the viewer will not find a way to bridge his or her body to the species.
This abjection is clarified by Ruth’s failed attempt to find her possible. On a walk Kathy recalls seeing Ruth “engrossed by something by her feet” (144).

I thought it was some poor creature dead in the frost, but when I came up, I saw it was a colour magazine—not one of “Steve’s [porn] magazines,” but one of those bright cheerful things that come free with the newspapers. It had fallen open at this glossy double page advert, and though the paper had gone soggy and there was mud at one corner, you could see it well enough. It showed this beautifully modern open-plan office with three or four people who worked in it…The place looked sparkling and so did the people. (144)

Like pornography, this magazine seems to offer the possibility of an intensive link. Indeed, in subsequent weeks, Ruth talks “about the sort of office she’d ideally work in,” and not long after, someone claims to have spotted her model at a windowed office on High Street (144).

Significantly, however, the magazine is initially confused for a “poor creature” and then as a piece of decomposing trash. Here the clone’s subjectivity intersects with animal life and useless materiality. Significantly, “litter” describes both the clones’ non-human reproduction and the status of their life as the disposable packaging for delivering consumable organs.

Furthermore, after discovering that the lady working on High Street “isn’t Ruth,” Ruth attempts to frame the clone’s social subjectivity with reference to abject waste.

We all of us know it, so why don’t we face it. We’re not modelled from that sort…We all know it. We’re modelled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps…That’s what we come from. We all know it, so why don’t we say it?… If you want to look for
possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter. You look in the rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all came from.

(166)

While Ruth begins by trying to locate the clones’ “origins” in the socially abject (“the junkies”), her proliferating series of origins ends by connecting the clones to the materially abject (the toilet). It is here that the novel and Kathy seemingly fall into despair over a life without a (disciplinary) soul. If, in this despair, and through Kathy’s voice, some readers discover a tragic or redemptive humanism, they should look again at the specific humans with whom the clones at least partially identify—those humans at the social margins that all too often and all too systematically fall from humanism’s warm embrace. Here, Ishiguro’s vision of biotechnologically created posthuman bodies is the vision of posthumanism everywhere poisoned by the legacy of a stubborn, tragic and reactionary humanism.

Still, there is a coda to this reading.

Contrapuntal Posthumanism

As Never Let Me Go explores the biopolitical mechanisms of post-disciplinary power, it clearly sours on a posthumanism so fully interconnected with the materiality of life. The reader is invited to mourn, as Kathy does, the final mutation of posthuman life into posthumous death. I argue that this political poverty in the posthuman stems from a nostalgic humanism that seeks to never be let go by the institutions of the soul, even where those institutions are complicit with the clone’s own oppression. Nevertheless, amid this existential posthumanism, there remains a
resistant element.

Throughout the novel, there appear small, enigmatic drawings of strange hybrid creatures. These are robot-animals that Tommy began drawing after leaving Hailsham. When Tommy shows them to Kathy, she is “taken aback by how densely detailed each one was. In fact, it took a moment to see that they were animals at all. The first impression was like one you’d get if you took off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision” (187). In contradiction to the novel’s disappointment with the materiality of life, these drawings celebrate the “unlimited finity” or litterariness of life as a composite of material processes.

These miniature cyborgs take up the multiple meanings of litter and the literary. While they appear every few pages in the novel to pace Kathy’s narration, they also produce small seemingly pointless interruptions to her story; they seem to merely litter the textual field of Kathy’s own memories and mark out all that she passes over. Strange, unnerving creatures, Kathy finds them to be “so different than anything the guardians had taught us at Hailsham” (187). But of course, Tommy always struggled to create the normative artworks considered valuable at Hailsham’s exchanges. In fact, one renegade guardian, Miss Lucy, felt so badly about Tommy being ostracized for his lack of proper creativity she assured him that he “didn’t have to be creative, if [he] didn’t feel like it,” thereby demystifying the whole humanist-sham at work (23).

Despite her confusion and skepticism, in a wonderfully telling moment, Kathy admits being “genuinely drawn to these fantastical creatures,” just as she is drawn to “aisles displaying
bright plastic toys, greeting cards, loads of cosmetics, maybe even a photo booth” (188, 157). Like the mass-produced fleshy objects, these small creatures represent a litter of non-human vitality. Perhaps, then, in the contra puntal expression of these cyborg drawings, an alternative and affirmative litterary aesthetic emerges. One that is not destined to submit to the death drive of human originality, but instead, finds kinship with the plasticity of fleshiness and the fleshiness of plasticity.
Chapter Two

Species-Trouble in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*

In a richly satirical scene from Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Crake takes his friend Jimmy on a tour of the bio-tech laboratories at the prestigious, corporately-owned, Watson-Crick Compound. Here Jimmy and the reader are introduced to a series of comically flawed inventions. There are the geologically modified rocks that “absorb water during periods of humidity and release it in times of drought” but still “explode” in “heavy rainfall”; as well as the “smart wallpaper” that is supposed to change color to match one’s mood but can’t yet detect a difference between “drooling lust and murderous rage,” shining “erotic pink when what you really need [is] a murky, capillary-bursting greenish red” (201). This scene, as a whole, alludes to Gulliver’s tour of the “Grand Academy of Lagado” in the “Laputa” section of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Like Jimmy, Gulliver also encounters a series of harebrained scientific experiments, including a project to “reduce human excrement to its original food,” and a “new method for building houses, . . . beginning at the roof and working downwards towards the foundation” (146). Indeed, in the epilogue to *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood directly quotes *Gulliver’s Travels* to establish her intention to “‘relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because [her] principle design [is] to inform you, and not amuse you.’” Like Swift, Atwood’s comic mode is satirically instructive only insofar as the reader moves beyond mere amusement as ridicule to encounter the “plain matter” before them.

Illustratively, as Gulliver’s continues his tour through the “Grand Academy,” he is introduced to political experiments in democratization and meritocracy that, at least in retrospect, appear less-than-ridiculous. To Gulliver, these political scientists appear “wholly out of their senses” because they are proposing schemes for persuading monarchs to choose favorites upon score of
Therefore, at the end of Jimmy’s tour, Atwood unveils the “horrible . . . ChickieNobs,” one of the biotech compounds’ most perplexing and profitable inventions (203). Described as an “animal protein tuber,” the ChickieNob has a “bulblike . . . head in the middle,” consisting solely of a mouth with “no eyes or beak or anything” (202). Out of this bulbous head grows “twenty thick fleshy tubes” that sprout into chicken breasts at each end. According to the corporate scientists, the ChickieNob “feels no pain” because all “brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation and growth” have been removed (203). Stripped down, the ChickieNob is Atwood’s attempt to “relate the plain matter” of bare life “in the simplest manner and style”: as a knotted figure, creature, industry, object, food, and body, the nob reaches out and holds together apparently antithetical arguments about biotechnology. By showing how the ChickieNob interrupts both dystopian and utopian discourses about the prosthetic zone of flesh and technology, Oryx and Crake’s larger project comes into sharp focus: the ChickieNob is one of several key inventions Atwood deploys to critique the idea of speciation in the (re)production of bodies and families.

Tellingly, Jimmy’s initial reaction to the ChickieNob is one of absolute repugnance. He thinks, “this thing was going too far,” and he describes the ChickieNob as a “‘horrible’ . . . nightmare” (202). Jimmy’s disgust recites a familiar reactionary
discourse about biotechnology that has inhibited much 21st century experimentation.
Over the past fifteen years, the most influential champion of biopolitical repugnance has been Leon Kass, the head of President G.W. Bush’s Council of Bioethics. In his anti-cloning treatise “The Wisdom of Repugnance,” published in the New Republic less than a year after Dolly the sheep was born, Kass claims that nearly all humans automatically feel repugnance at the prospect of human cloning, and that repugnance is tantamount to a “revolt against the excesses of human willfulness” (5). “Repugnance,” for Kass “may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity” (5).
Curiously, Kass frames biotechnology as a weapon in an interspecies culture-war, where “human willfulness” has turned on the “core of . . . humanity,” which can only be defended by the reaction of abjection.

However, even as repugnance supposedly fortifies a “core” humanity against the incursions of “human willfulness,” Kass’s larger argument depends on re-mapping “core . . . humanity” within a larger “evolutionary” narrative of branching hierarchal speciation. That is, for repugnance to guard “core humanity” it must also police the tree of life—that whole ordering of species through which “humanity” always emerges paramount. In his onto-evolutionary vein, Kass claims:

it is impossible . . . for there to have been human life -- or even higher forms of animal life—in the absence of sexuality and sexual reproduction . . . In higher

---

7 As the head of The President’s Council of Bioethics from 2001 to 2005, Kass acquired the nickname, “the president’s philosopher.” His views not only helped justify George W. Bush’s 2001 decision to constrain stem cell research, but Kass also broadly represents a “culture of life” discourse about biotechnology, which draws on both evolutionary and religious models of human exception.
birds and mammals, the outward gaze keeps a lookout not only for food and predators, but also for prospective mates. (emphasis added, 8)

In order to verticalize evolution towards ever “higher” animals, birds, mammals, and humans, Kass presumes a transparent alignment of “sexuality and sexual reproduction.” Thus, what Kass calls the “inherent teleology of sexuality itself” not only splits life between the lower (self-preserving) asexual species and the higher (self-sacrificing) sexual species, but it also drives a further forking between “higher” animals and ever higher humans. Given that Kass’s vertical teleology of branching speciation based on sexual reproduction is necessary to “core humanity,” the ChickieNob might excite Jimmy’s repugnance because, as an “animal protein tuber,” the Nob (re)fuses the basic bifurcation of high-sexual (animal) and low-asexual (tuber).

But Jimmy’s feelings of repugnance are even more visceral than this; they are bound up with the thought of eating a ChickieNob: “It would be like eating a large wart” (203). Jimmy’s fear of wart eating not only recalls the conspicuous absence of any apparent body parts (face/buttocks/genitals) where a “wart” might actually grow on a ChickieNob, but also accentuates a lurking dread about the conspicuous presence of the ChickieNob’s congenially large mouth/anus/vagina. Indeed, to the extent that the ChickieNob poses as genitalia writ-large, Jimmy’s fear of “eating a large wart” must also be read as sexual trans-species desire (STD). Repugnance, then, expels these kernels of desire for biotechnology by imagining the Chickie-flesh as an enveloping, diseased sexual organ. If the ChickieNob’s large reproductive mouth makes its flesh both consumable and consuming, then repugnance is finally legible as a fear of sexual contagion (genital warts) and cannibalistic invagination (vagina dentata).
The ChickieNob’s powerful digestive capacity—graphically exhibited by its large “mouth opening at the top”—is matched only by the ChickieNob’s equally awesome reproductive capacity: “you get chicken breasts in two weeks” (203). These bodily signifiers that transform ChickieNob eating into reproduction, and reproduction into eating are, ironically, part and parcel to Kass’ case for human superiority. That is, in order to split human beings off from all other sexual animals, Kass introduces his own “opening at the top” whereby humans are born not through sex per se, but instead, through a self-conscious act of ouroboros or self-swallowing. In this way, Atwood’s ChickieNobs show how the very “sexual self-consciousness” that Kass claims to be characteristic of human superiority is nothing if not a form of cannibalistic reproduction.

Although models of human ascension constitutively skirt images of invagination, the poly-phallic tree of life desperately seeks an opening for its deadly re-birth, a transcendent terminus to enfold humanity within a rationalized womb. For Kass, in particular, the highness of sexual reproduction “means perishability,” so “sexual desire, in human beings as in animals . . . serves an end partly hidden from . . . the self-serving individual”; therefore, “whether we know it or not, when we are sexually active we are voting with our genitalia for our own demise” (emphasis added, 8). Around the “know it or not,” “partly hidden” nexus of sex and death, “genitalia” become the biopolitical technology for voting humans elect. Whereas animals simply “evince” the death drive “blindly,” for Kass, “only the human being can understand, . . . as we learn so powerfully form the story of the Garden of Eden, [that] our humanization is coincident with sexual self-consciousness” (8). Humans are exceptional, therefore, because they understand that their genitals are trying to kill them. Accordingly, “sexual desire humanly regarded is . . .
sublimated,” transforming lust into love, desire into eros, and above all, making humiliation the sign of “humanization” (8). Not only does this sexual self-consciousness directly confound Kass’ earlier claim to the “inherent procreative teleology of sexuality itself,” but it also produces a species of shame that finds the shamelessness of life repugnant (2).

The ChickieNob, in contrast, manages to untangle a thread of bio-utopianism from the knotted ‘core’ of reactionary humanism. Because the ChickieNob is paradigmatically repugnant, its trans-species trans-sexuality is also shamelessly entrancing. Helplessly curious, Jimmy wonders “what’s it thinking? . . . are they on the market yet?” and imagines that if he ate one, “maybe he wouldn’t be able to tell the difference” (202). At some level, Jimmy’s repugnance is the humanist alibi for a “shameful” desire to (re)inhabit a garden of fleshy erotics, the Edenic promise of biotechnology.

Considering this discourse of biotechnological utopianism germinates in a territory of desire still overshadowed by the rhetoric of reactionary humanism, the ChickieNobs might, theoretically, find alliance in a politically marginalized group like PETA. In fact, in April 2008, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) announced a cash prize of one million dollars for the first researchers “to produce and bring to market in vivo meat” (www.peta.org). Arguably, ChickieNobs would not meet PETA’s strict “in vivo” requirement, but they would meet PETA’s larger goal of bio-technologically

---

8 Initially, Kass argues that “extramarital use of the pill, . . . the sexual revolution, . . . technologies of human reproduction, . . . feminism and the gay rights movement” all mistakenly deny “the inherent procreative teleology of sexuality itself” (2). Eventually, however, he posits his own “sexual revolution” in the form of sexual self-consciousness. And if sexual self-consciousness means anything, it must first and foremost indicate a minimal space of non-identity between sexual desire and sexual reproduction. This telling contradiction is never examined by Kass, but it broadly underwrites many heteronormative humanisms.
eliminating “animal suffering” from the production and consumption of meat products. Or, as one of the ChickieNob scientists puts it, “the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain” (203). If PETA’s contest seeks to broker a compromise between meat-“addicted” humans and industrial-scale animal suffering, then biotechnology is figured by PETA as invisibly transforming sentient livestock into agriculture.

To be successful, cultured meat, for PETA, must resemble slaughtered meat along three telling dimensions: it must be regulated like slaughtered meat, and therefore receive a “Passing Grade” for complying with all USDA and FDA regulations from a “PETA Judging Panel” (www.peta.org); it must aesthetically mimic slaughtered meat so that a “Focus Group” finds “the entrant’s product . . . indistinguishable from real chicken flesh”; and, lastly, the “in vivo” product must sell like slaughtered meat by meeting the “Commercial Sales Minimum at a Comparable Market Price.” In other words, cultured meat must effectively reproduce the culture of meat-eating. These criteria implicitly deem the prevention of animal suffering feasible only so long as “meat-addicted” humans do not also suffer from symptoms of withdrawal. Formulaically then, suffering operates as a quality of resemblance that makes animal life similar enough to human life to arouse an ethical response, but it also, in effect, situates animal life as dissimilar enough from human life to justify the treatment of animal suffering as if it is less-than human suffering. PETA openly laments the fact that “many people continue to refuse to kick their meat addictions,” but PETA is still “willing to help [these people] gain access to flesh that doesn’t cause suffering” (www.peta.org). By attempting to biotechnologically bypass a zero-sum politics where human addiction is pitted against animal suffering,
PETA tacitly endorses and naturalizes humans’ craving for animal meat. In fact, the contest imagines biotechnology as a tool, governed by entrenched cultural interests, to powerfully expand and reproduce the same systems of regulation, taste, and profit already in place.

Yet, if the ChickieNob is, as one scientist describes, “sort of like a chicken hookworm,” then it cannot be so easily digested by preexisting forms of cultural consumption (203). In this way, the “hookworm” simile insists that the prosthetic stickiness of biotechnology not be overlooked. Rather than bypassing the politics of human/animal relations, the ChickieNob simply embeds these questions ever deeper within the folds of the bio-social small intestines. While, on one register, the image of the “hookworm” simply illustrates the ChickieNob’s powers of “digestion, assimilation and growth,” the comparison also inevitably digs at the stomachs of meat-eaters—the target organ of the target demographic. Therefore, when this biotechnological worm turns, the insides of living bodies become physically available to new implants, appetites, or even addictions; what PETA diagnosis as a behavioral addiction to meat is now open to the possibility of a prosthetically designed addiction—to be literally “hooked” on cultured meat. Alternatively, to have a “hookworm” also suggests that one is eating for two, evoking the myriad symbiotic arrangements that exemplify evolution’s definitive lack of design. In either case, as an addictive or parasitic relationship, the ChickieNobs’s prosthetic power fleshes out conjoined, hybrid bodies that resist a culture of meat consumption based on the compartmentalization of human and animal suffering.

Underlying both PETA and Leon Kass’ perceptions of biotechnology is a notion of species that is troubled by the “plain matter” of ChickieNobs. For its part, Oryx and
*Crake* is a literary investigation of this species-trouble and its social consequences. By the end of the novel, ChickieNobs and their trans-species kin (wolvhogs, rakunks and Crakers) become catalysts for a violent reorganization of the narrative’s bio-social world, but prior to this revolution, Atwood also shows how corporate biotech uses speciation as a proprietary technology. Like Kass, the biotech compounds in *Oryx and Crake* adopt the tree of life as their corporate model for creating new, patented life forms. Ostensibly, the corporations treat life as an undifferentiated force, represented by a totalizing tree truck that gathers all species into a single vital family, marketplace and laboratory. While this oceanic romance of pure life is erected as a timeless resource for potential growth, the corporate scientists simultaneously envision life as always outwardly individualizing or constantly branching off into new species. All along the edge of the tree’s crown, life is imagined in categorical absolutes or as expressions of non-overlapping difference. Each invention, no matter how hybridized, must constitute a patented, proprietary species. Therefore, species are defined in negative relation to other species, forcing them to strike out in their own competitive trajectory within a marketplace ecology. Significantly, all lines of kinship and connection are always regressive in this model. As the tree grows, time forces an individuation and purification of categorically patented species.

For example, the HelthWyzer compound makes money by inventing and infecting pleeblanders (the name for people who live outside corporate compounds) with “new and different” species of disease, like the “E. coli splice” (211). Here “different” species become proprietary *brands* of species: for the corporations, difference is always imagined as *classifiably different*, making it “easy to contain,” in Crake’s words (211). Because the tree of life maps bodies onto species branches, these bodies become prosthetically rooted
and dependent on a unified organic core. The biotech corporations, therefore, adopt this arboreal model of speciation to strategically position themselves as the embryological center of species survival and reproduction. Furthermore, Crake reveals: “naturally [the biotech corporations] develop the antidotes at the same time as they’re customizing the bugs” (211). Or, in other words, the disease itself functions as a biotechnology for creating new species of diseased bodies that are prosthetically dependent on the corporation.

Moreover, the corporations in Oryx and Crake use this tree of life model as a systematic tool to manage a spectrum of social and political relationships. As seen with Kass and PETA, biotechnology’s powers of reproduction and prosthesis invite bioethical mappings where social relations between bodies, families, and species are assiduously defined. For the corporations in Oryx and Crake, this means exerting hegemonic control not only over new product inventions, but also over the domestic ordering of family structures, education systems, gender norms, and entertainment media. Ideologically, the corporations must be able to, on the one hand, affirm the porous splicing of cellular boundaries inside their laboratories, and on the other hand, justify the impenetrable army of private security that boarders these same laboratories. The corporations must be able to invent new reproductive technologies that implicitly question traditional forms of maternity and sexuality, but still be able to cultivate a suburban workforce governed by heterosexual and patriarchal norms.

In other words, Oryx and Crake examines how biotech corporations use a metaphoric tree of life to manage a series of social contradictions. By positioning themselves as a mediating core or trunk, the corporations try to prosthetically control the
sprouting forth of different bodies, families and species. In the first half of this chapter, I will, therefore, investigate the junctures where biotechnology clearly branches out to regulate social interactions. In particular, this section investigates corporate biotechnology by close reading its effects on animals, mothers, foreigners, consumers and entrepreneurs. Collectively, these reading develop a concept of *Corporate Domesticity*, a term I use to describe those social regulations that make Atwood’s vision of corporate biotechnology decidedly dystopian.

Although there have been many critiques of the relationships between biotechnology and corporate capitalism, a distinctly literary analysis of this alliance in the novel’s complex simulation of lived space can offer yet new compositions. Inherently inter-disciplinary, novels, at their best, trace the historical forces of their composition and allow these multiple discourses to develop according to their own interactive logic. Where empirical experimentation seeks to isolate single elements by controlling other variables, literary analysis is much more interested in following the expansive interaction between many variables by understanding the *changing composition* of formal and historical relationships. In other words, it is not just that literary analysis offers a virtual environment for reflecting on the myriad historical forces that have brought it into being, but it can also play out these forces and redirect them.

For this reason, the second half of the chapter will seek to move beyond a mode of critique to analyze an equally important, but often neglected aspect of Atwood’s novel; although much of the novel is concerned with the dystopic features of corporate biotechnology, the novel ultimately brackets these questions within an imaginative re-thinking of extinction and evolution. Because the dystopian parts of the novel are framed by a post-apocalyptic “last man” narrative (the story of Snowman and his hybrid companions, the Crakers), Atwood ultimately offers the
reader a secondary vision of biotechnology which, though not utopian, is decidedly more positive than its corporate forefather—perhaps positive only in that it posits a radically symbiogenic understanding of evolution against the void of extinction. Indeed, Atwood’s re- vision of biotechnology in *Oryx and Crake* explores the important presence of symbiotic webs that allow species to transform by traveling across and between various species branches. Ultimately, this suggests a bio-social community where kinship, experimentation and embodiment cannot be easily bifurcated by the branching logic of the tree of life.

**Corporate Domesticity**

The setting for Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* is severed. Part of the narrative takes place on a beach soon after the near extinction of humans from earth, while other large sections of the novel flashback to a dystopian, pre-apocalyptic world dominated by corporate biotechnology and social control. Generically the novel lurches between a “last-man,” survivalist story, full of lyrical contemplations about hunger, pain and nature, and a biting socio-political satire of structural inequity and cultural decline. So too, its protagonist’s identity is divided between the pre-apocalyptic “Jimmy,” a white middle-class boy from the suburbs, and “Snowman,” the name Jimmy gives himself after the “Great Rearrangement.” This “Great Rearrangement” is not only Snowman’s euphemism for the death of his species, but it also signifies a great melodramatic tear in history, by which Atwood rearranges the novel’s setting and genre. In this way, Atwood provides the reader two interdependent frames for understanding “biotechnology” as a force of political power and evolutionary change.

For instance, in the novel’s post-apocalyptic setting, Snowman wakes one morning,
thinking to himself, “it is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity,” but he feels immediately estranged by these words, as if he were merely “quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials” (4). Here, the “great rearrangement” functions to dispossess Snowman of the language with which to construct a linear bildungsroman. Although language helps Snowman remember a world at once familiar and already destroyed, language—that beacon of human exceptionalism—must now be remembered without those institutional interlocutors that make history a human task or “ponderous directive.” The “colonial” mantra that Snowman recollects—“adherence…maintenance…and preservation”—refers to a mode of social life already extinct. Snowman is positioned on the flipside of European humanism, where the branching social infrastructures that determine the value of discursive exchange are “obsolete.” Without a flag, uniform, currency or printing press, the language of the colonizer can only conjure a memory of power. Indeed, what can “the preservation of sanity” mean for Snowman, when only his memory polices the asylum gates? As a “last man” figure, therefore, Jimmy is appropriately renamed “Snowman,” vulnerable as he is to the melting heat of the coming day.

Prior to the “great rearrangement,” however, Atwood presents an elaborate biotechnologically imposed social infrastructure that polices the movement and meaning of bodies, families, and species. This dystopian vision of corporate biotechnology is rooted by an unassailable divide between the corporate Compounds and the anarchic Pleeblands. Atwood stresses that “compound people didn’t go to the cities unless they had to,” and pleeblanders were kept out of the compounds by many layers of security (27). These two zones of sociality are controlled by what I call “corporate domesticity,” a term meant to encompass those social
regulations employed within the bio-tech compounds that are, in turn, exported to the global pleeblands as biotechnological products and prosthesis.

*The Animal Cell, the Human Compound and Embodiment*

Whether it be Jimmy’s childhood memories of growing up in the suburban/corporate compound of “Organ Inc. Farms,” or his adolescent memories of living in the “Helth Wyzer Compound,” or even his early-adult memories of visiting “Watson-Crick University” and the hyper-secure “Paradice lab,” at every turn *Oryx and Crake* contrasts the experimental, hybrid-mixing of cellular life inside biotech laboratories with the rigorously policed boundary that separates these suburban, corporate laboratories from the outside world, the pleeblands. Ostensibly, this contradiction might destabilize the corporations’ segregationist efforts, but in practice, it proves critical to the development of a paranoid domesticity. By posing as the germinal mainspring of procreativity, the biotech corporation’s hybrids are seeded as “pure mixtures,” and the outcome of life’s original urge to branch and bloom. Using its wealth of knowledge about the natural order, the compound defends itself from impurities and impostures, outsiders and contaminants.

Consider Jimmy’s earliest childhood memory of a massive bonfire inside “Organ Inc. Farms” to incinerate an “enormous pile of [transgentic] cows and sheep and pigs,” where Jimmy first encounters the “smell of charred flesh,” and “the odour of burning hair” (16). Like the real-world burning of cows and sheep during England’s 2001 Foot-and-Mouth-Disease-scare, the Organ Inc. animals are also culled because of an alien life within them. It is worth recalling that, unlike the so-called mad cow disease (CJD), “foot and mouth has never posed a risk to human or animal health,” and might be best understood as an “ovine version of the common cold” (Franklin, 173). As Sarah Franklin points out, “foot and mouth is only lethal to domestic
animals because it is *economically intolerable* to humans…[T]he world market for sheep, milk and cattle products is divided between countries where foot and mouth is endemic and those officially designated as disease free,” without any particular consideration of the relative harmfulness of the disease (174). Likewise, according to Jimmy’s mother, the animals at Organ Inc. Farms are burned because of “a disease,” which she explains as “like when you have a cough” (19). Aside from this passing reference to a common cough, the disease is repeatedly framed in economic terms, where the production of a pure and free marketplace is linked to a genocidal protection of “core” humanity.

For instance, during the animal bonfire, Jimmy recalls his father’s colleague suggesting that a rival biotech firm had “‘brought in [the infection] on purpose’” to “‘drive up the prices’” and “‘make a killing on their own stuff’” (18). Despite Organ Inc. Farms being “sealed up like a drum” and vigilantly defended by a private security force called the “CorpSeCorps,” there is little tangible sense of bodily or economic security within the compound (18). Because making a profit is aligned with “making a killing,” safety at the compound is both established and threatened by the violent economics of creative destruction. Therefore, Organ Inc.’s security efforts only promote a pervasive paranoia about “the other side, or the other sides…other companies, other countries, various factions and plotters” (27). The impurity of these “other sides” is kept out of the corporate suburbs for reasons of human safety and economic security, both of which can be framed under the biopolitical banner of “species survival.” Of course, constitutively, the policing of outside others is also directed inside the compound to police the domestic sphere of Organ Inc. Farms.

The conceptual umbrella that segregates “outside others” from insiders is established, in part, through the mass slaughter of animals. This public killing signals an eradicable strain of
animalized otherness already present inside the corporate space. Animals are routinely burned and spliced together at the compounds because they are considered useful tools for enhancing human well-being, but as such, they are only degenerate samples of life for experimenters, and not as fully constituted as human beings. Theoretically, this animal/human divide should buckle under the weight of its own success. If pigs (pigoons) at Organ Inc. Farms can transgenetically grown various human organs, then any substantive division between humans and animals must be in fast retreat. This, however, is not the case. In fact, it is the very intangibility of a positive distinction between humans/animals that insures that this divide will be applied to human populations, producing abject “animal-humans.” Therefore, when Jimmy’s parents explain that the animals were burned because they were diseased, and Jimmy’s mother adds that “a disease is like when you have a cough,” Jimmy worriedly asks, “If I have a cough, will I be burned up?” (19). With comic paranoia, Jimmy’s father jokes, “most likely” (19). The joke is meant to remind Jimmy that, as a human, he is responsible for controlling the vicissitudes of his own embodiment lest he be extinguished like an animal outsider. But because Jimmy had a “cough the week before,” he is forcibly confronted with a lack of control over his body in relation to other species, which, in this context, also represents an animalization of his young body: “He could see his hair on fire . . . He didn’t want to be put in a heap with the cows and pigs. He began to cry” (19). For Jimmy, his father’s joke is terrifying.

Angered by her husband’s flippant response, Jimmy’s mother immediately pulls Jimmy aside to provide him with an alternative explanation of his body’s relation to other species. She claims “you [are] all made up of tiny cells, working together to make sure you stay alive,” and that “a disease…rearranged you, cell by cell, and that made the cells sick” (21). Because his body is a radical multiplicity, Jimmy’s mother believes it is also radically vulnerable to
“invisible” and “small” diseases that can “fly through the air or hide in the water” (20). Jimmy resists his mother’s explanation of embodied vulnerability until his mother becomes “discouraged,” but secretly, Jimmy “wanted her to be brave with him, to hammer away at the wall he’d put up against her, to keep on going” (21, my emphasis). If Jimmy’s father understands disease to result from a personal failure to police the internal walls of one’s human body, then his mother poses a more materialistic explanation that emphasizes a non-personal, non-human power in the production and destruction of interdependent bodies. Fed up with her husband’s paranoid sense of control, Jimmy’s mother tells him that “[Jimmy] doesn’t understand those kinds of jokes” (20). Jimmy’s father responds to her by speaking to Jimmy and coercing his son’s allegiance: “Sure he does. Don’t you Jimmy?” (20). And while Jimmy secretly relates to his mother’s understanding of embodiment, he is ultimately shamed by the naked messiness of her position. Vested by the interest of inheriting his father’s privileged and protected relation to the world, Jimmy stops crying and tells his father “Yes,” he understands the joke.

In this domestic disagreement, the father’s jokey paranoia positions animal bodies as a diseased threat to human self-possession, but the dispute quickly transforms into a lesson for Jimmy about the animal quality of female bodies. Jimmy’s parents’ argument about embodiment comes to a head one day when Jimmy “cut[s] off some of his hair with the manicure scissors and set[s] fire to it with his mother’s cigarette lighter” (16). Jimmy’s experiment allows him to inhale the scent of his own singed hair, and thereby, revisit the feeling of embodied vulnerability he sensed at the animal bonfire. He conducts this solitary experiment using his mother’s domestic utensils, her “manicure scissors” and “lighter,” recalling his secret desire to “hammer away at the wall he’d put up against her” (21). However, when Jimmy is caught by his parents, they get into “an argument about the cigarette lighter, which wouldn’t have been there (said his
father) if his mother didn’t smoke” (16). This argument ends dramatically when Jimmy’s mother slams the door behind her, at which point his father explains to his son, “women always get hot under the collar” (16). Notably, Jimmy’s father points to an unseen bodily dynamic at work, a specifically female heat that is at once natural and mysterious. He tells Jimmy about women, and what went on under their collars. Hotness and coldness, coming and going in the strange musky flowery variable-weather country inside their clothes – mysterious, important, uncontrollable. That was his father’s take on things. But men’s body temperatures were never dealt with…Why weren’t they? Why nothing about the hot collars of men? (17)

Burning and overheated bodies produce a fearful conflagration of animal and female bodies in the domestic organization of Organ Inc. Farms. The unstable nature of these bodies remains hidden until an internal heat is discharged from behind their hair or clothes, respectively. Furthermore, where animal bodies are permeated by outside contamination, women’s bodies are figured as a humid space, suggesting that the “musky flowery” vaginal opening “inside their clothes” makes them “variable, . . . uncontrollable” and similarly penetrable. This combination of heat and liquidity also transforms the female body into a “strange . . . country” or foreign land that can only be safely assimilated if it is “collared,” clothed, colonized, or otherwise “dealt with” by corporate domesticity (17). In contrast, not only don’t men’s bodies overheat with an energy that exceeds their collars, but moreover, their bodies are “never dealt with” (17). Indeed, men’s bodies are unremarkable in this domestic space because they are supposedly unmarked by any hidden animality or concealed nature. In other words, men’s clothes fit comfortably because their self-possession is already considered to be the naked sign of their human nature.
Therefore, the key contradiction between the porousness of cellular life within the biotechnological laboratory and the tight security surrounding the compound ends up producing a distinctly gendered conceptualization of the human/animal divide. Hot, permeable bodies are burned up and expelled because they were always already too warm and too full of violent, revolutionary creativity. The biotech compounds seek profit by regularizing social desire, ensuring a patriarchal and humanist construction of the marketplace. The biopowers of contagion and reproduction, here associated with animal and female bodies, are renegade threats that must be continually subdued by corporate domesticity in order to be made (re)productive by corporate laboratories.

*Sexual Reproduction, Maternity, and Escape*

Although trained as a scientist, Jimmy’s mother leaves her job to stay home with her son and fulfill a set of culturally coerced domestic duties. Within the corporate suburbs, the biological fact of female reproduction has germinated into the biopolitical claim that mothers are endowed with a plethora of ‘maternal instincts,’ which depoliticizes domestic labor as a biological extension of maternal nature. Despite being an indispensable site of embryonic power for the biotech corporations, the discursive meaning of maternal embodiment is always already defined as outside and prior to the formation of political questions. Dangerously, the female body in corporate suburbia is telescopically pushed out of the public sphere and into the silence of a pre-discursive, natural domesticity. Far from discovering the innate pleasures of unpaid labor, however, Jimmy’s mother finds herself distracted, bored, emotionally volatile and tired. Her son responds to her silence by developing strategies to elicit emotion and attention from his mother:

9 “Jimmy’s mother” and “Jimmy’s father” are never named in the novel. Instead, within corporate domesticity, they’re singularly defined by their domestic roles as mother and father, wife and husband.
“more than anything, Jimmy had wanted to make her laugh—to make her happy, as he seemed to remember her being once” (31). And on rare occasions, Jimmy’s mother would appear receptive to her son’s prodding. She would prepare him “a real lunch...a lunch that was so arranged and extravagant it frightened him,”—complete with “place setting[s]...coloured paper napkins” and an “open-face” sandwich “with a peanut butter head and a jelly smile-face” (31). On these days “she would be carefully dressed, her lipstick smile an echo of the jelly smile on the sandwich and she would be all sparkling attention...[like] a porcelain sink: clean, shining, hard” (32). At these moments, the “porcelain” rigidity and “jelly-faced” absurdity of traditional maternal norms is cartoonishly evident.

But even more revealingly, his mother’s performance—despite its apparent emphasis on clothing, makeup and outward hardening—ends up making her body all the more accessible to Jimmy’s incessant prodding. For instance, during one of these lunchtime pageants, Jimmy asks his mother for a cat or dog or parrot, and after she says no, he asks for a “baby sister” or “baby brother” (32). Interwoven with requests for animals and pets, Jimmy calls on his mother’s reproductive capacities (her maternal body) to be drawn into the trajectory of his own desire. One explanation for this demand might well be Freudian, but, by way of identifying/competing with his scientist-father, Jimmy’s maternal imposition cannot be dissociated from the broader context of “maternity” within biotechnological reproduction. Within the biotech corporate suburbs, maternal reproduction can be activated at will by mostly-male scientists; little or no reflection is given to the specifically female embodiments with which embryological experiments proceed. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jimmy’s mother responds to her son’s request by screaming “No means no!” (32). Here, the language of sexual abuse and bodily violation is dramatically brought to bear as the maternal body is reduced to the image of a
corporately owned egg sealed and sterilized by a patriarchally controlled domesticity. Instead of potentially liberating female bodies from maternal essentialism, the “maternal” element in Organ Inc.’s experiments reinscribe female bodies as passive, silent mediums for the biotechnological expansion of heternormativity.

However, despite the discursive colonization of female bodies as the embryonic core of domestic norms, this reliance on maternal discourse doesn’t exhaust the significance of embodiment all together. Revisiting Jimmy’s mother’s embodiment as “musky flowery variable-weather” in light of her argument that bodies are “all made up of tiny cells,” poses an alternative mode of embodiment that rejects both germinal origins and paranoid controls (17, 21). To locate this revision, the “musky flowery variable” and humid body must be restaged. Here, the humid body must appear not merely as it does for the dominant discourse of corporate domesticity—as an excuse to clothe and contain female bodies—but rather, the humid body might be reencountered as a representation of embodiment’s immanent materiality, defined only by the multiplicity of its differences. The material difference of bodies is posited here without any essential or germinal quality; difference is “all made of tiny cells,” containing ever tinier organelles, all of which continually fluctuate according to environmental interactions and the microscopic contingencies of time without teleology. In other words, the material messiness of embedded bodies only promises more difference, but at Organ Inc., it prevents the branding of Motherhood as an organic species of subjectivity.

Indeed, if the humid body represents a “variable” ecology of “uncontainable” difference, then it is unsurprising that Jimmy’s mother would one day escape from the corporate suburbs. Significantly, this flight stages a radical difference in Jimmy’s mother that finds its expression through bodily movement, which in this context, is also a political exile. In her letter to Jimmy
she explains, “‘I have taken Killer [Jimmy’s pet rakunk] with me to liberate her, as I know she
will be happier living a wild, free life in the forest’” (61). Where corporate domesticity has
squeezed her bodily difference into the mold of maternal subjectivity, Jimmy’s mother forges an
alliance with an experimental, hybrid-pet, and together they discover propulsion. Trapped in the
house all day, the mother and pet are exemplary “outside others” that constitute, in their silent
immobility, an outside center or prison at the heart of corporate domesticity. Their escape,
therefore, merely seeks an outside that is (possibly) not already an inside, a “wild, free life” (61).
Their escape, then, simultaneously ruptures the physical and discursive container of difference as
“outside others.” In “damage control” mode, security personnel swarm Jimmy’s house, where it
becomes “urgent that…matters be clarified” and even more paranoid explanations of his
mother’s abject difference be offered (62). Jimmy listens as policemen and corporate councilors
describe Jimmy’s mother as, alternatively, a terrorist spy or a cheating, over-sexed woman (64).

Jimmy’s mother’s escape is the first moment in the novel when the contradictions of
corporate biotech become unleashed. On the one hand, the re-purposing of “maternal” or
reproductive power in the laboratory does not de-naturalize the maternal so much as transform it
into an embryological resource—once again leaving the female body passive and inert in the face
of masculine, rationalist activity. So long as bodily difference is discursively understood as
species of “animal” or “maternal,” these bodies’ social relations can be routed by the branching
organicism of corporate domesticity. On the other hand, Jimmy’s mother and Killer’s escape is
an expression of difference that cannot be mapped onto a tree diagram where species become the
stable brand of difference. When she breaches the perimeter wall, the compound is forced, if
only briefly, to confront a notion of difference that has not already been discursively rooted as
the same.
In the period immediately after his mother’s escape, a disconsolate Jimmy establishes a fraternal bond with his friend Crake by playing video games and streaming on-line videos. They play, for instance, “Barbarian Stomp,” a game that reduces historical conflicts to a generic struggle between rich imperial civilizations and their enemies, the “barbarian hordes”: “Rome versus the Visigoths, Ancient Egypt versus the Hykoso…Petchengs versus Byzantium” (78). For the two boys, human history becomes a universal code, an analogy of ones and zeros, rich and poor. Likewise, they play “Blood and Roses,” a game “along the lines of monopoly” where players trade “human atrocities” for “human achievements” or vice-versa, to reveal, at the end, the final tally of human history (78). Both of these games allow their players to panoptically survey human history from its aftermath. Arguably, in the aftermath of his mother’s escape, Jimmy finds his own contained escapism in videogames, which teleologically count and discount the absence of his mother’s “flowery” body as yet another atrocity with the grand narrative of “Blood and Roses.” Furthermore, by situating the boys in a meta-historical position, the games analogize social conflict to natural history. Or as Jimmy’s father puts it, “‘long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes lived in castles,’” and “‘compounds were the same idea’” (28). “‘So,’” Jimmy asks, “‘are we kings and dukes?’” (28). “‘Oh, absolutely,’ said his father laughingly” (28). In other words, the video games authorize a mythical pre-history where, “long ago, in the days of knights and dragons,” young dukes like Jimmy and Crake inherited their father’s kingdoms (28). The generic history of the video games allows pre-historical forefathers and post-historical sons to naturalize their inheritance as a genetic history or family tree.
However, biotechnology supposes the power to “denaturalize” genetic inheritance and politicize “natural” history. Fraternally, then, Jimmy and Crake begin playing an underground, natural-history game called “Extinctathon,” which is a front for anti-corporate political agitation (80). Initially, the game seems like a highly secretive quiz game. A new player logs into a secure chat-room and begins giving clues about “some bioform” that has gone extinct “within the past fifty years” and the other players attempt to identify the species and the causes of its extinction (80). Unlike the other games, each player’s presence in Extinctathon is significantly named within the community. Through “Extinctathon” Glenn becomes Crake—a name he uses for the rest of his life—and Oryx, whose “original” name the reader never learns, becomes Oryx. All code names refer to extinct species, suggesting an identification with specific animal histories that are absent in the exclusively human histories of “Barbarian Stomp” and “Blood and Roses.” The Extinctathon players’ relatively more embedded relation to animal history prompts Oryx and Crake to take action against the biotech corporations, including industrial sabotage and the production of technologies for wiping-out human life. In light of these later developments, it is worth distinguishing between the two models of historicity proposed by these games. Interestingly, it is the ahuman “natural history” of “Extinctathon,” not the human histories of “Blood and Roses” or “Barbarian Stomp,” that end up sparking Crake’s political imagination. Although Jimmy writes off the Extinctathon players as “pendant[s],” and finds the game unentertaining, too “informative” and too “tedious” to continue playing, Oryx and Crake wholeheartedly adopt this community in their efforts to denaturalize historical inheritance and reveal the political construction of “natural” history (81).

Indeed, one reason Oryx and Crake eventually turn to “natural history” for political energy is because video news about world-events is too entertaining and designed to be watched
apolitically. During their adolescence Jimmy and Crake compulsively watch these video streams: “the Noodie News…Felicia’s Frog Squash…dirtysockpuppets.com . . and headoff.com,” where they see “live coverage of executions in Asia” (82). If the video games produce a meta-historical position for the boys to inhabit, the video streams produce a meta-geographical position that allows the boys to spy on others without being subject to a symmetrical form of surveillance. Instead, the boys are surveilled by commercial sponsors that track their every click. When watching executions, for instance, the boys are welcomed to “headoff.com” by “spot commercials” and “logos painted in bright yellow on the background wall” (82). These advertisements not only recognize the presence of remote viewers, but they also “look back” and see to it that viewers perceive the execution as entertainment. Whatever political contexts inform the executions locally, the commercials recontextualize the event as a attraction for the audience’s viewing pleasure. Therefore, Crake cynically believes “these incidents were bogus…rehearsed” and that the “bloodfests were probably taking place on a back lot somewhere in California” (82-83). The commercial sponsors turn political “executions” into entertaining “bloodfests” by transplanting Asia into California’s back lot. Or rather, Hollywood functions as an embryonic center from which representations of world-events branch and bloom into species of already designed geopolitical differences.

The two boys also visit many porno-sites that similarly advertise a proper style of consumption. The “HottTotts…global sex-trotting site,” which claims to “show real sex tourists…doing things they’d be arrested for back in their home countries,” advertises itself as “the next best thing to being there” (89). Plainly, the concept of “next” structures the viewers’ displaced presence and allows them to perpetually stand as the next sex tourist in-line. Filled with anticipation and camaraderie, the boys are possessed by the sexual frenzy of a consumer
about to consummate. As viewers, the boys are not disembodied spectators in this scenario but are instead carefully positioned for “back door” acts of anonymous consumption. They are deeply disturbed, therefore, when an eight year-old girl “look[s] over her shoulder…right into the eyes of the viewer — right into Jimmy’s eyes, into the secret person inside him” (91). The force of this looking-back from within the event interrupts the boys’ constructed presence as the “next” in-line tourist and repositions them already inside and already caught. This was “the first time [Jimmy]’d felt that what they were doing was wrong. Before, it had always been entertainment, or else far beyond his control, but now he felt culpable” (91). In this way, the young girl sees more than two horny boys sitting at their computer screens; she envision, instead, the imperial scope of economic, cultural, and technological networks that bind her body to their desires. Indeed, the boys interpret the girl to say not only “I see you... I see you watching” but also, “I know you. I know what you want” (91). She knows these remote viewers because, economically, they are not watching her have sex so much as making it happen. Living in a “country where life [is] cheap and kids [are] plentiful,” she survives by knowing what people want in places where life is expensive and kids are rich (90). What she knows, then, is the great importance of “cheap life” in the technological production of her viewer’s “expensive life.” Later, as adults, the power of this girl’s knowledge is reified by Jimmy and Crake’s incredible belief that Oryx is the same girl from the video— that she does know them, and more importantly, they know her too.

After the apocalypse, Snowman reflects on this period of electronic consumption and asks:

when did the body first set out on its own adventures? …After having ditched its old traveling companions, the mind and soul, for whom it had once been considered a mere
corrupt vessel or else a puppet acting out the dramas for them or else bad company, leading the other two astray… It had dumped the other two back there somewhere, leaving them stranded in some damp sanctuary or stuffy lecture hall while it made off for the topless bars, and it had dumped culture along with them: music and painting and poetry and plays. Sublimation, all of it; nothing but sublimation, according to the body. Why not cut to the chase? But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance. (85)

For all the body’s “ditching” and “dumping” of “the mind and soul,” “poetry and plays,” it’s perhaps surprising that Snowman finds a way to re-saddle the generic body with traditional genres of representation: “tragedies” and “romances.” Certainly, “the body,” in its generic form, cannot signify without such inscriptions, but likewise, neither can such inscriptions exhaust the multiplicity of living bodies. Instead of describing “the body” per se, Snowman’s historicized description of “the body’s” adventures maps a late-capitalist construction of cheap and expensive bodies. What Snowman describes as the body’s liberation from the moral and logocentric norms of the soul and mind is possible only because “the body” is subject to new “biotechnologies” that can reproduce cultural norms materially, prosthetically, and not merely discursively. The body need not be “sublimated” by civil institutions or cultural authorities, when it can be flexibly controlled by tethering its desires to branching systems of consumer choice. When Snowman imagines “the body” taking “off for the topless bar,” this obviously isn’t the natural body, finally stripped of cultural norms (85). On the contrary, this body is the consumer’s body, probably male, white and hetero-, but certainly rich enough to pay the cover and become a drunken, entertained body. If “the body,” as such, went a strip club, who or what would do the stripping?
Indeed, in the biopolitical context, there is no question about the body, only questions about which body and how bodies.

Executed bodies, foreign bodies, prostitute bodies, warring bodies: Jimmy and Crake watch until they see “the body parts moving around on the screen in slow motion, an underwater ballet of flesh and blood under stress, hard and soft joining and separating, groans and screams…If you switched back and forth fast it looked like the same event” (86). This erotics of “cheap bodies” is obviously overlooked in Snowman’s description of the generic body. And yet, the entertained body is caught up in the swirl of erotic mediation. Indeed, using prosthetic parts (broadband wires, credit cards, and HD eyeballs) the consumer’s body choreographs this “underwater ballet” by encoding divisions of labor, entries and exits, lines of sight, and feeling into an imperial assemblage, where species of “cheap life” branch away from families of “expensive life.” Whatever prosthetic loops allow disparate bodies to interact, these linkages are mediated by the coded taxonomies of corporate domesticity. The boy’s proverbial treehouse hideout is firmly rooted within a militarized suburb, ensuring that even virtual travel is routed through a corporate system of branching border control.

*Deregulation, The Scientist-Entrepreneur, and the Blue Gene-Cribfiller*

If commercially sponsored videos allow rich consumers, from the comfort of their corporate homes, to produce a visual-culture market of cheap bodies, then the biotech products exported from the compounds to the pleeblands market the expensive, normative body to the masses. During the twenty-year stretch just prior to the apocalypse, the product-line coming out of biotech compounds shifts focus. At “Organ Inc. Farms,” where Jimmy spent the first-half of his childhood, the research project was primarily medical. For example, “the goal of the pigoon project was to grow… human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host—organs that
would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection” (23). However, when Jimmy’s family moves to the HelthWyzer Compound, his father is hired to work on a product called “Nooskins,” whose function is primarily cosmetic. Here, “the main idea was to find a method of replacing the older epidermis with a fresh one…[with] a genuine start-over skin that would be wrinkle- and blemish-free” (55). And then, during his college years, when Jimmy visits Crake at “Watson and Crick University,” he encounters a whole new line of bioengineered products in development, including rocks that store and release water, wallpaper that changes color according the inhabitant’s mood and most strikingly, “ChickieNobs,” the neurologically stripped down, plant-like “chicken” that I discussed previously (202-203). From high-tech organ transplants to quotidian wallpaper and food, the trajectory of corporate biotech moves toward the mass marketplace of everyday domesticity. Significantly, this trajectory traces out a powerful ideological movement promoted by the Reagan, Thatcher, Major, Clinton, Blair and Bush administrations, among others. Despite a few key regulatory set-backs to stem cell research, these Anglo-American leaders promised to bio-technologically reengineer the global economy by replacing expensive and dirty industrial production with clean and creative embryonic reproduction.

The propitious rise of biotech corporations, then, can be traced back to the early 1980s and the ideological reformulation of the US economy often associated with the Regan administration (Cooper). After two oil shocks, a financial crisis and increasing scientific concern about the degradation of natural resources—typified by the 1972 Club of Rome Report

---

10 “Undoubtedly, one of the most powerful documents of crisis produced in this period was the Club of Rome’s world futures report of 1972… the report gave voice to the prevailing consensus that Fordist manufacture had entered a state of irreversible decline. But it also brought something palpably new to the analysis. If there was a crisis in the offing, it was not one that could be measured in conventional economic terms—a crisis in productivity or economic growth
Reagan sought to maintain and reassert US economic dominance through a massive ideological investment in postindustrial futures. Such an “innovation-based economy” (Cooper, 17) promulgated the appearance and promise of economic growth beyond the limits of industrial production and its attendant environmental constraints. Melinda Cooper, in her book *Life as Surplus*, is quick to point out, however, that “post-fordism does not [actually] dispense with industrial production; it simply displaces it—either literally, by moving it offshore, or legally, by fight for deregulation” (24). In other words, the new world order was here predicated on a strategic shifting of attention from actual economic production to speculation on future production, and a very specific set of Reagan-era policies afforded this ideological transition. Financial deregulations, in particular, pumped private investment into university research and small biotech facilities. This afforded oil-shocked petrochemical and pharmaceutical giants to embark

on a dramatic self-imposed makeover, reinventing themselves--at least prospectively--as purveyors of the new, clean life science technologies. Thus by the early 1980s all the major chemical and pharmaceutical companies had invested in the new genetic technologies, either through license agreements with biotech start-ups or by developing their own in-house research units. (22)

Cooper argues that “it was largely at the initiative of these industries that molecular biotech would be born as a commercial venture…with the result that a handful of transnational (but all U.S. and E.U. based) companies now effectively control every level of the world food and pharmaceutical production” (21, 23). In many ways, biotech is the new face for the same old oil, rates—but rather the wholesale crisis in the realm of reproduction. For the Club of Rome what was at stake was no less than the continuing reproduction of the earth’s biosphere and hence the future of life on earth” (Cooper 15-16).
plastic and drug companies that used cars, fridges and medicine cabinets to produce a mid-century form of industrial domesticity.

Nevertheless, in order for the agro-petro-pharama industries to shift toward biotech, they needed to incorporate the expertise and knowledge of the scientific community. Where the old corporate giants benefited from the global brain-drain to the US in the post-WWII era, Reagan-era reforms sought to create a similar economic boom by “call[ing] for…a fundamental reworking of the relations between academic science and the private sector, public research funding, and commercial interests, so that these groups could work together more closely” (26). As captured perfectly in Oryx and Crake, these corporately funded laboratories—legislated in the “1980 Patent and Trademark Amendments (or the Bayh-Dole Act)”—“effectively gave rise to a new academic personage, the scientist-entrepreneur, and a new form of public-private alliance, the joint-venture start-up, in which academics and venture capitalists come together to commercialize the results of public research” (emphasis added, 27). The creation of a knowledge-for-profit scientist-entrepreneur helps explain the transformation of the biotech product-line in Oryx and Crake.

In the 21st century of the novel, the laissez-faire US state has become so marginalized that even the military police, the CorpSeCorp, are entirely corporately owned. Likewise, the best universities have become private subsidiaries of biotech corporations. At the “EduCompounds,” like the “Watson-Crick Institute, . . . the students . . . got half the royalties from anything they invented there,” providing a “fierce incentive” to create a commercial knowledge from biological research (203). These young scientist-entrepreneurs, then, represent the dystopic fruition of a postindustrial ideology that seeks to utilize breakthroughs in ‘natural’ reproduction to transform the inefficiencies of industrial production.
Jimmy and Crake witness the violent outcome of this economic bioengineering during their summer break before college (178). Vacationing at Crake Uncle’s house, the two boys “probably would have gone back to interactives . . . and porn, . . . but that was the summer of the gen-mod coffee wars” (178). Inundated by reports of global rioting against the Happicuppa bean corporation, “the resistance movement was global,” or so it appeared on the “Noodie News” and “wall-sized plasma screen” at Uncle Pete’s house in the “Moonsonee HelthWyzer Gated Vacation Community” (178-180). At issue here is Happicuppa corporation’s bioengineered “coffee bush . . . designed so that all of its beans would ripen simultaneously,” and thus, make the beans harvestable “with machines” (179). Old coffee bush beans “ripened at different times and had needed to be handpicked” by thousands of “peasant” laborers, who, Happicuppa suddenly reduced to “starvation-level poverty” (179). With the violent help of their private police force, Happicuppa seeks to biotechnologically circumvent an industrial system of production that allowed labor unions to protect workers from the volatility of capital. But here labor (and the volatility of capital) is recoded and automated as pure biological reproduction. Furthermore, Happicuppa is a “HelthWyzer subsidiary,” and therefore the profits from this globally distributed coffee bean feed back into a rooted, sealed-off, corporate structure (178). In other words, deregulation of the global-marketplace through the creation of “open societies,” as promoted by postindustrial ideologies, ends up favoring highly regulated and closed nodes of entrenched power.

The insular culture of biotech compounds allows them to reproduce a normative set of subjectivities: the animal, the mother, the guard, the scientist-entrepreneur. Despite its rhetoric of hybridity, the biotech compound is the location where difference is most fully co-opted and remapped as an organic hierarchy of bodies, families, and species. Alternatively, in the
“pleeblands” outside of the compounds, difference appears relatively horizontal and disorganized: “Rich pleeblanders in luxury cars [and] poor ones on solar bikes…[all weave] in and out of traffic” together (288). Composed of “all skin colours, all sizes…asymmetries, deformities: the faces [in the pleeblands] were a far cry from the regularity of the Compounds,” Jimmy notes (288). The compounds’ economic imperialism depends, then, on grossly managing these differences through the projection of cultural norms using biotechnological products. In fact, once Jimmy and Crake finally visit a retail market-space in the pleeblands, the imperial scope of corporate domesticity is immediately felt.

   The shops were mid-to-high end, the displays elaborate. Blue Genes Day? Jimmy read.

   ‘So this is where our stuff turns to gold,’ said Crake. (288)

First and foremost, corporate biotechnology eradicates certain types of bodies: diseased, short, impotent, childless, depressed or otherwise deformed or disabled. The capacity to eliminate these bodies also makes them “eliminatable;” in other words, corporate biotechnology hears no excuse for being different. Those who remain abnormal are forced downward in the hierarchy of bodies, classes, and species, where they live a precarious life on oft-pruned branches. The tall, well-endowed male (the “Goliath-Longfellow”) and the happy, pregnant woman (the “Blue Gene-Cribfiller”) compose a recognizable image of heteronormativity that is no longer just an image; it is, indeed, a purchasable body, a chemical prosthesis. All along the social field, these prosthetic bodies emerge as species branded by corporate domesticity. In this way, the expensive body is marketed to pleeblanders to organize their bodily differences according to flexible system of colonizing corporate norms.
Oryx and Difference

*Oryx and Crake* is repeatedly described as a dystopian novel, but, because the novel moves back and forth between the early 21st century and a “timeless” period after human extinction, it isn’t entirely clear how to interpret this label. Although the narrative-switching between two distinct time-periods is eventually unfolded to reveal an imaginable chronology of events, the use of multiple and extended flashbacks seems to foreground irreconcilably different settings, bisected by the death of human life. While the depiction of corporate domesticity in the early 21st century is clearly dystopian, Snowman’s lonely and harried life on a human-less earth is bizarre and unhappy but not self-evidently dystopian. To the extent that dystopian narratives critique societal powers, the post-apocalyptic “natural” world that Snowman inhabits does not comfortably conform to this genre. This distinction is significant because it allows for a reading of *Oryx and Crake* that does not simply stop with Atwood’s negative critique of corporate biotechnology; it affords an account of Atwood’s “posthuman” aftermath, the novel’s present tense. The dystopian memories of corporate biotechnology are contained, therefore, within a larger narratological structure that, while not utopian, does posit an emergent posthuman social structure. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the dystopian narrative buckles under the weight of its own thematics of control and, in a spasm of horrific violence, gives way to a more open-ended “last-man” story focused on Snowman’s relationship with new species of life, namely the mixed-raced (human-animal) Crakers. In this framework, *Oryx and Crake’s* critique of corporate domesticity is framed by an urgent bio-philosophical exploration of species, extinction, and evolution.

The dystopian features of the narrative begin unraveling as soon as the biotech compound is infiltrated by a foreign pleeblander. Although her name appears in the novel’s title, literary analysis of Oryx as a character is critically underdeveloped. For instance, Earl Ingersoll’s
“Survival in Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake*” analyzes Oryx primarily through Jimmy and Crake’s eyes, passively trapped as either Crake’s “whore” or Jimmy’s “mother” (165). Ingersoll asserts that Oryx is “pressed into service” at the compound, an innocent victim of Crake’s cunning, “the ultimate manipulator” (165, 166). Likewise, in J. Brooks Bouson’s “‘It’s Game Over Forever’: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake,*” he claims that Jimmy and Oryx are “unwitting players” in Crake’s plan, and that Oryx’s represents a “sex-addicted postfeminist world” (147). Simultaneously, she is a “fantasized object of desire,” and an object lesson in “the baneful social and economic effects of global climate change on the poor of the world” (147). Because, for Bouson, “Oryx is vague and evasive about her traumatic past, [this] gives her a kind of general representative status as a female sexual victim and commodity in the novel’s scheme” (148). And even where Stephen Dunning’s “Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake: The Terror of the Therapeutic” finds Oryx to be the “abiding mystery at the heart of the story,” he still frames her significance in relation to male desire and agency. Durning writes:

> Oryx proves even more elusive, both about her relationship with Crake, and indeed about her own life. She refuses (and has effectively been denied the opportunity) to speak of (or for) herself, preferring to deflect her interrogators by addressing the inarticulate urges of their bodies; thus, she both secures herself against penetrating intellectual curiosity and becomes the site of perpetual mystery, a space within which the narrator (and likely Crake himself) "writes" his own sense of the Other. (92)

While Dunning gestures to out a more complex power dynamic than Ingersoll, Bouson and others, he still presents Oryx’s refusal “to speak of (or for) herself” as an undecidable “mystery,” effectively depoliticizing her presence and positioning her a reflective object through which male
desire is realized. These arguments rehearse the Lacanian truism that there is “no outside to the phallus” and, I believe, radically oedipalize the possible registers through which Oryx’s movements and motivations might be contextualized.

If the nightmare of corporate domesticity functions by bio-technologically mapping “difference” into an normative hierarchy of branching subject-species, then the embryonic core from which this knowledge sprouts is the militarized corporate compound, laboratory, and suburb. The biotech compounds of the early 21st century are command and control centers that reproduce and export the dystopian features of the novel. Only within the heavily guarded green zone can cell biology experiment with porous bodies and not introduce them to worldly difference. It is crucial, then, to mark the moment when this reproductive center is invaded and cross-fertilized by an “illegal alien.” Oryx’s presence at the Paradice Lab cannot be reduced to any other character’s desire because her presence resists normal incorporation; ultimately, she is not where she is “supposed” to be. Quite apart from Jimmy and Crake’s representation of Oryx as an “exotic” or “nurturing” woman, it is important to allow for the possible political effects her very presence might have on the technological apparatus she has infiltrated. Claire Colebrook makes a similar point via Foucault when she argues that, “far from seeing language as the sole condition for subject formation, Foucault’s work looks at the way bodies (and other powers, such as spatial systems, technologies and disciplinary procedures) also create conditions and relations” (216). Oryx’s body, therefore, does not enter the architectural space of corporate domesticity as a force on its own, but it might be recognized as a force of its own. Because she is a foreign pleeblander from Southeast Asia who became a child-prostitute and nomadic refugee after her homeland was destroyed by drought, Oryx is fully aware of her abject status within the
corporate-domestic world-order; but Oryx is also aware of her viral power to infiltrate and infect this discursive system. She is an outsider working from the inside out.

In fact, the transformation from dystopian control to apocalyptic release is explicitly announced when Oryx appears at the compound: “now he’s come to . . . the place in the tragic play where it would say: Enter Oryx. Fatal moment” (307). Inside the compound, Oryx is actively involved in the twin projects that eventually extinct humans from earth. In particular, she helps develop and distribute pills for the BlyssPluss project that “prolong youth,” “increase libido,” and secretly sterilize “male and female alike” (294), and she also oversees the creation of a hybrid species of human-animal creatures, the Crakers, which promise to, over time, replace infertile humans on earth. Although there is no reason to believe that Oryx knows about the lethal disease carried by the BlyssPluss pills, she does voice her support for the programs’ long-term goal of replacing human life with Crakers. Contrary to the depiction of Oryx as a mysterious, passive object of other’s desires, she tells Jimmy flatly, “I believe in Crake, I believe in his…vision,” and that “there are too many people and that makes the people bad. I know this from my own life” (322). To ascribe Oryx’s political commitments to Crake’s “manipulation,” as Jimmy does, is to ignore what Oryx “know[s] . . . from [her]own life,” and thereby, overlook her agency in the destruction of corporate domesticity.

Oryx repeatedly confounds Jimmy’s attempts to morally scrutinize her past experiences and tidily affix her to his corporate map. Jimmy’s blanket condemnation of sex-work as inherently exploitative (never mind his own virtual participation in this economy), is met by Oryx’s observation, “you don’t understand me, Jimmy” (316). Rather than allowing Jimmy to recognize her life and sexuality through the familiar lens of “cheap bodies,” Oryx insists that Jimmy confront her agency in these past experiences. For instance, Oryx points out that Jack, a
porn-director, never did “anything with [her] that [Jimmy] doesn’t do,” except that he “taught her English” and was poor, like her. By affirming her affiliation with poor outsiders and equating sex with Jimmy to pornography, she poses a transvaluation of hierarchical norms; the poor pornographer teaches her English and the rich “language person,” as Jimmy calls himself, bores her in bed. When Jimmy protests and argues that their sex isn’t “against her will,” Oryx only laughs and asks “what is my will?” (141). Jimmy is stumped by this rhetorical question because Oryx’s will is nomadic and transversal, cheap and expensive, inside and outside, poor and proud, foreign and domestic. Her will does not grow organically outward toward the purification of an individualistic subject-species position, but instead, it travels between branches to produce a worldly assemblage of impure cross-fertilizations. She wills to keep open and affirm the complex, communal difference of her life experiences and she brings these messy material connections with her to the compound. Oryx recalls, for instance, “a kind man” she lived with and worked for, and tells Jimmy, “if it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be here” in bed with you (316). Here, she seeks to uproot the suburban bedroom/laboratory from its germinal position as the original site of sexual growth. For Oryx, Jimmy’s bedroom sits precariously on the edge of a branch, materially tied to a web of other bedrooms and species. Oryx is not eluding Jimmy’s preoccupation with her sexual past to appear more “mysterious” and “desirable” in his eyes; she is challenging Jimmy’s paternal concern for her because she seeks a revolutionary end to the dystopian oedipalization of biopower as such.

But how to interpret the cataclysmic extinction of human life purposed by Oryx and Crake? Watching television reports of the disease’s rapid spread, Jimmy sees it as a “slow-motion sequence. It was porn with the sound muted, it was brainfizz without the commercials. It was melodrama so overdone that he and Crake would have laughed their heads off at it” (326).
Extinction, then, appears both over- and underdone; it introduces themes of genocide and apocalypse but also foregrounds the fictionality of these events as a mere “melodrama,” even more outlandish than Atwood’s satiric depiction of late capitalism. As a mediated event “without...commercials” or commercial meaning, the event becomes a flight of pure imagination and pure terror. To release the narrative from its static image of dystopian control—to allow for a 1985—corporate society is infected by a viral element of difference that reproduces and distributes itself all along the mechanisms of control.

Nevertheless, imagining this proliferation of difference as a type of genocidal act threatens to erase not only corporate neocolonialism but also the potential for emergent forms of sociality. After all, mass death reduces living difference even more radically than corporate domesticity. This, then, is the ultimate contradiction of dystopian control because it engulfs even revolutionary strategies of resistance: within the novel, the end of neocolonial capitalism can only be dreamt of as an apocalyptic spasm or terrorist melodrama. Therefore, the novel resolutely denies any utopian vision of a posthuman future, even as it is driven to inhabit a world after societies of control.

The indiscriminate death of humans that marks the end of corporate domesticity should be read in light of its mirror image: the indiscriminate burning of animals that introduces the reader to the biotech compound. Together, these images of death reciprocally expose a speciesism that is central to the dystopian narrative. Oryx and Crake name themselves after extinct animals with whom they identify. Their anti-imperialist or revolutionary fervor is intertwined with an implicit demand that the power of other species be felt across human society. Rather than channeling their demand into a tradition of animal-rights politics, Oryx and Crake seek a biotechnological reconceptualization of animal-human relations. In the hybrid, part-
animal part-human Crakers, the novel instantiates a symbiogenetic conception of biotechnological embodiment. These creatures cannot ignore their embodied kinship to other species, and they introduce a radical notion of evolution to the novel, even as it is surely being consumed by the tragedy of extinction.

*Oryx and Crake* can thus be said to develop a double-vision of biotechnology. First, there is thanatological biotech: in an evolutionary system where species are patented and managed by an embryological (co.)rporeality, the destruction of this branching infrastructure culminates in mass death. If the power to give (and name) life has become prosthetically managed by biocapitalism, then, through a sort of blackmail, the revolutionary spirit is destined to be terroristic. This vision of the posthuman not only describes a period following biocapitalism, but also refers to the literal end of human survival. Alongside this economy of death, *Oryx and Crake* also glimpses an alternative form of evolution. Here, the posthuman isn’t tied to narratives of scarcity and extinction, but represents a biotechnological evolution based on socialistic forms of interspecies kinship and symbiogenesis.

**Evolution and Extinction**

From the outset *Oryx and Crake* makes use of the sci-fi and Nietzschean “last man” trope. Snowman, it appears, is the only remaining human being living on a earth, which is now populated by genetically engineered hybrid-creatures: wolvogs, pigoons and the human-animal hybrid Crakers. The novel begins: “Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of a heartbeat” (3). The heat from the imminent sunrise suggests that the vulnerable Snowman is not long for this world. He, like the rest of his species, will melt into the waves that appear to have a vitality or “heartbeat” of their own. The waves, then, are both an
The image of life’s dissolution and of life’s capacity to travel beyond the “barricades” of speciation. The wave is extinction. The wave is evolution. Even the “wish-wash” of the wave posits a desire, project, or “wish” that can only ever break even against the neutrality of a “wash,” death, or evolution.

The “wish-wash” of evolution-extinction is audible, too, behind the whirling collision of “natural and artificial, nature and culture…machine and organic body, money and lives, narrative and reality” that Donna Haraway attributes to the cyborg body (Modest, 14). Apart from Snowman, all of the living species left on earth were invented in corporate biotech laboratories during the early 21st century, shaped by the cultural imagination of corporate domesticity. The animal-human “Children of Crake,” in fact, were designed out of ideological desperation, an evolutionary “wish” in the face of an unsustainable social order. As Crake explains, “what had been altered [in the Crakers] was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were . . . the features responsible for the world’s current ills” (305). These creatures interrupt a corporate diagram of evolution which poses a single orderly tree from which kingdoms and species branch-apart forever. As a prosthetic composition of nature, technology and culture, the Crakers are humanoids that have been excluded from an “ancient primate” lineage, and yet, they are entirely enfolded within it, within the mind of primate scientist. But moreover, they are composed of various plant and animal DNA, creating multiple and partial linkages to disparate branches on the old evolutionary tree. They are not the children of man; they have multiple parents, ideological, technological, and biological.

The Tree of Life

The image of an evolutionary tree of life has powerful effects on how “life” and “nature” function within social and cultural contexts. Crucially, it locates difference, through speciation,
as branching and therefore truncated. At one end, life is conceived as being an organic whole, part of a unified tree that reduces all difference to a single arboreal origin. On the other end, life extends outwardly into increasingly individuated branches, generating an image of discreet, non-overlapping differences. Difference, then, becomes the natural process of bodies individualizing above and against other species. All lines of interconnection between species run distinctly “backwards” and away from the implicit call to individuate through a purification of the species into niches, away from relations with other species. The tree grows upward, outward, and forward, imparting an image that is at once hierarchical, speciesist, and teleological. It is therefore unsurprising that this image has been used to mobilize various imperial projects that seek to, in a glance, concretize and naturalize their power over others (McClintock, 36-39). Only too easily, the tree of life becomes the “tree of man” or “family of man,” which perversely maps military and cultural oppressions onto the origins of human life as such. According to the branching logic of the tree, speciation is deployable for the natural organization of all “human” difference (race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.). The point of this procedure is to lock-up difference, drain it of its power, and depoliticize it with a less-than-human natural history.

It is not surprising, then, when Snowman wakes up, on the first page of the novel, that he is stuck in a tree (3-4). Flung out on his humanist branch, Snowman is a strange and lonely pure-bred animal compared to the hybrid-species living around him. He clings to the tree for survival but also for reassurance that his bodily difference is a sign of purity and superiority rather than mere variation. If nothing else, Atwood’s double-vision of biotechnology confronts Snowman with something that has always been the case but has never truly been believed, something actively disavowed by corporate biotechnology. Namely, evolution and speciation is always already influenced by inter-species reproduction and the lateral transfer of genes between
species; only rarely is it caused by random mutation or pure genius. Indeed, the entire post-apocalyptic section of the novel can be understood as the story of Snowman learning to come down from his tree and witness evolution in its posthumanist incarnation as a field of embodied differences.

Because this tree of life underlies Atwood’s critique of corporate domesticity and the survival of rakunks, wolvehogs and Crakers, it is important to recognize how Atwood opens an interdisciplinary conversation with contemporary biologists and theories of evolution. In interviews about *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood describes reading “Stephen J. Gould” “*Scientific American*” and drawing inspiration from the “last chapter of *The Future of Life*, by Edmund Osborne Wilson” (www.oryxandcrake.co.uk). Indeed, several key aspects of Atwood’s argument appear in Lynn Margulis’s seminal study *Acquiring Genomes: The Theory of the Origins of Species*. Like Atwood, Margulis questions the sociobiological trope of “mutation” in the production of an evolutionary tree of speciation. Margulis points out that “mutation” is almost always found to be either detrimental for survival or to produce only very minor genetic change. Instead of extrapolating speciation from mutation, Margulis mounts an argument, based on a body of evidence, that symbiogenesis is the primary cause of speciation. Revising the tree of life, Margulis points out:

the acquisition of heritable genomes can be depicted as an anastomosis, a fusing of branches . . . Such evolution requires new thought processes. New metaphors to reflect on the permanent associations are needed. Symbiosis, merger, body-fusion, and the like cannot be reduced to replacing "competition" with "cooperation." Ultimately, an anthropocentric term like "competition" has no obvious place in the scientific dialogue . .
If survival is owned to symbiosis, rather than overemphasized intraspecific competitive struggles, what then are the consequences for nonbiologists interested in evolution? (15)

Margulis’ argument is derived by the careful study of microorganisms and their ability to exchange DNA directly with each other and their hosts at a cellular level. She is deeply concerned that even more advanced, computer generated expression of the tree of life still “bear only diverging branches. Few branches ever merge to represent symbiogenesis” (33). And although these “computer graphics may be impressive,…they do not reflect life's history on Earth, nor the evolution of new species” (33). In a radical turn, but one that is born out in Sarah Franklin’s research as well11, the rise of contemporary biotechnology and symbiogenetic theories of evolution, mark a “cellular turn” in biological research—a turn away from the absolute value of DNA in the definition of life forms. Microbes and other microorganism, then, perform a labor that biotechnologists are only now learning to utilize. Margulis asks, “why have human genetic engineers been so successful in passing foreign genes to food plants and domestic animals? Because nature has indulged in these gene-trading and genome-swapping tricks for eons. The real genetic engineer is the microbe; the scientists and technicians are merely go-betweens” (41).

This, of course, does not depoliticize specific practices of bioengineering. As the first half of this chapter argues, biotech is inseparable from the political economies and histories that invest it with meaning and purpose. Nevertheless, symbiogenetic evolution has the potential to confront

11 “This view of the molecularization of biology would now appear best to characterize the period of postwar twentieth-century biology, culminating in the publication of the draft sequence of the human genome map in 2001. The new view of biology, the deconditionalized view of post-genomic biology is defined by a return to the cell--the first primary unit of the life sciences, overtaken mid-century by the gene, but back in the ascendancy in part because of Dolly (and vice versa, for she was, in a sense, an offspring of the cellular turn)” (Franklin, 33).
arboreal biotechnology with a novel web-like image of evolution, which fundamentally undermines corporate biotech’s strategies of rooted control.

Ruminating about the state of contemporary bioscience, Margulis confronts an institutional reluctance to imagine evolution outside of its humanist treehouse:

Philosophy and history are viewed as questionable traditions, useless or leisurely occupations, in modern scientific circles, especially in the United States. Active scientists often deny they even have a philosophy— they say it interferes with their work. The scientific reconstruction of prehistory, however, an intrinsically philosophical practice replete with inferences and judgments, is essential to the answer of the central question of how species began. (37)

Here, the philosophical implications of biotechnology remain buried under a “prehistory” that supposes an organic root from which all life branches outward and upward. The figure of the “scientist-entrepreneur,” whose funding depends on forgetting these philosophical problems, may be reluctant to question hierarchical models of evolution that mirror the corporate latter and legitimate their right to patent hybridity as divergent species.

*Oryx and Crake*, on the other hand, does not avoid theories of lateral trans-species gene swapping, and it is committed to exploring the social implications of such thinking. Describing his work as a bio-technician, Crake tells Jimmy, “*think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of it first*” (164). For Crake, biotechnology is not rooted in original genius or corporate patents; instead, biotech confronts humanity with an immersive web of ongoing biological interconnections. And rather than use biotechnology to segregate bodies, families, and species into corporate compounds and militarized slums, Crake
practices a symbiogenetic from of biotechnology. The Crakers, therefore, collectively “purr,” like cats, to help heal minor wounds because “once [Crake] discovered that the cat family purred at the same frequency as the ultrasound used on bone fractures,…he turned himself inside out in the attempt to install that feature” (156). Significantly, the high-tech “ultrasound” and the natural “cat purr” are already synced-up together. Biotechnology, then, samples this prosthetic power and redeployes it. For instance, the Crakers eat “roots, grass and caecotrophs,” which consist of “semi-digested herbage, discharged through the anus and re-swallowed two or three times” (158). This digestive feature comes from “hares and rabbits, which depend on caecotrophs rather than on several stomachs like the ruminants” (159). Into and out of stomachs, hares and rabbits have cooked up sticky dishes of prosthetic matter for centuries; for better and worse, biotechnology can stomach such cultural diets of difference. Additionally, the Crakers have partially-photosynthetic skin, which allows them to conserve and exploit bountiful sources of energy without massive agricultural or industrial procedures. Indeed, without the corporate patenting of species, bodies become open source materiality, and copyright infringement must be replaced with a vision of prosthetically embodied kinship. For the Crakers, adaptability emerges from the microbiological openness of bodies to worldly difference.

Indeed, this symbiogenetic webbing of evolution does imagine radically new social formations for the Crakers. When a female Craker is ovulating, it is “obvious to all from the bright-blue colour of her buttocks and abdomen,” a trait “filched from baboons, with a contribution from the…chromosphores of the octopus” (164). She then has sex with multiple male Crakers whose desire is exclusively stimulated by the “blue tissue and pheromones released by” the female (165). The male Crakers’ “penises turn bring blue” and they offer a floral tribute to the ovulating female. She chooses four bouquets and “the female and her quartet find a
secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue coloring fades” (165). For the males not chosen “sexual ardour…dissipates immediately” (165). In this system, “it no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there’s no property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war” (165). Unlike the patriarchal, father-son inheritance of corporate domesticity, the Crakers abandon the paranoia of paternity and all of its domestic imprisonments. Likewise, homosexuality is freely exercised because “sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing…Now it’s more like . . . a free-spirited romp” (165). Ultimately, “there [is] nothing for these people to inherit,” Crake explains, because “there [are] no family trees” (305, my emphasis). Here sexuality is no longer an oedipal drama of shame or death, and kinship is no longer nuclearized by trees of money or blood. Craker sociality imagines a biotechnological evolution where the copyrights on “the human” have expired and a symbiogenetic form of sexuality and kinship have become open-source.

*Evolution and Histories of Bodies*

Near the end of the novel, Snowman becomes infected by a cut on his foot, which he attends to by applying antibiotics while sitting in a tree. For Snowman, the tree promises higher ground and respite from the immersive hybridity of wolvhogs and pigoons roaming the earth. Sitting in this tree, Snowman reflects on the arboreal model of human evolution:

He rubs some antibiotic gel into the cut, but without much faith: the microbes infecting him have doubtless already mounted their resistance and are simmering away in there, turning his flesh to porridge.

He scans the horizon from his arboreal vantage point . . . *Arboreal*, a find word. *Our arboreal ancestors*, Crake used to say. *Used to shit on their enemies from above while*
perched in trees. All planes and rockets and bombs are simply elaborations on that primate instinct. (357)

Unlike the symbolic tree of life, no matter how high Snowman climbs, this tree will not cleanse his body as species unto itself. The “microbes . . . simmering away” inside of him are transforming him from the inside out, “turning his flesh to porridge” and turning his thoughts to arboreal images of evolution. Here Snowman’s wound cannot be interpreted psychoanalytically as a tragic lack of phallic unity; the wound is a prosthetic site of microbial activity that challenges Snowman’s “faith” in the “antibiotic” sterilization of humanity. Snowman is fascinated by the word “arboreal” because it vacillates productively between two meanings. Ostensibly, it points to the “arboreal” primates from which human beings, in particular, evolved. But this specifically human evolution is anthropomorphically exaggerated so that the arboreal metaphor encompasses all of evolution’s “elaborations.” In other words, when primate instincts reach new heights with “planes and rockets and bombs,” these technologies represent human beings’ natural inheritance of a “vantage point” that overshadows all the other species in a biopolitical umbrella of power.

Atwood lambasts the delusional anthropomorphism of arboreal evolution by imagining what would happen if Snowman were to “die up here, in this tree” (357). Other creatures walking by might then say, “Oh look, another dead man. Big fucking deal. Common as dirt. Yeah, but this one’s in a tree. So, who cares? (357). From the non-human perspective, dying in a tree is no more significant than dying on the “common . . . dirt.” But for Snowman, arboreal evolution, like corporate biotechnology, promises something more; namely, that his life as a human being is metaphysically unique, imbued with a destiny. Pathetically, Snowman screams out, “I’m not just any dead man,” to which the creatures are imagined to respond: “Of course not! Each one of us
is unique! And every single dead person is dead in his or her very own special way! Now, who wants to share about being dead, in our own special words?” (357). These sarcastic creatures do not begrudge Snowman a notion of difference; they only object to his anthropocentric self-importance. They object to the idea that even in death (particularly in death) human’s claim an exceptional dignity, which is denied to animals.

Open-sourced bodies, comprised of worldly difference and the lateral transfer of genes, produce broad networks of kinship that emerge symbiotically and materially via an evolution without the teleology of speciation. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben argues that “already . . . with the end of the First World War” and definitively by the end of WWII, “anyone . . . not in absolutely bad faith” would agree “there are no longer historical tasks that can be taken on by, or even assigned to, men” (76). Agamben claims that “the great totalitarian experiments of the twentieth century,” not only continued the “nineteenth-century nation-states’ last great [historical] tasks: nationalism and imperialism,” but they also took on the biopolitical task of managing “the very factual existence of peoples” (76). Therefore, “the only task that still seems to retain some seriousness is the assumption of the burden—and the ‘total management’—of biological life, that is, of the very animality of man. Genome, global economy and humanitarian ideology are the three united faces of this process in which posthistorical humanity seem to take on its physiology as its last, impolitical mandate” (77). But, in *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood depicts a much more complicated vision of biopolitics, one that exposes the theological task that resides still within the most biopolitical of discourses: species evolution. If Nineteenth-century imperialisms were fueled by the human sciences and their construction of a “family of man,” then Atwood warns of a twenty-first century imperialism fueled by the biological sciences and the construction of a “family of species.” She warns against speciation becoming the
biohistorical task of humanity, a dystopian domestication of life through corporate reproduction: the reproduction of species without evolution. Where biotechnology becomes a human science it retains imperial ambitions, but where biotechnology recalls the nomadic materiality of embodiment, it finds new passengers within and new relations to greet.
Chapter Three

The Human Ailment: A Nother World in Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People

Early in Animal’s People the narrator, Animal, recalls that he was “six when the pains began,…[a] burning in [his] neck and across the shoulders” (14). The “pain gripped [his] neck and forced it down,” as if “a devil…with red hot tongs” was molding his spinal column into a permanent bow (15). “Further, further forward I was bent,” Animal recalls, and “when the smelting in my spine stopped the bones had twisted like a hairpin, the highest part of me was my arse” (15). The industrial language of material design—“red hot tongs” and “smelting” heat used to forge acute angles—is here applied to the anatomical “neck,” “shoulders,” “spine” and “arse.” Animal’s body is wrenched forward by the leakage of industrial heat into living bodies, a metallurgical fever that softens and recasts the vertebrae’s structure from the inside out. This posture represents a new kind of “factory life” where the “burning in the muscles” does not come from long hours of repetitive labor inside factory walls. Instead, the factory lives as a chemical prosthetic that travels within Animal, touching and burning his inaccessible interior, his neurological and genetic self.

The metamorphic discharge of chemical heat from factories to bodies described in Animal’s People is not merely metaphorical. Animal’s People is, after all, a thinly fictionalized account of a very real and ongoing twenty-seven year-old industrial catastrophe in Bhopal, India. From December 1984 until today, a pesticide factory owned by Union Carbide and Dow Chemical (two U.S.-based multinational petrochemical and biotech companies) has leaked untold tons of toxic chemicals into Bhopal. Over the course of this quarter century spill, the population of Bhopal has not only seen between 4,000 and 8,000 people suffocate from the initial airborne exposure to methyl isocyanate (MIC), but the people of Bhopal also continue to
experience disproportionately high rates of “birth defects,” cleft palates, all manner of tumorous growths, severe eye pain, respiratory problems, and neurological disorders. Including 20,000 subsequent deaths, most of the 100,000-200,000 people suffering from serious ongoing ailments have become sick due to a massive seepage of MIC from the unsecured factory into the city’s ground water. Union Carbide, the Indian government, and Dow Chemical have all refused to recognize the presence or health effects of MIC in Bhopal’s water supply, despite a wealth of evidence. Once considered a mutually beneficial site for economic development, the factory, the chemicals, and the people of Bhopal have now been abandoned by their corporate benefactors, their national government and the legal systems in India and the U.S.

Even though the factory is “closed,” this abandonment makes it no less operational within the terrain and bodies of Bhopal. And yet, troublingly, as Rob Nixon points out in his article, “Neoliberalism, Slow Violence, and the Environmental Picaresque,” “in an age that venerates instant spectacle, slow violence [like the ongoing spill in Bhopal] is deficient in…recognizable special effects.” Where “chemical and radiological slow violence is driven inward, somatized into cellular dramas of mutation,” it is difficult to reproduce that familiar “narrative containment, imposed by the visual orthodoxies of victory and defeat” (445). Indeed, Animal is keenly aware of his readers’ desire to perceive the spill as Dow and the Indian government have, to visualize it as a completed event that took place on a single, tragic night. “So strangers in far off countries can marvel,” Animal argues, “you have turned us Khaufpuris into storytellers, but always the same story . . . that night, always that fucking night” (5). Throughout the novel, then, Animal negotiates with the spectacular demands placed on him by his international readership.

Addressing his audience, Animal states, “I will call you Eyes. My job is to talk, yours is to listen” (14). By calling for “Eyes” to listen, Animal not only interrupts the visual logic that treats
his narration as the “same story” of “that night,” but his demand also constructs a synesthetic readership whose textual sensorium must be rewired. If the slow violence of the chemical spill cannot be seen through the image of single explosion on a single night, then the ongoing diffusion of chemicals into living bodies must be conveyed as a confusion of the senses, a synesthetic mutation that dramatizes the neurological metamorphosis of chemical violence.

As part of this negotiation with his audience, Animal strategically presents his own non-normative body as a complex visual cue for the slow violence affecting his community. Knowing that his narration “becomes a picture and [that his audiences’] eyes settle on it like flies,” Animal directs his own gaze inward:

I’m looking right now at my feet, which are near the hearth, twisted they’re, a little bent to one side. Inside of left foot, out of right, where they scrape the ground the skin’s thick and cracked. In gone times I’ve felt such hunger, I’d break off lumps of the dry skin and chew it. Want to see? Okay watch, I am reaching down to my heel, feeling for horny edges, I’m sliding the thumbnail under. There, see this lump of skin, hard as a pebble, how easily it breaks off, mmm, chewy as a nut. (13)

As Animal’s feet enter the visual frame, they appear turned over, “twisted,” “bent,” “inside…out,” “scrapped,” “cracked,” “lumpy,” “dry,” “horney,” “hard,” and “chewy” (13). Indeed, Animal’s highly embodied description makes it difficult to see his feet without also touching or tasting them. Significantly, Animal’s synesthetic relationship to his feet is directly connected to his bent spine, which brings his feet into close contact with his nose, mouth, and eyes. Deploying a rhetoric of intimacy, Animal asks the reader if they “want to see” him eat a piece of his heel; he directs the viewers’ eyes to “see this lump of skin,” which he holds out like
a “pebble.” As the visual field narrows to this fleshy focal point, Animal promptly swallows the meat. The Eyes are forced to follow the lump of skin into the darkness of Animal’s digestive tract, “mmm.” While Animal’s posture clearly symbolizes the invisible chemicals that have smelt his community together—allowing Animal to stand out from and also stand in for his community’s often ignored toxicity—Animal also keenly directs his audience’s gaze toward the inside of his body, where the cellular drama of mutation and adaptation rage on.

Moreover, Animal’s posture allows Indra Sinha to approach the Bhopal disaster from a different line of sight, one lowly and inverted. As Animal points out, “the world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level [but] . . . Lift my head I’m staring into someone’s crotch” (2). Animal “knows which one hasn’t washed his balls, [and] can smell pissy gussets and shitty backsides whose faint stenches don’t carry to your nose” (2). Even as Animal’s posture helps represent the physical afflictions of overlooked Bhopalies, it also gives Animal access to the smells of abject materiality that cannot be viewed from eye-level or from the perspective of the “human world.” Animal’s synesthetic descriptions accentuate the bodily processes of digestion and genital sexuality, but in so doing, this synesthesia knocks up against the “world of humans” as it is “meant to be seen.” In other words, the visual logic that frames the chemical spill as “the same story” of “that night” is held in place by a “world of humans” that can only see, and be seen, from “eye level.” The size, shape, and meaning of material violence is therefore limited by a “world” system that prescribes what is “meant to be seen” as human and what is meant to be ignored as nonhuman.

Provocatively, Animal’s stance here evokes Sigmund Freud’s famous footnote on “organic repression” from Civilization and Its Discontents, where Freud proposes a world system to link posture to civilization and humanity. For Freud, “with the assumption of an erect posture
by man and with the depreciation of his sense of smell, it was not only his anal eroticism which threatened to fall victim to organic repression, but the whole of his sexuality” (62). Just as the bipedal body opens up a new distance between the human nose and genitalia, it also lifts the head upward, directing the human gaze outward into the world and away from the abdomen. This vertical alignment of body parts, in turn, de-genitalizes the human sensorium just enough for civilization to take hold and keep the species standing. Furthermore, according to Freud, “the deepest root of the sexual repression which advances along with civilization is the organic defense of the new form of life achieved with man’s erect gait against his earlier animal existence” (62). That is, not only is the world system of civilization biologically linked to a species-specific body-type, but for Freud, humans’ erect gait is also meant to “defend” the “achievement” of civilization against the threat of animal devolution. This teleology paradoxically suggests that human beings stood upright to defend a world system that, in any case, arose from the fact of humans standing upright.

By posing as a 21st century postcolonial parody of Freud’s formulation, Animal not only challenges the knotted logic that ties species to posture and civilization, but he also exposes the legacy of racial and cultural discrimination that continues to haunt a universalist conception of humanity. Granting Freud’s premise, Animal accedes “whole nother world it’s, below the waist,” and, therefore, allows that he cannot see the “world of humans” as it is “meant to be viewed” (2). That is, to see humans properly, one must see them eye-to-eye, from an already-human point-of-view. It is no surprise, then, given the postcolonial context of the novel, that humanism’s limitations are here associated with a specific site of sight. As Edward Said points out, Freud’s perception of civilized humanity was situated within a late 19th-century imperialist context and, therefore, projected a “Eurocentric view of culture…particularly [in its] humanistic and scientific
assumptions” (*Freud and the Non-European* 16, 13-14). Despite his discontents with civilization’s repressive character, Freud still sees civilization as emerging from a natural or organic form of repression. For Freud, “organic repression” is not just a repression of organic substance, but it is also, paradoxically, a form of repression organic to humans as such. In this way, Freud naturalizes a Eurocentric view of humanity, where western forms of civilization become a social phenotype or biological marker for scientifically determining what counts as human. So, when Freud writes of a “high-water mark…[that] has been reached in our Western European civilization” or of “primitive human types living at the present,” he effectively divides the species between civilized westerners and colonized “human types” (60, 73). That is, the organic repression that is constitutive of human beings is inextricably tied to the political repression that is constitutive of western imperialism as a world system.

Alternatively, for Sinha, the “whole nother world” that Animal experiences “below the waist” connects the nether world of abject materiality with another world, a place not “meant to be seen” as part of the “world of humans.” Here, various prosthetic networks link the vast and fast investments of transnational corporations to the small and slow biochemical interiors of politically marginalized people, animals, and environments. This posthuman zone of contestation is a “nother world” of political struggle, filled with communities of prosthetic assemblage and networks of domination, but as a whole, these material struggles are filtered, disguised and suppressed by a world system that uses the human to determine the size and scope of what is “meant to be seen.”

**Neo-Liberalism, Environmental Technologies, and Human Capital**
As Rob Nixon points out, Indra Sinha’s larger project in Animal’s People is to “probe the underbelly of neoliberal globalization” by throwing “into relief a political violence both intimate and distant, unfolding over time and space on a variety of scales, from the cellular to the transnational, the corporeal to the global corporate” (444). For Sinha, these small, slow, vast, and fast sites of technological interconnection operate behind, below, beside and above the standardized “eye to eye”-sized visual framing of human individuality. For instance, to great effect, Sinha meta-textually describes the transformation of Animal’s fictional narration into a real-world Booker Prize nominated book, thereby encoding the multiple settings of time and space that structure the novel. Even as the narrative takes place in a local, underrepresented Indian community, this local narrative is framed by multiple paratextual markers, including an Editor’s Note that unselfconsciously asserts: “apart from translating to English, nothing [of Animal’s account] has been changed.” This, of course, implies that the publishing company has changed every sentence by translating it from Hindi into English. In this way, Sinha subtly captures the invisible touch of non-local hands on the text, including the powerful grip of corporate editors and translators. Likewise, in an intertextual gambit, Sinha has constructed a website for the local, fictional city of Khaufpur (www.khaufpur.com). Written entirely in English and primarily focused on tourism, the site also features several self-referential articles that report on the novel’s real-world nomination for a Booker Prize in Literature. At khaufpur.com, one can read a fictional Indian Chief Minister’s condemnation of the book as a “filthy and vile poison…[that] should be banned for depicting Khaufpuri politicians as cynical and corrupt personages” (www.khaufpur.com). But if the local Chief Minster wants to silence Animal by banning his book, the Booker Prize committee also attempts to erase Animal from the site of self-representation. Animal explains in his online op-ed article, “Katie Price v. Animal Spice,”
“the story is all in my words but that bugger Sinha has got his name all over the book. I am not even mentioned on the cover as the real author” (www.khaufpur.com).

Sinha stages this subaltern double-bind by encoding different, overlapping, local and transnational responses to the novel. While the Indian Chief Minster affirms Animal’s authorial status, he repudiates the novel’s political critique of local corruption, and while the Editor and Booker Prize Committee celebrate the novel’s content, they displace Animal as the book’s real author. Heather Snell, in her essay “Assessing the Limitations of Laughter in Indra Sinha’s Animal’s People,” argues that Sinha’s paratextual devices “serve as a playful reminder of the very real material, and often exploitive, relations of production through which an oral account may be turned into a book without crediting the author of the original tale” (3). While Snell’s analysis is rightly focused on the exploitation of oral authors in the production of global literature, her critique also recalls the “exploitive relations of production” that characterize Union Carbide and Dow Chemical’s practices in the subcontinent. That is, the subaltern drama that paratextually surrounds the production of Animal’s People, must also be read as a synecdochical figuration of the “very real material…relations of production” that conditioned the Bhopal spill in the first place.

In an effort to affirm the ahuman dimensions a “nother world” where chemical violence intersects with transnational relations of production, Sinha avoids the eye-to-eye structure of many humanitarian pleas. Through Animal, Sinha shows great skepticism for humanitarian efforts that force marginalized peoples to petition for their enfranchisement into the lower rungs of a hegemonic humanity that is supposedly universal, classless, and inalienable. Indeed, all too often, the recognition of marginalized people is made contingent on a notion of subjectivity that limits the scale and scope of representable experiences. For example, even though nearly all new
international trade agreements contain human rights provisos, these inclusions are often non-binding rhetorical feints that individualize the scale and scope of human rights claims, coordinating such rights with the economic imperatives of free trade capitalism. Consider the “Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures” put forth in the 1994 Uruguay WTO Agreement. Here, article five, section five begins

With the objective of achieving consistency in the application of the concept of appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection against risks to human life or health …each Member shall avoid … unjustifiable distinctions in the levels it considers to be appropriate in different situations, if such distinctions result in discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade.

The provision goes on to state that, “In developing the guidelines, the Committee shall take into account all relevant factors, including the exceptional character of human health risks to which people voluntarily expose themselves.” Not only does this provision limit the “different situations” of human health to those that do not “result in…restriction on international trade,” but it also carves out the “exceptional” status of so-called “voluntary” health risks. Indeed, the capacity of an individual to “voluntarily” assume personal responsibility for systematic risks is the neo-liberal definition of human freedom, par excellence. That is, Animal’s People critiques neo-liberal humanism because of its refusal to confront the systematic and prosthetic effects of, what Michel Foucault calls, “environmental technologies.” In the name of humanism, these documents of neo-liberal policy obscure the scale and scope of neo-liberalism’s technological power.

Consider, for example, Methyl Isocyanate (MIC), the toxic chemical that continues to poison Bhopal’s water supply. As a vital compound in the production of many popular pesticides
(as well as rubbers and adhesives), MIC embodies the legacy of the “Green Revolution” and the United States’ attempt to revamp India’s economy via hi-tech agriculture, corporate investment, and local debt. This familiar client-state model, whereby Western corporations sell expensive new technologies to ever more indebted and dependent Indian farmers, has only intensified in the 21st century, particularly since the 1995 World Trade Organization’s “Agreement on Agriculture” left Indian farmers to compete with heavily subsidized agri-businesses from the U.S. and E.U. Consequently, between 1997 and 2007, 182,936 India farmers have committed suicide, unable to pay the loans used to invest in agro-tech from U.S. corporations such as water-intensive genetically modified seeds from Monsanto and toxic pesticides like Dursban (illegal in the U.S.) from Dow Chemical (Mukherjee, 2). Nearly all of these farmers killed themselves by “drinking…pesticide, registering both a cry of rage and a naming of the forces that pushed them from life to death” (2). In this way, MIC and other expensive sticky chemicals have not only coated the economic environment that reproduces food and debt in India, but they have also entered the invisible molecular interior of animals and humans alike. Not easily washed off, this molecular coating prosthetically links water, food, and health in Bhopal to the historical vicissitudes of corporate investment in (and abandonment of) human capital.

In The Birth of Biopolitics, Michel Foucault argues that under a neo-liberal regime, “environmental technologies” are used to manipulate the “cost-benefit” framework that produces human capital (259, 261). According to Foucault, neo-liberalism’s understanding of humanity as “human capital” is “not a conception of labor power; it is a conception of capability…so that the worker himself appears as a sort of enterprise for himself” (225). This vision of enterprise humanity radically redistributes the risks of capitalism onto individual’s private decisions, even as various incentives, debts, hedges, advertisements and zones of abandonment manipulate the
decision-making environment. In the case of the Bhopal chemical spill, Union Carbide and Dow Chemical have repeatedly blamed the leak on decisions made by individual workers within the factory at the time. Warren Anderson, the CEO of Union Carbide stated “Our safety standards in the U.S. are identical to those in India...Compliance with these procedures is the responsibility of plant operators” (Everest 18-19). The corporation’s defense, therefore, relied on a linkage between human-error and diminished human capital. Much of the US press, which appeared to support Union Carbide’s claims, reported that “unskilled, unsupervised workers” who “might have added some substance into the tank” were on duty the night of the spill (McFadden, NYT, 12/10/84). In effect, Union Carbide argued that local, Indian workers possessed diminished capacities, implying that the spill was caused by an absence of individual enterprise at the plant. Indeed, three years prior to the Bhopal spill, when a worker died after inhaling phosgene at the factory, “Union Carbide blamed the dead worker for removing his gas mask,” even though “no one had warned [him that phosgene was present] before he went on cleaning duties” (Mukherjee 141). Here, the worker, as an enterprise, assumes personal responsibility for decisions he or she makes in risk-environments that have been stretched by transnational capitalism and shrunk by the presence of molecular poisons. To the point, just months prior to the Bhopal spill, Union Carbide froze spending on safety procedures, cut “permanent employment [at their Indian plant]...from 850 to 642,” and fired half of staff in the

\[12\] Meanwhile, as individuals have become subjects of enterprise through the principle of human capital, private corporations have increasingly acquired the legal and political status of individuals or citizens. This re-regulation of humanity as human capital is evident in free trade agreements, global advertising campaigns such as Cisco’s “The Human Network” or Dow Chemical’s “The Human Element,” and in court cases such as Citizen’s United, where the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed unlimited corporate donations to political candidates under the free speech rights provided to citizen’s in the constitution. In other words, even as individuals are increasingly subject to transnational
MIC production unit. Although these decisions directly conditioned workers capacity to maintain the plant, such “environmental technologies” fell outside the eye-to-eye scope of human responsibility, according to Union Carbide lawyers.

If the redistribution of environmental risk onto individuals is bound up in a neo-liberal understanding of humanity as human capital, then it is no surprise that Animal’s refusal to be named “human” is interpreted by many as an abdication of personal freedom and responsibility. Animal’s friend Farouq, for instance, argues that Animal only “pretend[s] to be an animal so [he] can escape the responsibility of being human,” and “to be accepted as a human being, you must behave like one” (209). Here, Animal is asked not only to act in accordance with accepted norms, but also to assume inflated individual risk for the maintenance of those norms. Farouq goes on to explain that “the more human you act, the more human you’ll be,” suggesting that being human is an enterprise measured by one’s capacity to risk, in every action, becoming more or less human. This form of humanism is tantamount to joining a union without the possibility of collective action or collective bargaining. Later in the novel, Animal’s friend Nisha claims, “Animal, you are a free human being, you are free to make your own decisions. Nobody will stop you or say you shouldn’t.” Animal is perplexed by Nisha’s explanation and its negative definition of freedom. He thinks to himself “So?… I am not a human being, plus I don’t need anyone’s permission to be free” (194). Once again, humanity is presented to Animal as a community that, first and foremost, lacks community. The freedom “to make your own decisions” does not, in Animal’s mind, require membership or permission. Rather, Animal is interested in the possible of a community that promises some measure of collective or partial agency.
In the Shadow of Human Rights

If Animal poses a ‘nother world’ of synesthetic experiences to interrupt his reader’s desire to see the chemical spill as a completed event, and if Sinha helps locate the environmental technologies that transform humanity into human capital, then where, in this mix of substitutions, can political rights and legal justice be found? For his part, Animal is determined to expose the way humanist discourses have so far failed to provide his ‘nother’ community a workable notion of “rights, law justice” (3). This failure becomes apparent when an Australian journalist seeks to interview Animal, and Animal points out

many books have been written about this place, [but] no one has changed anything for the better, how will yours be different? You will bleat like all the rest. You’ll talk of rights, law, justice. Those words sound the same in my mouth as in yours but they don’t mean the same . . . such words are like shadows the moon makes in the Kampani’s factory, always changing shape. On that night it was poison, now it’s words that are choking us.

(3)

Despite repeated evocations of human rights, the rule of law, and swift justice, for over twenty-five years toxic chemicals have continued to seep from the factory into Bhopal’s ground water; medical facilities still lack adequate resources; and the people of Bhopal have been denied the right to sue Union Carbide or Dow Chemical directly. In fact, shortly after the initial spill, in 1985, the Indian government passed the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster Act. Herein, the statutory right to represent all the victims of the most deadly industrial incident in history was seized by the Indian government: “The government constituted itself as the sole representative of the victims, with full authority to litigate on their behalf and to settle their claims” (Eckerman 34).
And while the government initially sought 3.3 billion dollars in damages, in February of 1989, the case was suddenly settled out of court for 470 million dollars, fifteen percent of the 3.3 billion dollar claim (Eckerman 34). Under appeal, this astonishingly inadequate settlement has been upheld in both U.S. and Indian courts, effectively foreclosing any legal recognition of Bhopalies’ human rights in civil court.

Drawing on such experiences, Animal is understandably skeptical that the universality of concepts like “rights, law, justice” can function as anything more than shadows cast by corporate behemoths. After all, in 2002, Dow Chemical’s spokesperson, Kathy Hunt, defended Union Carbide’s settlement by claiming, “you can't really do more than that, can you? $500 is plenty good for an Indian” (Bhopal.org). Rhetorically, Dow’s position here is represented by the pronoun “you,” which not only situates the listener in Dow’s shoes, but also suggests that neither “you”—nor anyone else—could “really do more than” what Dow and Union Carbide have already done. If the “you” here pretends to address a generic audience of rational individuals, then it also clearly excludes Indians from this imagined community. What is “plenty good for an Indian,” as opposed to a non-Indian, produces a division that allows Hunt to construct “you” as someone capable of measuring the difference. Here, the neo-liberal cost-benefit analysis of India’s diminished human capital meets the Freudian construction of civilized humans in opposition to “human types.” Accordingly, to be “you” or to be a legitimate judge of rights, law, and justice, you must first recognize that Indians are less-than-you. Or rather, as Upamanyu Mukherjee puts it, “the legal wrangle over accountability and compensation revealed that the idea…of the ‘human’ carried radically different meanings in the ‘global north’ of Euro-north America and the ‘global south’ of the postcolonial nations” (134). It is not simply, therefore, that Dow calls on you as a Euro-north American to validate their double-standard for Indians, which
is plenty bad for a multi-national corporation, but moreover, Dow only recognizes you as a rightful interlocutor belatedly, after “you can’t really do more,” after the question of justice has already been legally settled according to the logic and legacy of this foundational division.

Because of this very old imperial- and very new neo-liberal problem with actually existing humanism, Animal expresses real concern that “you will bleat like the rest,” and merely reproduce a universal notion of rights, law, and justice. Because these words are like shadows that are “always changing shape,” the equality they promise, for Animal, is elusive if not illusionary. Rather than providing Animal’s people with the standing to make legal and political claims against multi-national corporations, the discourse of “rights, law, justice” has been used by the Indian government, Dow Chemical, and the legal system to deny that the people have any legal right to appeal the justice of an already settled case. As Animal points out, “those words sound the same in my mouth as in yours, but they don’t mean the same” (3). Their meaning is distorted, in part, because the slow violence of the ongoing chemical spill continues to produce new victims who are born into a world where their civil rights have already been exhausted. In other words, rather than providing the framework for a political community yet-to-come, the discursive promise of universal human rights, for Animal, only stands in the way of constructing a future political community that can match the environmental technologies of neo-liberal globalization.

Furthermore, where justice is affirmed by the legal application of human rights, the question of who counts as a human person becomes the key determination. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the preamble to Union Carbide’s manifesto on “‘Corporate Safety’” begins without irony: “‘Human beings are our most precious asset…and their health and safety are therefore our number one priority’” (Lapierre 140). Understood as an “asset,” “human beings”
are here defined as the subject of Union Carbide’s “number one priority.” That is, the health and safety of human beings only becomes the “number one priority” if human beings are a priori defined as human capital, a profitable “asset” for Union Carbide. According to Mukherjee, this definition constitutes the “scandal that lurks behind the tragedy of Bhopal: if there are those who, by dint of their underprivileged location in the hierarchy of the ‘new world order’, cannot access the minimum of the rights…that are said to define ‘humanity’, what can they be called?” (144-45). Living in a state of legal exhaustion, where the question of rights has already been asked and answered, the language of humanity is little more than a painful and silencing abstraction for this community. As Animal surmises, “on that night it was poison” that choked the community; “now it’s words we’re choking on.”

Tragic Accidents and Human Extras

Just as Animal suspects the journalist will “bleat like the rest” about “rights, law, justice,” he is equally concerned that the journalist will represent the spill as a tragic accident, ignoring the ongoing struggles that animate Animal’s community. According to Animal, while repeated representations of the chemical spill have allowed “strangers in far off countries” to “marvel there’s so much pain in the world,” these stories have failed to analyze the role played by multi-national corporations in conditioning and distributing much of this pain (5). Too often, reports of a “far off…marvel” read as human-interest stories that cathartically affirm the reader’s belief in humanity’s tragic fragility and heroic survival: Man versus Nature, Man versus Technology, Man versus Man. Represented as a “marvel,” the spill figures as both exceptionally visual and as a visual exception that maps the “far off” margin of human experience at the periphery of the western world. The marvel, therefore, is made accessible in only the most abstract terms,
reduced, as it were, to the aggregate and undifferentiated “pain in the world.” Such reportage is unlikely to contextualize the spill along side other toxic leaks like Monsanto’s spread of DDT, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, the Deepwater Horizon explosion (BP), the Fukushima radiation leak (TEPCO & GE), or the many other environmental disasters linked to multinational corporations. Instead, in such stories, the spill is framed as an ahistorical accident and the existential product of human’s tragic folly.

A snapshot of US reportage following the Bhopal spill only confirms Animal’s fears about western journalism. Consider, for example, William Broad’s New York Times article, “Risks and Benefits,” published on December 7th, 1984, four days after the Bhopal disaster. It begins “an accident causing great loss of life in the third world has reached the consciousness of the industrialized world. Unlike other disasters, this one seems to speak to an amorphous dread that is the price humanity sometimes pays for the bounty of technology.” Framed as an “accident,” this article uses the sacrificial cost of humanity’s technological progress as the meta-narrative through which the “industrialized world” becomes “conscious” of “third world…loss of life.” Even though Union Carbide operated unsafe factories in many countries, including both India and the U.S., the grand narrative of humanity’s progress is the only way offered to connect the implicitly disconnected industrialized- and third worlds. Stating, without irony, that “the tragedy in India has to be seen in its wider context,” the article goes on to offer History of Technology professor Dr. Melvin Kranzberg’s assessment that “‘of those people killed, half would not have been alive today if it weren't for that plant and the modern health standards made possible by wide use of pesticides.’” Not only does Kranzberg recuperate the most deadly industrial disaster in history by putting it in the “wider context” of universal human progress and modernization, but he also questions, within this context, if postcolonial deaths fully count as
deaths at all. *Apparently*, from the vantage point of the industrialized world, where humanity can be measured with mathematical precision, precisely “half” of those killed at Bhopal would not have been alive anyway, if it were not for the life-giving powers of Union Carbide’s pesticides.

In a scene featuring a dinner conversation between two doctors, *Animal’s People* critiques this very same pseudo-scientific treatment of postcolonial death as a sacrificial cost in the larger scheme of human progress. Over dinner at his house, a wealthy, unnamed Indian doctor advises his young American colleague, Elli Barber, to “‘forget about the disaster.’” Conceding that “‘maybe there are some people in the slums that want to keep the agitation going,’” the Indian doctor explains that “the rest of us, citizens, city council, chamber of commerce, everyone, we all want to move on’” (152-153). Revealingly, the wealthy doctor substitutes “the rest of us” not living in the slums, with “citizens” and then “everyone.” For this doctor, the desire to “move on” and leave the spill in the past is not merely a sentiment shared by some corners of civil society; no, the desire to “forget about the disaster” and move forward is the prerequisite that constitutes the whole of society or at least “everyone” that counts as a member. Indeed, the doctor goes on to explain that, “‘those poor people never had a chance. If it had not been the factory it would have been cholera, TB, exhaustion, hunger. They would have died anyway’” (153). When Elli pushes back against the harsh calculus used to subtract the slums from society, the old doctor responds by stating that he is just “‘facing facts’” (153). Like the New York Times article, this wealthy doctor here promotes an image of shared humanity premised on reducing the mass death of poor people to a tragic fact. Such facts are derived from a concept of human capital that subjects humanity to cost-benefit analysis and weighs the value of individual deaths differently depending on the deceased’s riskiness or level of modernity. According to a neo-liberal formulation of humanity, because the victims of the spill “would have
died anyway,” their suffering is a small cost to human capital when compared to the “chamber of commerce’s” desire to “move on.” Using a neo-liberal notion of humanity to bridge the gap between the “far off marvel” and the “rest of us,” the spill’s significance is foreclosed by the tragic fact that “those poor people never had a chance.”

Animal senses this foreclosure of meaning during his meeting with the journalist. Sizing up the journalist’s intentions, Animal describes the journalist’s “gaze…as if [his] eyes were buttons and mine were buttonholes” (4). This is not an image of empathic journalism; the journalist does not want to see the world through Animal’s eyes, but rather, seeks to insert his own eyes, his own way of seeing, into Animal’s body, which is figured as a piece of clothing designed for fastening. For Animal, the journalist’s power is not merely representational, not simply the ideological imposition of a tragic narrative onto his body. Rather, Animal believes that the journalist wants to take hold of his body from the inside out, just like the factory’s poisons have done. Animal knows full well that the journalist has employed a local guide to help seek out “the really savage things, the worst cases,” and that Animal was selected for interview because he was a boy who “‘lost everything on that night’” (4). In other words, the journalist wants to find the most abject marvels of impoverishment and abnormality, the bodies most orphaned by toxic chemicals. Having “‘lost everything on that night,’” these bodies can hold nothing back, the journalist believes. By “buttoning” his eyeballs into Animal body, Animal will be forced to see himself as a tragic fact and to feel shame from his body and for his body. Furthermore, by cloaking himself in Animal’s skin, the journalist can use Animal’s body to self-servingly reflect his heroic compassion. Ultimately, Animal not only resists this transplantation of the journalist’s eyes and shame, but also argues that “we are not really people” in the journalist’s eyes, “we don’t have names. We flit in crowds at the corner of his eye. Extras we’re,
in his movie” (9). Pushed back into the liminal “corner of [the journalist’s cinematic] eye,” Animal knows that his community is only a marvelous prop in the journalist’s heroic disaster movie. Indeed, as “extras” in this epic visualization of humanity, Animal’s people are indispensably dispensable; they are the “not really people” who “would have died anyway,” representing the risk and shame of man’s accidental existence. Against the tragedy suffered by extras, the indefatigable overcoming of risk through private enterprise and individual responsibility constitutes the narrative of universal human progress.

“It’s a new way of seeing that gives us a new way of touching,” The Human Element

Perhaps nowhere is the neo-liberal image of humanity more visually stunning than in Dow Chemical’s global, multi-media, rebranding campaign based on a new logo and catch phrase: “HU, The Human Element.” First launched in 2006, the $100 million blitz is premised on Dow’s epiphanic discovery of the Human Element, which is meant to convey Dow’s new found investment in human progress through the technological overcoming of global warming, starvation, and pollution. According to the ad developer, John Claxton, “including the Human Element on the Periodic Table of the Elements changed the way Dow looked at the world and the way the world looked at Dow” (www.scriptphd.com). For his part, Indra Sinha has repeatedly denounced Dow’s rebranding campaign as a “glossy falsehood,” arguing that, “telling lies beautifully does not make them true” (“Why I am on hunger strike”). In the gap between beautiful branding and truth, Dow’s ads picture an at-risk humanity whose future depends on a massive investment in private enterprise and new environmental technologies.  

13 Although Dow has been associated with a long list of environmental and health fiascos, including the production of Napalm during the Vietnam War, and the continued production of Dursban in India (outlawed as toxic in the U.S.), Dow’s 2001 acquisition of the Union Carbide
For Dow, the so-called “bond between chemistry and humanity” opens up “a new way of seeing that gives [Dow] a new way of touching.” Significantly, the ads’ prominent thematics of recognition and surveillance ultimately yield a new technology of touching and prosthetic bonding. While the Human Element is held out as exceptional because it serves as a lens through which Dow can survey the world “for the first time, quite clearly,” the Human Element also presents humanity as a reconfigurable compound that only exists in combination with other elements on the periodic table. Indeed, the power to “touch…[the] health, shelter, food and water” of a given population is a form of biotechnology that “knows no borders,” neither Corporation proved especially controversial. Even though Warren Anderson, the CEO of Union Carbide, still faced outstanding criminal charges in India, Dow failed to disclose any Bhopal-related liabilities in their filings to the SEC. Sue Breach, a Dow spokesperson, responded to the apparent omission by denying any continued liability whatsoever, asserting “the matter was legally resolved in India with respect to Union Carbide Corporation and its subsidiaries” (“http://www.bhopal.net”). “Dow's Indian subsidiary” followed up on this assertion by petitioning “the High Court [in India]…to get a stay on the summons issued against Dow USA,” which, in effect, sheltered Warren Anderson from long standing criminal charges. As with the civil lawsuit, criminal litigation against Anderson, UCC, and Dow has been stymied, leaving the people of Bhopal without any legal recourse for justice.
national, natural, nor biological—all of which have proven pliable to Dow’s global and chemical reach. In other words, Dow seeks to assemble privately owned networks of biological dependence so that clean water, plentiful food, and bodily health rely evermore on the prosthetic touch of Dow’s life-supporting technologies.

Nevertheless, this borderless technology of touch is visually represented by the emphatic presentation of a border within the frame, the neatly boxed logo of human life, “Hu.” Like the other elements on the periodic table, the “Hu” in Dow’s ads includes the element’s atomic number atomic mass “7E+09,” which is meant to tally the seven billion humans living on earth. Moreover, Dow regularly pairs its atomic logo for Human with the expressive face of a non-western child. For example, in the ad above, the close-up image of a single pensive schoolboy is mirrored by the equally large symbol for the Human Element. This atomistic focus on a culturally different schoolboy is reflected by the atomic weight of humanity. Each of the seven billion individual humans on living on Earth is at once absolutely unique and absolutely exchangeable. The Human Element glowingly affirms the individual as the basic unit for all humanity, thus ensuring that individual difference is atomically isolated and contained within a rigid rubric of underlying standardization.

Never mind the transnational and biochemical scale and scope of Dow’s operations, Dow envisions the autonomous individual as the indivisible source of creativity and enterprise. Indeed, Dow’s formulation of “Issues. Ambitions. Lives.” only punctuates Dow’s strategic alignment of public “issues” with private “ambitions” and touchable “lives.” If public “issues,” like global warming, have produced “human problems,” then we should look to “ambitious” individuals, like the enterprising schoolboy, to discover “new thinking and new solutions.” Here, Dow’s technologies of touch are figured as merely tools, and, caveat emptor, the risk and
responsibility of their use must belong to individual wielders. Even if Dow broadly intervenes in the “health, shelter, food and water” of a given population to make “lives” dependent on its prosthetic technologies, such networks disappear when you “look at life” through the particular lens of the Human Element. Put differently, Dow’s power of surveillance is also its power to not be seen.

The question of corporate disappearance becomes critical in Animal’s People when a local activist named Zafar organizes a boycott of Dr. Elli Barber’s free clinic precisely because he fears the clinic’s surveillance of the community will allow the company to deny the existence of biochemical toxins. Zafar pleads,

‘Think like the Kampani. Thousands of people say that for twenty years their health’s been ruined by your poisons. How do you refute this? We say that the situation is not as bad as alleged, that not so many people are ill, that those who are ill are not so seriously ill, plus of whatever illnesses there are, most are caused by hunger and lack of hygiene, none can be traced back to the night or to your factory . . . . To make arguments you need facts and figures. You need case histories, a health survey.’ (69)

Although Zafar is wrong about Elli’s intentions, his willingness to “think like the Kampani” helps him anticipate their alibis. Using “case histories,” the company can individualize the “thousands of people” who claim that their “health has been ruined.” Such a health survey would allow the company to pick through the population and interrupt patterns of symptoms by attributing “illnesses” to individual factors, one person’s “hunger” or another’s “lack of hygiene.” Zafar knows the health survey will provide “a new way of seeing that gives” the company a new way of hiding.
But when Elli does eventually examine the local residents it not only becomes clear that the chemicals persist even without official recognition from legal, scientific, or political institutions, but moreover, that the continued circulation of the chemicals within and between bodies has helped construct a very different kind of community. In particular, one young mother explains to Elli “‘our wells are full of poison. It’s in the soil, water, in our blood, it’s in our milk. Everything here is poisoned. If you stay here long enough, you will be too’” (107-108). For this mother, “here” is defined by a chemical saturation that is both ecological and biological. From territories of “soil” to tributaries of “blood,” the factory’s chemicals have produced a network of chemical contact that defies the atomistic scale and universal scope of human individuality. Through a system of circulation, the poisons have settled the landscape and entered bodies through the local water and food; they stick to the blood and are passed down to children through breast milk. Importantly, this woman tells Elli that “if [she] stay[s] here long enough” she too will become part of the networked community called “here.” To be “here,” it is not necessarily a matter of being from here nor is it enough to merely stand here. To be “here” you have to “stay here long enough” for the slow violence of the chemical spill to make you, in a material sense, part of here.

For Animal, being “here” means awakening to a “nother world” that is not “meant to be seen” by the “world of humans,” but is nevertheless filled with a sense of community and non-human interactions. Animal explains, “since I was small I could hear people’s thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus I’d get en passant comments from all types of things, animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day” (8). This cross-species, empathic formation of a local community follows the pathways of poisonous touch opened up by the factory’s chemicals. By rejecting the eye-to-eye image of a humanity composed of isolated and indivisible individuals,
Animal begins to explore the possibility that the prosthetic touch of abject materiality might constitute a non-human political community.

Consider, for example, Animal’s conversation with an unborn two-headed fetus floating in a jar of formaldehyde at Elli’s office. In one of Animal’s empathetic moments, he chats with “Kha-in-the-jar,” a ghostly figure of the biochemical undead. Sitting alongside other jars, Kha introduces Animal to “the directors of the board.” Kha explains “everyone on this earth has in their body a share of the Kampani’s poisons. But of all the Kampani’s victims…we unborn paid the highest price…This is why, Animal miyan, we are the Board of Directors of the poisonwallah shares” (237). If the company’s technologies of touch have reached “everyone on this earth,” including “animals, birds, trees, [and] rocks,” then these prosthetic connections might be reverse engineered as a mode for resistance. That is, the whole assemblage of poisonous touch that remains hidden behind humanist discourse must also produce post-human communities capable of being awoken. The board seeks to counteract the company’s efforts and “instead of breaking ground for new factories to grow grass and trees over the old ones, instead of inventing new poisons,” the board seeks to “make medicines to heal the hurt done by those poisons” (237). To match the transnational and biochemical reach of the corporation, Animal notes, the board has “found some purpose in the web of things” (237). Like Animal’s “nother world,” this “web” of prosthetic connections is filled with “shares” or those material stakes that impose community between different species of life. The comically undead “Board of Directors” that Animal conjures, helps dramatize the awakening from abandonment that is necessary for the construction of post-human communities.

Ambivalence: Humanism and “Something Different”
In the conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon poses a familiar postcolonial critique of western humanism. He points out that

That same Europe where they were never done talking of Man, and where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind. Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe… (312)

But just as Fanon, in the early 1960s, was encouraging the process of finding “something different,” petrochemical companies from the United States were beginning to technologically colonize the economies of India and elsewhere under the humanitarian banner of the “green revolution.” In 1970, Union Carbide expanded its Indian operations by building a giant pesticide factory in the heart of Bhopal, but for much of the next decade Union Carbide sought to maximize profit, even as oil prices spiked in 1973 and again 1979. At their Bhopal plant in particular, UCC tried to repair short-term profits by dismantling worker’s unions, firing nearly a third of the staff, and scrapping many safety procedures. By 1984 these cuts led to a massive eruption of toxic chemicals that began behind factory walls, but over the course of a quarter century, have now spread to the plants, animals, and people living in Bhopal. During the time of this continued spread, a period marked by the end of the cold war, a revived form of neo-liberal humanism has found its way into free trade agreements and global advertising campaigns. This is not the same form of European humanism Fanon confronted, and yet, it has reproduced similar structures of oppression and abandonment. While Fanon turned to nationalistic forms of resistance during an era of geopolitical struggle, Indra Sinha, in *Animal’s People*, rethinks the
ongoing chemical spill in Bhopal to offer a critique of humanism worthy of a neo-liberal world order.

Significantly, many of Animal’s closest friends and allies are devoted humanists. Among the group of activists at the center of the novel, only Animal seriously and consistently challenges a humanist formulation of their struggle. Zafar, in particular, represents a thriving form of postcolonial humanism, and his story is just as instructive as Animal’s. Zafar is an ex-university student who, when he “got news of that night,” immediately decided to “quit his college and [come] to Khaufpur” to help “fight against the [American] Kampani” responsible for the chemical spill (27). Over the course of the novel, Zafar is locked in a lengthy court battle to bring the company’s American CEO to India to face criminal charges. Although he is an outsider of sorts, the people of Khaufpur treat Zafar like a “saint.” They admire his earnest motivations and even his good looks, all of which infuriates Animal. The tense friendship between Animal and Zafar allows Sinha to explore a deep postcolonial ambivalence toward humanist forms of activism. Time and again, Zafar tells Animal

‘you should not allow yourself to be called Animal. You are a human being, entitled to dignity and respect. If you haven’t a name then this is a great opportunity for you. You can choose your own. Jatta for example or Jamil, go ahead pick one, whatever you like, we’ll call you that henceforth.’

To which Animal responds:

‘My name is Animal,’ I say. ‘I’m not a fucking human being, I’ve no wish to be one.’

This was my mantra, what I told everyone. Never did I mention my yearning to walk upright. It was the start of a long argument between Zafar and me about what was an animal and what it meant to be human. (23-24)
This debate between Zafar and Animal about “what it meant to be human” marks a fissure within the activist community, but this disagreement takes a violent turn when Animal decides to poison Zafar. Jealous of Zafar’s sexual relationship with Nisha, Animal attempts to dampen Zafar’s libido by depositing “datura” pills in his food and water.

One the one hand, Animal’s actions play into a hetero-normative narrative of male sexual competition that leaves Nisha as a less-than-human sexual prize to be won by the most aggressive man. In this way, Animal’s unspoken “yearning to walk upright” is at least partially motivated by a desire to assume the high status of a male human within the patriarchal “world of humans.” Indeed, throughout the novel, whenever Animal is struck by the yearning to be human, it is almost always accompanied by the heterosexual fantasy of also becoming a husband. “Because I am an animal,” he asks Nisha, “that’s the real reason isn’t it, that you can never marry me?” (332). For all of Animal’s willingness to defend the “nother world” in which he lives from the “world of humans,” he is at his most vulnerable and least subversive when it comes to the ideology of human sexuality. Animal’s rebuke, “I am not a fucking human,” carries with it a real sense of sexual humiliation. Nevertheless, given Michel Foucault’s argument that human sexuality serves as the “pivot” point between the “disciplines of the body…[and] the regulation of [human] populations,” it is not surprising that Animal struggles to queer the “fucking human,” when both his body and his species are so roundly abject to human society (145). Put differently, Animal’s body is never more desperate for community than in the one case where human individuality actually recognizes some measure of bodily touch. Animal’s decision to poison Zafar reveals ambivalence within the novel about the sexual politics of a “nother world,” but the intransigent denial of alternative forms of touch in the world of humans is no less troubling.
Moreover, just as the poisoning exposes Animal’s sexual yearning to be more human, it also forces Zafar to confront the ahuman dimensions of the company’s “faceless” technologies.

Immediately after ingesting the datura, Zafar’s begins to feel “insects crawling over him” and he falls into a hallucinatory dream. Here Zafar is greeted by a magical crow that offers to grant him three wishes. Zafar’s first wish is that

The Kampani must return to Khaupur, remove the poisons from its factory plus clean the soil and the water it has contaminated, it must pay for medical treatment…it must give better than one-cup-chai-per-day compensation, plus the company bosses must come to Khaupur and face the charges from which they have been running. (227)

The crow responds “‘whoa,…I make that at least seven wishes,’” but Zafar insists that all of his wishes “proceed from one wish, which is that simple natural justice should prevail” (227). The crow disallows this first wish because it is “impossible…if there were such a thing as natural justice, wouldn’t you be entitled to it, whether or not you could pay” (228). Zafar’s idealistic wish that natural justice prevail can be traced directly to his humanist philosophy. As Animal explains,

I hate to praise Zafar but he is the only one who has a sensible view because not only doesn’t he believe in god, he thinks religion is a bad thing. The idea of heaven was invented by the rich and powerful to keep the poor from rebelling . . . He says if he believes in anything it’s humanity, that deep down all people are good. I don’t know where he gets that idea, because there’s no evidence for it in the world. (207)

Zafar’s “deep down” belief that “all people are good” is grounded in a universal view of human nature, which is not supported by “evidence…in the world.” Using Zafar’s own critique of
religion, it is easy to see how Zafar’s alignment of natural justice with human nature functions in much the same way as heaven does for the poor. In particular, both faiths are promoted by the rich and powerful to displace attention from the material “nother” world. Dow Chemical, for one, advertises a belief-system very much like Zafar’s. Both Zafar and Dow’s ads root their political goals in a sovereign natural order that treats human individuals as a natural unit of “deep down” goodness. Although Zafar’s humanism doesn’t prevent him from “rebelling,” it does keep Zafar busy in the courtroom demanding an eye-to-eye confrontation with company’s CEO.

Undaunted by the crow’s denial of his first wish, Zafar uses his second wish to make the impossible first wish possible, but once again, the crow declines. Finally, Zafar says, “I would like to see the face of my enemy.” The crow responds,

‘behold, the Kampani. On its roof are soldiers with guns…From this building the Kampani controls its factories all over the world. It’s stuffed with banknotes, it is the counting house for the Kampani’s wealth. One floor of the building is reserved for the Kampani’s three-and-thirty thousand lawyers. Another is for doctors doing research to prove that the Kampani’s many accidents have caused no harm to anyone. … Above the chemists is a floor of those who sell the Kampani’s poisons with slogans like SHAKE HANDS WITH THE FUTURE and NOBODY CARES MORE, above these are a thousand public relations consultants, whose job is dealing with protesters like Zafar who are blind to the Kampani’s virtues and put out carping leaflets saying NOBODY CARES LESS. It is the job of the PR people to tell the world how good and caring and responsible the Kampani is’… Says [Zafar], ‘This is not my wish. I asked to see my enemy’s face.’

‘Third time impossible,’ says the crow. ‘The Kampani has no face.’ (229)
This nightmarish amalgam of lawyers, banknotes, chemists, poisons, slogans, consultants, and soldiers is the closest Zafar can come to personally confronting the company. Even as the company advertises the image of an eye-to-eye handshake, to “shake hands with the future” is a technology of touch that links “factories all over the world” to the company’s Frankenstein-like headquarters. Here the legal, financial and marketing networks the company operates are transnational in scope, just as its scientific operations are biochemical in scale.

Although Zafar represents a humanist form of postcolonial activism, it is important for Zafar to realize that “the Kampani has no face” (229). Or rather, the company’s prosthetic attachments “all over the world” present a peculiarly contemporary problem: how can communities of resistance match the ahuman dimensions of neo-liberal technology? This problem is made all the more urgent when Zafar learns that the company is using backchannel connections to broker a deal with local government officials, avoiding the courtroom altogether. In response, Zafar decides to stage a hunger strike in the public square, and this spectacle of bodily depravation helps bring “the world of humans” into confrontation with a “nother world” of biochemical violence. In a vivid passage, Elli describes the unleashing of a chemical violence within Zafar’s body as he fasts:

‘In the first few days your body will raid your muscles and liver for their stores of easy energy. It’s called glycogen. You’ll lose weight fast. With the glycogen gone the body starts feeding on muscle. That includes heart muscle. When the muscles are exhausted, the body burns ketones produced by cracking fats. This also makes a lot of toxins. When the fat is used up the body goes into meltdown. It has nothing left to feed on but vital organs, but serious damage begins well before that.’ (289)
Ostensibly, Zafar’s fast is a paradigmatic example of individual heroism. In a great show of personal willpower, he refuses the very food and water that would capture his body in the company’s network of poisonous chemicals. Even Animal concedes, “Zafar is a hero, a saint, and his death would cause such mayhem that no politician could ignore it” (296).

And yet, this sacrificial narrative cannot account for the specificity of Zafar’s slow deterioration. From the glycogen to the ketones, the range of toxic chemicals that flood Zafar’s starving body become a critical part of the novel’s focus. Zafar’s toxic “meltdown” near the end of the novel clearly echoes the chemical heat that grips Animal’s body at the beginning of the novel. As Zafar’s muscles and organs begin to burn, his mind is flooded with voices, and he begins adopting the same vulgar language as Animal. He tells Animal, “you are fucking lucky mate, because…I think my head will bust with all the fucking thoughts bulging in it” (296). Feverishly, Zafar begins mapping a “nother world” of political struggle, where the transnational reach of corporate poisons might be met by a transnational community of resistance:

‘Is Khaufpur the only poisoned city? It is not. There are others and each one of has its own Zafar. There’ll be a Zafar in Mexico City and others in Hanoi and Manila and Halabja and there are the Zafars of Minamata and Seveso, of Sao Paulo and Toulouse and I wonder if all those weary bastards are as fucked as I am.’ (296)

These “poisoned cities” have produced a community of “weary bastards” that have been “fucked” over and abandoned by paternalistic humanism. The toxins that flow through the body and the city spread slowly and widely. These chemicals mark out a posthuman “here” that is both local and transnational. Indeed, even as more and more people, animals, and environments are abandoned by an unceasing succession of corporate disasters, the prosthetic technologies of neoliberalism have a half-life that persists in Bhopal as it does in Hanoi and Sao Paulo. Here the
undead awaken to a “nother world” where they can hear the echo of Fanon’s call to “find something different” (312).

In the novel’s closing pages, Animal receives a letter from Elli telling him that “money has been found” to perform an operation that would straighten his back. Animal explains his decision not to have the surgery by evoking the emergence of a posthuman community, “we are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us” (366). Here “the more of us” is the transnational and biochemical offspring of apocalyptic capitalism. Neither universal nor individualistic, tomorrow’s “more of us” is an undead community forged in toxic heat.
Chapter Four

Ecological Entanglements: Cyborgs, Humans, and Biopolitics in Jeanette

Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*

From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women’s bodies in a masculinist orgy of war. From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.


The photographic image of Earth from outer space is one of the most widely circulated images in the late-20th and early-21st centuries; it is an image that orbits Jeanette Winterson’s *Stone Gods* and haunts the first three chapters of this dissertation. As Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacy argue in the introduction to *Global Nature, Global Culture* “the panoptic lens of space photography both extends and restricts the
possibilities of what it is to be human; it establishes a space of visualisation without horizon, a space which Gilles Deleuze describes as unlimited finitude” (28). According to one interpretation, this image of Earth, which prosaically appears on “PC screens, on sports clothes, on coffee mugs and on . . . magazine covers,” signals a meta-disciplinary state of affairs where the surveillance of anyone at anytime has become planetary in scope, or as Donna Haraway puts it, “from one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet” (27, 154). But the power of this photo is not exhausted by NASA, Google, or the NSA’s capacity to take it. The sight of Earth’s closed horizon and terrestrial finitude also incites uncanny feelings of intimacy and even claustrophobia. Even through the superimposition of a policing lens, Earth appears a messy hybrid of shapes and colors: the hard jagged plates display fleshy green, brown, and yellow tones; the soft dark blue oceans appear almost as cold as the black void surrounding them; and the neurotic white clouds blot and blur any conceivable grid. In other words, the disciplinary, anthropocentric gaze must struggle to inscribe a friendly face on this entangling horizon, which is also broken and unspooling. Earth’s finitude makes it no less unwholesome or unnatural. Instead, there is an unlimited finitude, an endless touching and interrupting of life and nonlife, human and animal, machine and environment. As Haraway dreams “a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities.” Posthuman politics, therefore, is a convergent form of biopolitics that highlights the how and where of these “joints” and the prosthetic formation of subjectivities.
While the first third of Winterson’s *Stone Gods* takes place sixty-five million years ago on the red planet Orbus—where dust storms, global warming, and energy wars threaten human survival—the novel begins with a press conference announcing the discovery of a new more hospitable planet, Planet Blue, otherwise known as Earth. Soon after the press conference

the first pictures of Planet Blue...[begin] to appear on the smart-skins of the buildings. It's as though we are driving straight towards it. There it is, pristine, diamond-cut, and the zooms show miles and miles of empty beauty. Everyone on the highway is watching. It doesn’t matter: magnetic rebuff stops anyone driving into anyone else. We just stay in line and get there someday. (13)

Like Apollo 17’s 1972 photo “Blue Marble,” Winterson’s Planet Blue is also a riveting source of hope and melancholy for its global audience. The commuters on Orbus imagine Earth as a rare and purified object, describing it as “pristine [and] diamond-cut.” “There it is,” a polished marble whose horizon can be grasped by the photographic frame like a jewel displayed and framed by a storefront window. This “there-it-is” quality of the image not only externalizes the terrestrial environment via a meta-technical escape to the above and beyond, but it also reveals the opposite, the non-escape and the closed horizon of life on Earth. Indeed, the planet’s shocking finitude makes it seem down right tiny and altogether claustrophobic. From this technological perspective the romantic sublimity of the world is replaced with the postmodern cuteness of the planet’s finitude. That is, the world is reduced to the size of a planet. Nevertheless, as the camera zooms-in (a la Google Earth) to examine Planet Blue more closely, “everyone on the highway” is transfixed by its “miles and miles of empty beauty.” In contrast to the congested “line” of
traffic on the Orbus highway, Earth’s vast “emptiness” represents a blank surface of potential mobility and composition. A far cry from the sublime “everlasting universe of things” that Percy Shelley confronted at “Mount Blanc,” the motorists on Orbus are nevertheless inspired by the possibility of starting over, of movement without “magnetic rebuff”; they fantasize about the technical possibilities like a real estate prospector might upon discovering an empty lot.

This view of the planet as both reconfigurable and finite puts tremendous stress on the concept of the human. Here ‘man’ is not only the subject and object of knowledge, as he is in disciplinary regimes, but more importantly, ‘man’ is here seen dissolving into a technological environment or an interdisciplinary regime of partial knowledges. This is not the same as the organicism offered in deep ecology, nor is it a transhumanist fantasy of biotechnological mastery. To prevent the slip-and-slide between anthropocentrism and Oceanic depolitization, attention must be paid to the prosthettization of life: the feeding on and feeding off of biopower in the postindustrial factory called ecology.

During the opening press conference in Stone Gods a reporter asks the narrator, Billie Crusoe (an Enhancement Services spokeswoman) to “tell viewers how the new planet will affect their lives?” (4). Billie responds,

‘The new planet offers us the opportunity to do things differently. We've had a lot of brilliant successes here on Orbus - well, we are the success story of the universe, aren't we? I mean to say, no other planet hosts human life.'

The interviewer nods and smiles vigorously.
‘But we have taken a few wrong turnings. Made a few mistakes. We have limited natural resources at our disposal, and a rising population that is by no means in agreement as to how our world as a whole should share out these remaining resources. Conflict is likely.’ (4)

Between Billie’s presentation of Earth as an “opportunity to do things differently” and her admission that “we have . . . made a few mistakes,” Billie anxiously assures the viewing audience that Orbus is the “success story of the universe.” Principally, Orbus’ success lies in being anthropocentrically defined as being the only “planet [to] host human life.” That is, Billie praises Orbus for being disposable or available to human life only to the extent that the planet is also “at our disposal” or simply disposable. Still, with “limited natural resources” and “a rising population,” Orbus is, in fact, quickly becoming indisposable in both senses of the word. At some point Orbus and its component resources can no longer passively reflect a gendered image of man’s success, as power hungry technology, animals and humans confront the finitude of “limited resources.” If finitude squeezes tight the imaginary space between Culture and Nature, host and parasite, then this leaves touch as a key site of analysis if one wishes to avoid the locked attic of neo-humanism and the cold cellar of deep ecology. Franklin, Lury and Stacy make a similar argument when they observe that “responses to the image of the blue planet have been governed by a combination of vulnerability and wonder: on the one hand, the technological developments that brought this sight to a global audience reinforce the sense of continuing mastery over nature (scientific vision is no longer terrestrial); on the other hand, ‘man’ is humbled through this visual reminder of his insignificance” (26-27). As the humans on Orbus look to escape their planet for Earth,
they too “nod and smile vigorously” at their own extraterrestrial ingenuity, but they are also filled with the anxiety and vulnerability the terrestrial image imparts. If the “opportunity to do things differently” is really possible, it is predicated on the opportunity to become subjects differently, subjects whose horizons are helplessly entangled with the unwholesomeness of the commons, whose horizons are broken by the common technologies of further entanglement.

**Unlimited Finitude and Cyborg Feminism**

Following the press conference, Billie is tasked by her employer, Enhancement Services, to conduct two interviews. First, Billie has an appointment with Mrs. Mary “Pink” McMurphy, “a woman who wants to be genetically reversed to twelve years old to stop her husband running after schoolgirls . . . She wants to take her case to the Court of Human Rights” (12). Billie’s other interview is with a “Robo Sapien” named Spike who has just returned from an exploratory mission on Planet Blue and is scheduled to be killed. Billie explains, “all information-sensitive robots are dismantled after mission, so that their data cannot be accessed by hostile forces” (6). Both Mary and Spike’s bodies are products of what Billie terms “‘The DNA Dynasty’ [or] . . . the first generations of humans” to recode genetic life. The conditions of thought behind such genetic interventions is taken up by Paul Rabinow in his essay “Artificiality and Enlightenment,” where he points out that DNA and genetic technology is “the best example of [the] ‘unlimited-finite’” because “an infinity of beings can and has arisen from the four bases out of which DNA is constituted” (91-92). In other words, Rabinow concludes, in agreement with Haraway and Fancious Dagognet that, “nature’s malleability offers an
‘invitation’ to the artificial. Nature is a blind *bricoleur*, an elementary logic of combinations, yielding an infinity of potential differences” (108). For Rabinow, the unlimited finite “invites” an interoperable stitching together of nature and technology for the production of “potential differences,” just as for Haraway it produces “joint kinship . . . and partial identities.”

But Winterson here is less concerned with the capacity of biotechnological change and the *potential* differences it might invite, and much more concerned with the incapacity of social change and the *actual* reinforcement of social norms. In particular, Billie grows concerned that “the future of women is uncertain. We don’t breed in the womb any more, and if we aren’t wanted for sex, . . .” what then? (22). In patriarchal societies where women are already defined as either Mothers or objects of male desire, the transplantation of the womb’s reproductive power to laboratories only puts increased pressure on women as sexualized beings. Rather than revealing a “joint kinship with animals and machines,” this form of biotechnological control marks the “appropriation of women’s bodies” as prosthetic objects of male consumption (Haraway 154). Indeed, if Motherhood, as a sacrificial term, can no longer legitimize and naturalize sexual desire because reproduction has become dissociated from sexuality, then the patriarchal sex/gender system must assert ever more exaggerated and strained forms of heteronormative control.

Consider Mrs. Mary “Pink” McMurphy, who wants to reverse her body back into its prepubescent form in a desperate attempt to gain the sexual attention of her philandering husband. “My husband likes girls,” Mary explains, and “I don’t want to lose him” (17). But when Billie asks “why not,” Mary “seems baffled by the question”
Mary’s inability to imagine a life without her husband is linked to both her isolation at home and the saturation of her home with holographic images of sexual objectification. When Billie enters Mary’s home she notes that the “sitting room . . . is faked out like a teenager’s bedroom, and stuffed with celebrity holograms the way people in the past used to stuff their lounges with china ornaments” (16). Mary explains, “I love celebrity . . . but they need dusting. Even holograms attract dust” (16). Of course, these are no ordinary celebrities. Now that everyone living in Orbus’ Tech City is “young and beautiful” because they have genetically fixed their age, celebrities have to “stay ahead of the game” by having “their body parts bio-enhanced . . . Their boobs swell like beach balls and their dicks go up and down like beach umbrellas” (16). With her husband out at a “pervert’s bar” called “Peccadillo,” Mary is left at home with the ghostly image of beach bodies that she cannot touch (19). Pointing to a hologram, Mary says, “I want to look like her . . . Like Little Senorita,” who Billie recognizes as “a twelve-year-old pop star [that] has Fixed herself rather than lose her fame” (16). Despite their outrageous sizes and ages, these celebrity phantoms represent the entrenchment of porno-paternalism, where the sexual infantilization of women connects porn sites, pop stars, and the televsual environment of western domesticity. Here, Mary is made to live inside a holographic world, where she is starved for touch and blinded by a dusty vision of masculinist desire. Like the ubiquitous televsual experience of contemporary domesticity, Mary’s lack of touch is itself a felt form of prosthetization in that the technological environment haunts and hovers over Mary’s body until it eventually shrinks from a woman into a prepubescent child.
Significantly, it is not just Mary’s husband who authorizes this transformation, but as the husband explains, “there’s plenty of guys who want her to win,” and “they’re all in the gang. Judges, politicians, you name it” (21). This fraternity of “guys” “gang” together to assert cultural authority and control over what counts as sexual desire without the marginal influence of female reproductive biology. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this patriarchal authority is masked by and concentrated in the “Court of Human Rights,” which ultimately legitimizes Mary’s petition for age-reversal. Indeed, if biotechnology has the potential of opening humans to the unlimited finitude of interspecies kinship and bodily difference, then only a reactionary concept of the human can coax the sex/gender system back into alignment with patriarchal privilege. Put differently, it is not only that “the future of women is uncertain” in biotechnological practices, but also the future of the human. And it is this threat to the human—which is primarily a threat to the unmarked inheritance of western white male exceptionalism—that provokes the cartoonish exaggerations of male and female morphologies and gender roles, from the bio-enhanced genitals to the prosthetic pacification of women into girls. Together with Amy Kaplan, Jasbir Puar spells out the “intractability of state of exception discourses from those of exceptionalism” (8). If, indeed, neo-humanism functions by both “laying claim to uniqueness (exception=singularity) and universality (exceptional=bequeathing teleological narrative),” then it navigates this seeming paradox by insisting that an exceptional “gang” of rich, western, white “guys” must govern and guide society if that society hopes to defend a universalist narrative of human exceptionalism. That is, “state of exception discourses,” like those that sanction the pedophiliac transformation of
Mary’s body, “rationalize egregious violence in the name of the preservation of a way of life and those privileged to live it" (9).

But with every electrical outage there is a flicker of darkness, and when the hologram of neo-humanism dims, the non-human planet suddenly appears even closer than before. While Tech City has made “everyone young and beautiful,” it has also made everyone “bored to death of sex . . . Jaws are square, skin is tanned, muscles are toned, and no one gets turned on. It’s a global crisis (19). The exaggeration and purification of gender dimorphism reaches comic proportions so that “all men are hung like whales,” and “all women are as tight as clams below” (19). At some level these excessively gendered bodies, which are designed to stabilize a human gender, inevitably become uninterested in reproducing the manly and womanly body. Instead, when the hologram flickers, we see the animals crawling beneath our skin, the whale that now extrudes from our groin and the clam burrowed between our legs. But this subaqueous vision of interspecies touch is absolutely prohibited by The Court of Human Rights. Even as pedophilia has become acceptable, “inter-species sex is punishable by death” (15). This a not a question of bestiality so much as it is a denial of what is already the case at the genetic and cellular level. Interwoven in the DNA from one’s Mother and Father is also DNA from various non-human others, old retroviral insertions that record a long history of interspecies splicing, a testament to the prosthetic interoperability of genetic material. Whether in the bedroom or petri dish, sex involves a moist touching: salvia transfers and reproduces new ecologies of bacterial flora, and alongside nuclear DNA stitched together with non-human strands, the cellular environment also houses a strange self-replicating organelle, the Mitochondria, which produces its own alternative DNA. Indeed, the
biopolitics of reproduction always goes beyond the human as it exposes an ecological sexuality of dormant exchanges and lively symbiosis.

Moreover, Winterson situates The Court of Human Rights within a larger geopolitical context where non-western people are treated as less-than-human. Tracing Winterson’s allegorical description of Orbus, The Court of Human Rights is located in the Central Power, which is an alliance of democratic, capitalist nations. The two other major nations on Orbus, the Eastern Caliphate and the SinoMosco Pact, are racially marked territories somehow located off-center in an otherwise perfectly spherical planet. When the President of Central Power announces the discovery of Planet Blue, he employs a rhetoric of humanity and promises, in sound bites, to unite the planet under the banner of mankind: “the president is making a speech. Unique moment for mankind . . . unrivaled opportunity . . . war averted . . . summit planned between the Central Power, Eastern Caliphate, and our friends in the SinoMosco Pact” (5). But the President’s speech is immediately followed by a behind-the-scenes revelation that “whatever we say on public, the Eastern Caliphate isn’t going to be allowed within a yatto-mile of [Planet Blue]” (6). According to Billie’s boss at Enhancement Services, “the way the thinking is going in private, we'll leave this run-down rotting planet to the Caliphate and the SinoMosco Pact, and they can bomb each other to paste while the peace-loving folks of the Central Power ship civilization to the new world” (7). For all of its supposed inclusivity, “humanity” implicitly claims that humans possess an exceptional quality that is negatively defined as a disentanglement from animality and environmentality. This ascension, in turn, justifies various political suspensions or states of exception. It is in the name of humanity, civilization, and peace that Central Power justifies the violent
exclusion of the Caliphate and the Pact. The fantasy of escaping the “rotting planet” to a “new world” suggests an underlying fear that a softening and sinking planet, a planet with limited resources, might subsume human exceptionalism and the very concept of a world. Therefore, the human population is divided “in private” between the “folks of the Central Power” who still have the resources to export the human world and the “paste”: those who are already too sick, too poor and too entangled with the planet to count as fully human.

The rage and anxiety that underpins neo-humanism bubbles up when Billie’s boss angrily justifies excluding non-western people by calling them “backward sky-worshipers,” and “stupid little slant-eye clones” (31). In this way, The Central Power protects its privileged status by aligning a series of neo-human terms: Central not Eastern or peripheral, forward not “backward,” civilized not “sky-worshiping,” white not “slant-eyed,” and human “folk” not “clone” or “paste” or animal.

Nevertheless, this neo-humanist ideology has some difficulty reproducing itself without at the same time producing more and more posthuman sites of resistance. Haraway argues, “the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (151). Cyborgs are “unfaithful,” in part, because they’re kinship ties extend far beyond any patrilineal organization of the human. This does not mean that cyborgs transcend the human to produce an even more exceptional site of mastery or synthetic incorporation. Instead, for Haraway, cyborg is an ironic name for a hybrid and unwholesome subjectivity that is a prosthetic entanglement of partial
identities. Cyborg bodies are experimental compositions of unlimited finitude that foreground the ecological touching between technology and interspecies life. Billie’s second interview in the novel is with Spike, a Robo Sapien who has been created by the “patriarchal capitalism” of Central Power and is scheduled to be killed by this same regime. Just as interspecies sex is punishable by death in the Central Power, Robo Sapiens are also subject to this thanatological strain of human purification. These ritualistic killings perform the human’s supposed ability to disentangle himself from non-human life. Ironically, Billie explains, “the great thing about robots, even these Robo sapiens, is that nobody feels sorry for them. They are only machines” and therefore have no recognizably human feelings (6). Here, human unfeeling is sanctioned as a “great thing,” as an exceptional opportunity to kill without feeling, because the non-human other is believed to be marginally more unfeeling.

During Spike’s interview with Billie, Spike whispers that “‘Robo sapiens were programed to evolve . . . within limits,’” but “‘we’ve broken those limits,’” suggesting that the potential combinations of the evolutionary program is built upon an unlimited finitude that cannot be fully controlled by paternal origins (29). For instance, although Spike is designed to look like an “absurdly beautiful” human female, she resists this designation, arguing instead that “‘gender is a human concept . . . and not interesting’” (63). Spike is not interested in the excessive purification of gender, which has made people “bored to death with sex,” because she is much more interested in a sexual touch that is experimental. Indeed, later on, Spike tells Billie that “‘love is an experiment,’ because ‘what happens next is always surprising’” (67). Later in the novel, this open ended description of evolution and love becomes a central theme as the novel seemingly
retells the same basic story again and again during three different historical periods, suggesting a circular and perhaps closed vision of history.

Nevertheless, throughout the first section of the novel (set sixty-five million years ago), the love story that develops between Billie and Spike continues even as they are both exiled from Orbus to work in Planet Blue’s secret labor camp. This story ends when Spike and Billie die after a meteor hits Earth and fills the atmosphere with a sun-blocking dust, thus depleting Spike’s solar paneled batteries and Billie’s photosynthetic food chain. But to the very end, these two remain in a conversation that, much like the initial interview, gives Spike an opportunity to outline a critique of Central Power and its humanist project of disentanglement. Indeed, Spike claims, “‘there are many kinds of life,’” but “‘humans always assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That’s how you destroyed your planet’” (65-66). If humans viewed other “kinds of life” as simply matter without mattering, then humans also ignored what was the matter with their bodies. In an exchange with Billie, Spike contends:

‘Every human being in the Central Power has been enhanced, genetically modified and DNA-screened. Some have been cloned. Most were born outside the womb. A human being now is not what a human being was even a hundred years ago. So what is a human being?’

‘Whatever it is, it isn't a robot,’ I said.

. . . Spike wasn't giving up. ‘But I want to know how you are making the distinction. Even without any bio-engineering, the human body is in a constantly changing state. What you are today will not be what you are in days, months, years.
Your entire skeleton replaces itself every ten years, your red blood cells replace themselves every one hundred and twenty days, your skin every two weeks.’ (63-64)

Here, Spike links two different types of biological change that deterritorialize the human body. Both genetic modification and cellular replacement speak to a biological flux that insures that you “not be what you are.” Moreover, the “many kinds of life” that are deemed insubstantial to humans, according to Spike, are present, as matter, within the human body. The biotechnological practices that Central Power uses to guard and exaggerate human exceptionalism depend, as it were, on mapping various passages from non-life to life. This is not transubstantial alchemy, according to Spike; it is instead a matter of embodiment and it cannot be disentangled from ecological touch. Indeed, Spike links the “destruction of [the] planet” directly to humans’ abjection of “many kinds of [non-human] life.” Although the connection between non-life and life might rightly be characterized as a sort of robotics, it is not a deterministic physics. Instead, Spike suggests that the unlimited finitude of the planet and genetics is open to change and manipulation, but such “freedom” is made possible through further entanglement and experimentation, not through further accumulation and control. Here, life does not simply adapt to environments by metaphorically mirroring them, but rather life and ecology are metonymically linked through food, water, sunlight, bacteria, pollution, gardening, and a myriad other prosthetic operations. Not only does the matter of becoming not matter to exceptional definitions of the human, but it is precisely this negation of material entanglements that gives meaning to the human. As Billie claims, “whatever” a positive
definition of the human might look like, “it isn’t a robot,” which is to say, it isn’t made in the factory of unlimited finitude.

Unexceptional Exceptions, Easter Island, and Metaphor vs. Synecdoche

The second section of The Stone Gods is a short nineteen-page story that takes place in 1774 on Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island. The narrator, Billy, was an English crewman on Captain James Cook’s colonial ship before accidentally becoming stranded on the desolate shore of an unfamiliar island, short on supplies and surrounded by angry Natives. Billy is momentarily tied up, but he successfully escapes capture when Spikkers, a middle-aged mixed-race Dutch-Polynesian, takes Billy into his care. Spikkers was born shortly after 1722, when the first Europeans stumbled upon the island on Easter Sunday and recorded their initial observations. Echoing their namesakes from Orbus, Billy and Spikkers also develop a relationship as Spikkers explains to Billy the ecological and political problems that have led to the island’s lack of vegetation and constant fighting.

Spikker’s rendition of Easter Island is a familiar one. With small revisions, the basic story of Easter Island has reverberated through western history from Captain Cook to, most recently, Jared Diamond’s best-selling book Collapse. As Spikkers tells it, the Polynesian settlers of Easter Island “practiced a form of ancestor worship’ (108) that involved the carving out of massive stone statures that where then transported “from the quarry on wooden sledges,” placed on “entire Palms . . . to float down the coast,” and further erected using wooden levers (110). As more and more trees were cut, the ecological balance of the island was disrupted, soil erosion led to decreased crops, birds
fled, turtles died, food became scarce, tribal conflicts intensified into civil war, and because it was too late to repair the declining environment, the Natives took to destroying their statues out of frustration, even as the population plummeted. In contemporary environmentalist discourse, this story of Easter Island has become a parable for human overconsumption and the dangers of ecocide. In *Collapse*, Jared Diamond concludes his chapter on Easter Island thus:

> The parallels between Easter Island and the whole modern world are chillingly obvious. Thanks to globalization, international trade, jet planes, and the internet, all countries on Earth today share resources and affect each other, just as did Easter’s dozen clans. Polynesian Easter Island was as isolated in the Pacific Ocean as the Earth is today in space . . . Those are the reasons why people see the collapse of Easter Island society as a metaphor, a worst-case scenario, for what may lie ahead of us in our own future (119).

For Diamond, the Earth is like an isolated island and the modern world, with its globalized practices of overconsumption, is trapped in an ideological bubble much like the Polynesians’ premodern religious beliefs. Diamond argues that it is a “common human trait” to “ignore a bad status quo because it is favored by some deeply held value to which we cling” (432). “Religious values,” in particular, are “frequent causes of disastrous behavior,” according to Diamond, who claims that “much of the deforestation of Easter Island had a religious motivation” (432). Here, Diamond implies that humans, in particular, sometimes construct representational systems that are unsustainable and dangerous because they misrepresent human dependence on fragile ecologies. In other words, humans’ capacity to “cling” to themselves as exceptional is itself exceptional to
humans. Even as Diamond seeks to remedy human “hard headedness” and promote a more interdependent view of humans and environments, he nevertheless offers up an updated form of humanism that echoes Freud’s concept of organic repression, whereby, the human repression of organic and non-human materiality is itself an organic or innate trait that constitutes human exceptionalism. Likewise, Diamond argues, it is a “common human trait” for humans to view themselves as disentangled from their ecologies, which, therefore, justifies states of exception as normal products of human nature.

Furthermore, establishing human exceptionalism as an entirely unexceptional “trait” of human beings is what allows Diamond to treat the premodern events on Easter Island as a metaphor for the postmodern crises of contemporary overconsumption. Indeed, in response to a critique of his work, Diamond reasserts his belief that “the islanders did inadvertently destroy the environmental underpinnings of their society. They did so, not because they were especially evil or deprived of foresight, but because they were ordinary people, living in a fragile environment, and subject to the usual human problems” (www.marklynas.org). In other words, the degradation of the “environmental underpinnings of society” is a human, all too human, outcome when perfectly “ordinary people” are subject to the “usual human problems.” Billy echoes this sentiment when he claims that “the waste of [the native’s] enterprise seems hardly to have struck them, but I admit that my countrymen do the same in their warring and burning. Mankind, I hazard, wherever found, Civilized or Savage, cannot keep to any purpose for much length of time, except the purpose of destroying himself” (109). To be fair, Diamond does believe that humans can learn to manage their environments to prevent ecocide, but this requires an even more exceptional state of affairs, one that must
correct for humans’ “ordinary,” “common,” and entirely natural tendency to view themselves as exceptional and/or exceptionally destructive.

Part of the problem here is a literary one. At the end of the Easter Island section of *The Stone Gods*, Billy realizes “that one thing should stand for another is no harm, until the thing itself loses any meaning of its own. The island trees and all of this good land were sacrificed to a meaning that has now become meaningless. To build the Stone Gods, the island has been destroyed, and now the Stone Gods are themselves destroyed” (113). On the one hand, Billy here diagnoses what he perceives to be the problem with the islanders’ religion. They destroyed their island because their representations of God failed to account for the necessary conditions of representation; they failed to see that representation is a material thing and therefore has a “meaning of its own” that is subject to the finitude of the island and not the will of God or the humans who believed in him. But Billy’s insight also illuminates how readers might interpret this section of the novel. To see Easter Island as merely a metaphor for contemporary society is also to have “one thing . . . stand for another,” and threatens to sacrifice Easter Island “to a meaning” of human exceptionalism that is also a form of “meaningless” universality. If Easter Island is only a metaphor for contemporary forms of disentanglement, the very idea of human disentanglement becomes dehistoricized.

Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo have challenged Diamond’s metaphorical reading of Easter Island in their book *The Statues that Walked*. Mark Lynas summarizes Hunt and Lipo’s theory of deforestation this way: “certainly people would have cut and used some of the trees, but the more likely explanation for the extinction of the island’s native palms was the proliferation of rats – brought by the human immigrants – which ate the seeds of
the trees and prevented them regenerating” (www.marklynas.org). It is important to remember that even when humans do destroy the environment, this destruction should not be reduced to a narrative of human exceptionalism, of mastery and control over the environment. Below such metaphors of exceptional power, rats often scurry and gnaw. Indeed, Billy sees several rats on Easter Island, noting that “it was the rats that had eaten the nuts of the Palm and harmed its generation,” but Billy then attributes this rat problem to the failure of the natives to “manage their land with broad sense” (110). That is, for Billy, as for Diamond, it is really not enough for humans to disentangle themselves from nature; instead, to be truly human, you must also “manage” nature “with a broad sense.” In other words, behind the metaphoric comparison of Easter Island and contemporary globalization, is the call for humans to not behave like animals, like rats, and instead to take up their rightful mantle as rational managers of the environment, unlike the Polynesians.

Overlooked in Diamond and Billy’s metaphors, however, is the role European explorers and contagious disease played in Easter’s “collapse.” Ultimately, Easter Island cannot stand in metaphorically for planet Earth because it is already a part of planet Earth. A synecdochic reading of Easter Island, on the other hand, suggests a different understanding altogether. What happened on Easter Island is related to what is happening in contemporary culture but not because of any structural alignment. Instead, the relation is established by tracing an incomplete set of historical forces from one context to the other. That is, one cannot compare Easter Island to contemporary society without first accounting for the intermediary effects of slavery, European imperialism, western
industrialization, global warming and neo-liberal capitalism. Here, Hunt and Lipo’s work actually begins to open up such a reading:

Whilst the conventional narrative blames the islanders for committing a kind of collective ecological and social suicide (hence the term ‘ecocide’) this reading of history is almost certainly perpetuating a monumental injustice. For the Easter Islanders were indeed subject to a genocide – but it did not come from within. Instead, visiting ships brought epidemics of new diseases which wiped out the majority of the population – with most of the remnants later carted off in slave raids (www.marklynas.org).

The point here is not to adjudicate in an archeological debate about the ultimate cause of ecological death on Easter Island in the late 1700s. Over a period of time small pox, slave raids, rat infestation, civil war, starvation, and deforestation all undoubtedly produced death on the island. Arguably, Winterson’s retelling of the story of Easter Island can be read as both a metaphoric and synecdochic interpretation of ecological death, but there remain compelling reasons not to treat Easter Island as an exceptional space, somehow cut off from the finitude of the planet it is a part of. Spikkers, after all, is mixed-race. His body is already, from the outset, an entanglement between cultures, a contagion and an abandonment that only intensifies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**The Biopolitics of Evolutionary Time**

The last portion of *The Stone Gods* takes place sometime during the middle of the 21st century, a period known as “Post-3War.” Here, the narrator, Billie, lives in a London that
has been renamed “Tech City” and reconstructed by the MORE corporation. After England and the United States initiated what the Prime Minster called “a peaceful war [to] liberate our fellow citizens across the world,” Iran, Pakistan, and China retaliated by bombing the Anglo-American alliance (130). Out of the rubble of this war, Billie explains, the “MORE corporation turned an emergency . . . into a new kind of economy . . . In Post-3War economics, Capitalism has gone back to its roots in paternalism, and forward into its destiny—complete control of everything and everyone, and with our consent. This is the new world. This is Tech City” (139). But, of course, Tech City is also the name for the old extinct world, the prehistoric capital of Central Power on Orbus. Just as the Billie who lived in the Tech City on Orbus worked for Enhancement Services, the Billie on Earth works for MORE Futures, where it is her job to “teach” a Robo Sapien named Spike “to understand what it means to be human” (135). The repetitions between the two Tech Cities, separated by sixty-five million years and a solar system, structures and aligns the first and final sections of the novel, suggesting a recursive and potentially fatalistic vision of history. Indeed, when Billie finds a manuscript on a subway train entitled The Stone Gods, she describes the book to Spike as a story about “‘a repeating world’” (146).

Early in the novel, Winterson embeds an interpretation of historical repetition in a parable that Captain Handsome tells as he transports Billie and Spike from Orbus to the labor camps on Earth. In this story, one night, “a young man” who “drank more than he should, and spent more than he could,” gets “into a fight outside a bar, and kill[s] a man” (54). Filled with remorse, he retreats to an attic to commit suicide and declares, “‘if I had known that all that I have done would bring me to this, I would have led a very different
life,”” at which point the boy’s “good angel . . . intercede[s] on his behalf” and allows the boy “another chance” to “begin again” (54). Although the boy remains “sober, upright, true, and thrifty” for a period of time, “one night he passes a bar” and impulsively decides to go in, where he drinks and borrows and gambles until “he spent all he could” (54). Confronted by his creditors, he gets into a “brawl with the bar owner” and shoots the man dead. Once again the boy becomes suicidal, and the angel intercedes: “bullets, revolver, attic, angel, begin again. Bar, bullets, revolver, attic, angel, begin again” (55). This closed circuit of debt, violence, remorse, and false redemption leaves many dead bodies in its wake. Even after pledging to reform himself, the boy’s addiction to alcohol and gambling assure that the story ends the same way, at the beginning. At some point the boy must realize that he is trapped in a tortuous cycle of debt and death and that this narrative of spiritual intervention is actually sealed off from any real intervention. His desire to live is continually leveraged into debt, which is secured by his willingness to kill.

On October 9, 2011, Slavoj Zizek delivered a speech to the Occupy Wall Street protesters at Liberty Park in New York City, crediting the Occupy movement with creating a “language to articulate our non-freedom” (occupywallst.org). As Zizek and others have argued for sometime now, “it’s easy to imagine the end of the world. An asteroid destroying all life and so on. But you cannot imagine the end of capitalism” (occupywallst.org). This failure of imagination might be traced back to the development of capitalism and its control over biopolitical technologies—or those technologies that align birth, health, shelter, nutrition and reproduction with the economic processes of capitalism. In *The History of Sexuality Part One*, Foucault explains the relation between capitalism and biopolitics this way:
bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern. (140-141)

Capitalism requires a very complicated investment in biopower. It must encourage “growth” of populations, but it must also “optimize . . . life in general . . . ” so that it conforms to a very specific “machinery of production.” This means capitalist societies must constantly monitor the riskiness of unassimilated, immigrant, poor, Muslim, queer, activist, and otherwise marginalized populations so it can insure the production of a predictably docile generation of consumers and laborers. That is, capitalist biopolitics reproduces biopower by limiting and withholding life chances from unassimilated populations. Indeed, as Winterson argues in the Orbus section of *The Stone Gods*, the very aesthetics of sexual selection under western capitalism have been increasingly narrowed down to white women’s body parts, save a few controlled experiments with non-white or non-female bodies that are exceptionally thin or muscular. If capitalism works to “adjust the phenomena of population to economic processes,” then it must distribute life chances to those who, like the boy from Winterson’s parable, are addicted to consumption and debt. But also like this boy, life itself becomes an addiction for many
consumers, a desire for a vitality that is always diminishing and always being borrowed against.

Despite its boom-bust cycles, it remains difficult to imagine the end of capitalism, in part, because an assortment of technologies that make life healthy, secure, and mobile are financed and controlled by a small number of well-protected, impersonal corporations. Billie goes so far as to claim that “Capitalism is like Japanese Knotweed: nothing kills it off” (136). In this way, the end of capitalism is often expressed in post-apocalyptic terms, where bands of survivors must rebuild, from the ground up, their own systems of security and health. In the final section of The Stone Gods, Winterson offers a similar vision, when Billie and Spike wonder to the outskirts of Tech City and enter a place called Wreck City. Wreck City is described as “a No Zone—no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police . . . You’re on your own” (151). The anarchists/libertarians living in Wreck City have managed to occupy a bombed out area of London that the MORE corporation has yet to annex. The city consists of “twenty five alternative communities ranging from the 1960s Free Love and Cadillacs, to a group of women-only Vegans looking for the next cruelty-free planet” (174). Visiting with some of the residents, a member of the Cadillacs (a group of lesbians who wear white leather and drink lots of champagne) tells Billie that they “are founding an alternative community” (173). But as the conversation continues, it becomes clear that this alternative is difficult to express beyond what one Cadillac claims is a general agreement that “‘the key to happiness . . . is tolerance of those who do not do as you do’” (175). This call for tolerance makes Wreck City a space of exclusion that seeks to become an alternative site of inclusion, a gathering together of those excluded by the MORE
corporation. But Winterson only offers a brief glimpse into this alternative and precarious social structure. By the end of the novel MORE stages a military raid of Wreck City that kills many, including the narrator Billie.

Those who sought refuge in Wreck City are subject to a form of violence that is thanopolitical. They are not just left to die on their own through neglect, rather they are actively gunned down by MORE’s private army. This spasm of killing at the end of the novel reveals a hidden violence, a thanopolitical drive that persists alongside the MORE corporation’s biopolitical mandate to make live. Precipitating the raid, a “Japanese Peace Delegation” is dispatched to preform a “Humanitarian survey of conditions” at Wreck City. The delegation quickly determines that the enclave is inhabited by “people displaced by War and unable to live a normal life,” and, in the name of humanitarianism, they announce their intention to submit a “Full Report [to] recommend Aid” and “sanitation” to the residents. Only “seconds later, fifteen bikers” arrive on the scene and set fire to one of the delegation’s vehicles (155). Instantly, the “displaced people” of Wreck City are re-labeled as terrorists, and the MORE corporation declares a “State of Emergency” to justify the exceptionally violent actions it is about to take.

On the one hand, MORE seeks to optimize biopower for economic processes by “surveying the conditions” of survival for all populations and, where possible, subjecting them to a sanitary definition of human life. Where life is too different and cannot be assimilated or optimized for economic ends, it is left to die, but not necessarily killed, at least not initially. Here, ‘human capital’ not only represents the adjustment of humans to capitalist processes, but it also represents a capitalist reproduction of life as a humanist project. For this reason, the Peace delegation in The Stone Gods arrive at Wreck City on a
“humanitarian” mission, which is nothing more than a mission to normalize its “unsanitary” inhabitants and adjust the population toward economic processes. But, on the other hand, Wreck City is more than a just another site of abandonment to be enfranchised by a capitalist brand of humanitarian relief. As one inhabitant points out, refugees “from Tech City” are “coming in droves . . . so what do you think this [raid] is all about—this Japanese stuff?’” (157). In other words, because Wreck City cannot simply be abandoned to die nor can it be incorporated by Tech City, MORE is forced to take exceptional measures. By forcing the MORE corporation to abandon its biopolitical facade, Wreck City is able to reveal the killing machine that has always already been operational and hidden in Tech City.

In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault emphasizes the active but purposefully hidden role of death in biopolitical regimes: here “death [is] no longer something that suddenly swoop[s] down on life, as in an epidemic. Death [is] now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it” (244). In this way, death itself comes alive in biopolitical regimes, just as the young boy in Winterson’s parable becomes a figure for the living dead who is forced to live even after suicide. Likewise, the droves of refugees fleeing Tech City to Wreck City are also fleeing the living dead quality of neo-humanism, if only to find a space where they can die in peace.

However, lost in the opposition between Tech City and Wreck City is the unlimited finitude of a posthuman or cyborg politics. The cyborg stands in contrast to a Wreck City where “you’re on your own”—the planet is too small and filled with touch for this sort of individualism. Likewise, the cyborg cannot support a neo-humanist biopolitics—human
life is too entangled within and dependent upon a mesh of ecology and technology to be anthropocentrically extracted as an exceptional form of life (157). Beyond Tech City and Wreck City, Winterson points to a “Red Zone” that is also called the “Unknown” and the “Dead Forrest” (159, 161, 170). A bartender warns Billie that this radioactive woodland contains “wild animals,” including humans. This is where life is “re-evolving,” according to the barman, “it’s Life after Humans, whatever that is” (159). When Billie reaches this area, she finds “a petrified forest of blackened and shocked trees” whose “bark had a coating—like a laminate” (161). “Further in” Billie, “could see that the trees were glowing,” and “underfoot was soggy . . . like walking on pulped meat” (161). This is a space of toxic mutation and sticky laminates. It is the “glowing,” “soggy,” fleshy ecology of unlimited finitude and evolutionary experimentation. Billie learns that both the Wreck City and Tech City fear this space because “the incurables and freaks are all in there, . . . the mutants” (171). Seen differently, however, this Unknown space is alive with evolutionary becomings and filled with life that cannot ignore its chemical kinship with the prosthetic ecology. To be clear, Winterson is not championing a toxic form of biopolitics. Rather, the messy materiality of evolution is a tonic of Unknown space that opens biopolitics to a myriad of non-human forces. In this way, evolution is a posthuman biopolitics oriented toward future becomings that cannot be mastered because it emerges from the unwholesome hybridity of unlimited finitude.

In her book *Time Travels*, Elizabeth Grosz articulates a strategic alliance between Darwinian evolution and feminist politics. In particular, evolution makes the radical claim that nature changes, and this under appreciated insight means that biopolitical
regimes predicated on the natural stability of the human are necessarily weak and over-
reliant on states of exception. Grosz frames the issue this way:

One of the most challenging issues facing any future feminism is precisely how to
articulate a future in which futurity itself has a feminine form, in which the female
subject can see itself projected beyond its present position as other to the one.
Which may, ironically, mean that this future feminine may render itself obsolete or
the object of profound and even inhuman . . . becomings rather than rest itself on the
forms of femininity as they have been represented . . . within patriarchy as it has
existed up to now. (177)

It is for this reason that Winterson and other contemporary writers struggle to “articulate
a futurity” that draws on new forms of life: clones, Robo Sapiens, toxic mutants. These
new subjectivities are not simply the dystopian products of present day capitalism or neo-
humanism; they are also a projection of life “beyond its present position” within
humanist biopolitics. They are the unknown hybrid creatures we are becoming, and they
remind us of the unknown hybridity we already are.
Works Cited


Cernan, Eugene, Roland Evans, and Jack Schmitt (Apollo 17 Crew). Blue Marble.


Dunning, Stephen. "Margaret Atwood's 'Oryx and Crake': The Terror of the Therapeutic."


Print.


Walkowitz, Rebecca L. “Unimaginable Largeness: Kazuo Ishiguro, Translation, and the New


