

# Technology, the Environment and Biopolitics in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*

Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai

**Abstract:** For critic Roger Luckhurst, African-American writer Octavia Butler's trilogy of *Xenogenesis* (*Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*) is about "the horror of miscegenation." In *Dawn*, an African woman named Lilith Iyapo is awoken to the task of converting other humans to trade with the Oankali in this post-apocalyptic otherworld. In *Adulthood Rites*, the protagonist Akin is a genetically engineered offspring of five parents (two humans, two Oankali, and one Ooloi); and in *Imago*, Jodahs is an Ooloi who controls the evolution of racial science. Through the destabilization of binary thinking between the human and the alien, Butler's *Xenogenesis* has demonstrated a Harawayan cyborg writing about the importance of hybridized identities that renders survival possible. In this essay, I argue against a moral reading of the technological advances as adumbrated in the trilogy. For my part, the trilogy aims at moving beyond Michel Foucault's technology of the self and Giorgio Agamben's biopolitics in the hope that the ethico-political dilemma can be resolved.

**Key words:** Octavia Butler; *Xenogenesis*; ethical choice; biopolitics

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**标题:** 巴特勒《创生三部曲》中的科技、环境与生命政治

**内容摘要:** 美国非裔女作家巴特勒的《创生三部曲》是一部后末世论小说。小说讲述核子危机后，硕果仅存的少数人类被具高科技的物种翁卡利类人拯救并封存起来，其目的地与其种族延续有关。本文尝试从科技、环境与生命政治角度来讨论这三部曲背后所隐藏的宰制、剥削和殖民等内在问题，同时本文也将运用福柯和阿冈本的生命政治和聂珍钊的“伦理选择”来剖析赖莉丝的“伦理决定”，期能走出科技、环境与生命政治的两难。

**关键词:** 奥克塔薇娅·巴特勒；《创生三部曲》；伦理选择；生命政治

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The future belongs to Posthumanism.... Not to nation-states, not to factions. It belongs to life, and life moves in clades.

— Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix Plus* 170

In *Xenogenesis*, African American science fiction writer Octavia Butler depicts a post-apocalyptic world where the earth was devastated by nuclear wars which brought two species into real contact with each other: humans and aliens. The former tends to be self-destructive due to their “genetic contradiction” while the latter are referred to as “captors” because of the gene trading that might lead to human extinction at the hands of the Oankali aliens. For Butler, both are biologically and culturally flawed: The human mindset is invariably hierarchical, so are the Oankali but in a different sense (Francis 114) <sup>①</sup>. However, the aliens can still suggest steering alternative modes of thinking out of the dualistic, value-hierarchical thinking to embrace the post-human.

Like other SF practitioners, such as Margaret Atwood and Bruce Sterling, Butler employs an end-time apocalyptic discourse to create a critical dystopia after the entropic world. However, the end-time point should not mark the end as the end of the world, but as the beginning of a new beginning. In “Apocalypse at the Gate,” Slavoj Žižek argues against the end-time ideology as the closure of critical thinking. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze also warns that apocalyptic thinking is a form of “maniacal programming” (40) in that it sees nothing but “an End lying at the limit of a long flat line” (45). In a similar vein, Butler, by writing the apocalyptic into the real, reactivates the post-apocalyptic imagination of a brave new world: the post-human. In other words, the end is ground zero, a Barthesian zero-degree writing, and Butler's *Xenogenesis* series signals the arrival of a new post-human era in which the humans co-evolve with the aliens.

Donna Haraway, one of the important critics of Butler, observes in “Cyborg Manifestoes,” along with Maria Aline Ferreira's “Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler” and Laurel Bollinger's “Symbiogenesis, Selfhood, and Science Fiction,” that creative assemblage between the human and the aliens functions as a hope for the future to shrug “gender bias” and “racism” off old humanism. In this trilogy, two competing forces are juxtaposed: the aliens' intelligence and the human hierarchy. Though the human is equipped with a hierarchical mindset and dwarfed by the alien in biotechnology, Butler suggests that the human can still learn from the alien and have a second chance to sustain themselves on earth when Lilith told the human resisters “about the Oankali, about the plan to reseed Earth with human communities” (149). Judging from the Oankali's more ecological impulse that values the importance of biodiversity, my post-human reading of Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy attempts to move beyond the post-colonial reading that foregrounds the opposition between the captor and the captive, the colonizer and the colonized, as illustrated in Sarah Outtersen's “Diversity, Change, Violence: Octavia Butler's Pedagogical Philosophy” which passes an entirely negative judgment on the Oankali. Daniel Dinello's *Technophobia: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman*

*Technology* is an example that offers a more or less didactic reading of the novel by saying that the Oankali are “fascistic” and that their “biotechnological rape employs the eugenic logic of the slave master” (210). Although Butler’s work “remains rooted in social allegories of race, gender, and power” (Clarke 163), she actually destabilizes gender boundaries, renounces speciesism, and criticizes human hierarchy by ushering in a new post-human worldview with a possible genetic fusion that might pave way to the continued existence of both species. Thus, Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy exemplifies a Harawayan cyborg writing about the importance of hybridized identities that render survival possible: “My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusion, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (154). As Larry McCaffery rightly argues, Butler’s critique of human hierarchical behavior aims to “stop ourselves from behaving in certain ways if we could learn to curb some of our biological [hierarchical] urges” (63). In this essay, I point out that both moral and post-colonial readings of the technological advances as adumbrated in the trilogy are reductionistic in that Butler’s trilogy aims at moving beyond Michel Foucault’s technology of the self and Giorgio Agamben’s biopolitics in the hope that the ethico-political dilemma can be resolved. In addition, I will also move from Haraway’s biopolitics and immunity discourse to a discussion of the post-human bodily (third) nature in dynamic interactions with the materiality of an agential body as embodied by Lilith’s brood—Akin and Jodahs.

### I. After the World

Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy—*Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989)—is set 250 years after a nuclear holocaust. Her critical dystopian vision differs from classical dystopia novels, such as the Orwellian totalitarian panopticon society under total surveillance and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, in which hatcheries and reproduction are conditioned at the beginning of birth<sup>②</sup>. In contrast to the social control under totalitarianism, Butler’s *Xenogenesis* acts out the evolution of a new race through genetic engineering mediated by the aliens.

After the holocaust, the reader witnesses the arrival of the Oankali who save the remnant human population and whose world as envisioned by Butler is expected to live in tandem with the humans for the future possibility of gene-trading (Bollinger 42). At the outset of *Dawn*, Lilith Iyapo, the heroine of the trilogy, who has been awakened off and on over the last several decades, is shocked to an awareness that she has a scar on her abdomen: “Opening and closing her jacket, she had touched the long scar across her abdomen” (4). Without her knowing, she has been prostheticised during her long sleep, and Lilith’s awakening in the wake of the cancer surgery marks the prelude of a post-human era where humans are expected to trade genes with the aliens—the Oankali—and survive.

Lilith is an African American woman whose name alludes to Adam’s wife in the Hebrew Bible. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin in 1988, Butler stated that Lilith was Adam’s first wife (Francis 25)<sup>③</sup>. According to the Bible, there are two creation stories in Genesis: the first account describes how God creates humankind, male and female, in his image on the sixth day while the second narrative centers on the creation of Adam and Eve, “the bone

of [Adam's] bones." Thus, for critics, Lilith was the first created female in the Bible. Between the two, the second creation story emphasizes a radical equality in the order of things (Bowker 30).

Lilith was continuously awakened and finally finds herself "[s]till alive. Alive... again": "Awakening was hard, as always.... Lilith Iyapo lay gasping, shaking with the force of her effort.... She curled around it, fetal, helpless" (*Dawn* 3). In effect, Lilith was awakened with a mission: to persuade the other human beings to trade genes with the Oankali. She was entrusted with the leadership of the survivors, which really puts her in an awkward position: she was regarded "either as traitor or as a ticking bomb" (257).

The Oankali, meaning "traders" (21), are equipped with more advanced biotechnologies, including the growing of an organic ship, genetic engineering, and posthuman reproduction. Biologically, they have three genders: Oankali male, Oankali female, and Ooloi. The Ooloi is "the third gender" (*Conversations* 114), capable of diagnosing "what could be normal or abnormal, possible or impossible for the human body" (21)<sup>④</sup>. To Lilith's amazement, "they know our bodies better than we do"; they even know how to fix her cancer (*Dawn* 178). They are mind-readers (*Adulthood Rites* 39) and can see without eyes (*Dawn* 102). Part human and part Oankali, the Ooloi do not have human "eyes, nose, or ears" (24), but they are able to fix genetic problems. Bogue aptly adds that they have their own language system. Exempt from the self-contradiction in human language, the signifier and the signified are well-matched in the Oankali language: "the Oankali cannot lie, whereas humans can say one thing and mean another" (Bogue 143). In general, the representation of the Oankali as an alien species does look grotesque and "ugly" (*Dawn* 51, *Adulthood Rites* 37, 43). To the human eyes, they are repulsive.

In the novel, the Oankali are regarded as "captors," and the humans regard themselves as "captives." Ironically, the humans are victims and perpetrators of the nuclear war at the same time. Critics such as Gregory Jerome Hampton look at this trilogy as a work of colonialism. However, this line of argument is sort of flimsy, as Lilith confesses that the aliens do not treat her as an animal: "But, no, it was not that kind of [animal] experiment. She was intended to live and reproduce, not to die" (62). In contradistinction, it is the human who treats the alien as animals. In my opinion, such a colonial reading that complains about the tyranny of the aliens is inadequate because an ethical choice to be human or post-human is still up to Lilith<sup>⑤</sup>.

Lilith's existential and ethical choice between loyalty and betrayal, the human and the post-human, or to live or not to live, sits on the fence between the human contradiction and the post-human transduction. According to critic Nie Zhenzhao's literary ethics, there are two kinds of selection: the biological selection and the ethical selection (272-73). The former refers to a step taken to move toward humanesis while the latter is an existential choice that helps overcome the moral dichotomy between good and evil. Lilith's decision to work with the aliens is close to Nie's ethical selection in that she ponders over a similar predicament between herself and an "experimental animal", and she has been struggling to find a balance<sup>⑥</sup>:

Experimental animal, parent to domestic animals? Or... nearly extinct animal, part of a captive breeding program? Human biologists had done that before the war—used a few

captive members of an endangered animal species to breed more for the wild population. Was that what she was headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced “donations” of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth... Humans had done these things to captive breeders—all for a higher good, of course. (*Dawn* 62)

In *Gilbert Simondon's Psychic and Collective Individuation*, David Scott points out that the Simondonian distinction between an ethical choice and a moral choice is germane to the discussion of an ethics of (non-)human post-humanism. Simondon tries to chart a new (ontogenetic) ethics ignored by Plato, Aristotle, and the scholastics, such as St. Augustine, because these philosophers highlight the importance of hylomorphism<sup>⑦</sup>. Simondon claims that a new criteria of judgment should stay away from a hierarchical thinking. Thus his notion of ontogenetic ethics is non-oppositional, reciprocal, and co-determinous. For Simondon, a (practical) ethics is an “emergent” value, not “a projective normativity,” projecting “a norm to explain value” (184). In this sense, ethics “brings us back to the *innocence* of becoming”, while morality preaches “a contra-existence, an anti-becoming” (192). In other words, morality, for Simondon, proffers “a method of valuation that, on the promise of salvation... turns life against life” (192). Conversely, Simondon’s ethical action “acquires its affective intensity when integrated with and operative within a larger network or information web of actions” (188). Following Simondon’s ethical choice, we can infer that Lilith’s choice is a forced one, but the choice is still a result of taking into account all the conditions of possibility and impossibility as a mediator between the human and the alien.

## II. The Ecological Post-human

In spite of the fact that this imbrication of human and the aliens is framed by a deployment of insect metaphors to describe the Oankali in “insectoid” terms (The aliens are like “caterpillars”), the aliens are the post-human whose evolution takes place outside the anthropological machine. They have created a nature-oriented brave new world in their ship while orbiting the moon in outer space to make the body fit with the material conditions of the environment.

The aliens have androgynous voices with a good memory and a strong olfactory sense (*Dawn* 100). They are vegetarians: “The Oankali don’t eat it [meat]” (152). Due to their nomadic life styles, they develop an ecology of space traveling. They find plants particularly useful in the ecosystem, and they are “used to captur[ing] living animals and keep[ing] them alive for a long while, using their carbon dioxide and supplying them with oxygen while slowly digesting nonessential parts of their bodies: limbs, skin, sensory organs. The plants even passed some of their own substance through their prey to nourish the prey and keep it alive as long as possible. And the plants were enriched by the prey’s waste products. They gave a very, very long death” (54). In Wark’s terms, the world that the Oankali have terraformed is based on a third nature: “She thought it would have been easier to have left mosquitoes out of this small simulation of Earth. But Oankali did not think that way. A simulation of a tropical forest of Earth had to be complete

with snakes, centipedes, mosquitoes and other things Lilith would have preferred to live without" (214).

The whole ship is built as a living organism, like a "circulatory system" (*Adulthood Rites* 211) that disposes of the garbage efficiently (146). In this ship, the bed "seemed to grow from the floor" (4) and the walls of the spaceship seem magically "alive and so is almost everything in it" (156)<sup>⑧</sup>. Besides, the ship "gave food when asked" (*Adulthood Rites* 221). The Oankali "use living matter the way we used machinery" (146). In fact, the Oankali controlled the ship with their "body chemistry" (*Dawn* 123). To train and to make experiments, they used an area of the ship to simulate "a fragment of Earth" as a tropical forest (156). Indeed, the ship is "a vast sphere made up of huge, still-growing, many-sided plates like the shell of a turtle" (*Adulthood* 13), which purports to help the aliens live, heal, and trade (190). In Butler's hands, technology is prosthetic in the post-natural world, able to offer a utopian impulse to treat the human contamination and social fragmentation. For the Oankali, technology and ecology are not separated:

I sorted through the vast genetic memory that Nikanj had given me. There was a single cell within that great store—a cell that could be "awakened" from its stasis within yashi and stimulated to divide and grow into a kind of seed. This seed could become a town or a shuttle or a great ship like Chkahichdahk. In fact, my seed would begin as a town and eventually leave Earth as a great ship. It would never be a shuttle, though it would be parent to shuttles. (*Imago* 263)

As an "ark-ship", this interstellar spaceship Chkahichdahk preserves the aliens' knowledge, technology, and culture. For Akin, the Oankali-human son of Lilith in *Adulthood Rites*, the Oankali not only need to terraform the Earth to make it habitable but also fix the biosphere: "Nothing would have survived except bacteria, a few small land plants and animals, and some sea creatures. Most of the life that you see around you we reseeded from prints, from collected specimens from our own creations, and from altered remnants of things that had undergone benign changes before we found them. The war damaged your ozone layer. Do you know what that is?" (*Adulthood Rites* 41). In addition, the aliens also preserve human genomes for future prosthetic reconstruction: "We have prints of all of you. We would be sorry to lose you, but at least we would save something. We will be inviting your people to join us again. If any are injured or crippled or even sick in spite of our efforts, we'll offer them our help. They're free to accept our help yet stay in their villages" (42). In *Virtual Geography*, McKenzie Wark proposes third nature as "the spectacle" in the sphere of everyday life. Inspired by Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Wark notes that "commodities make up second nature," transforming "being into having" (176). Third nature breaks with "the surface and the tempo of second nature" and turns "having into appearing" (176). For Wark, adherents to third nature do not have to "follow the movement of the sun," they highlight the importance of technological imaginations "stripped of its myths" (192).

In addition to the aliens' simulation of a third nature, they are also practitioners of third memory. As Bernard Stiegler argues, "humanity and technics are indissociable" (*Technics and*

*Times* 2:2). Because the aliens are prosthetic beings with an originary disorientation. They need an “originary supplement” via memory (*Technics and Time* 2:4). For Stiegler, memory is liberating and ortho-thetic (*Technics and Time* 1:238)—and after the dialectic between primary and secondary memory comes third memory. In Butler’s hands, it is the posthuman Oankali, not the humans, who use third memory as a mnemonic device for survival. Primary memory is “what is constituted in the originary impression”; second memory refers to memorization, recollection, and re-presentation (*Technics and Time* 1:246). Third memory, also called “epiphylogenetic memory”, is also seen as a correction of Angus Weismann’s two memories: somatic memory and genetic memory: The former refers to “the nervous memory of the individual animal while the latter is the default genetic carrier” (*Acting Out* 67). Epiphylogenetic or third memory highlights the importance of the structural coupling between the living human being and technics, and “[i]t is a break with the ‘law of life’ in that, considering the hermetic separation between somatic and germinal, the epigenetic experience of an animal is lost to the species when the animal dies, while in a life proceeding by means other than life, the being’s experience, registered in the tool (in the object), becomes transmissible and cumulative; thus arises the possibility of a heritage” (*Technics and Time* 2: 4). This third memory can be regarded as the third person “he” who can be converted into a “we” and become one of “us”. In other words, technical objects and the environment are mutually implicated in the post-human world. The aliens, who are a life-loving people, do not preach “violence” because

... violence was against Oankali beliefs. Actually it was against their flesh and bone, against every cell of them. Humans had evolved from hierarchical life, dominating, often killing other life. Oankali had evolved from acquisitive life, collecting and combining with other life. To kill was not simply wasteful to the Oankali. It was as unacceptable as slicing off their own healthy limbs. They fought only to save their lives and the lives of others. Even then, they fought to subdue, not to kill. If they were forced to kill, they resorted to biological weapons collected genetically on thousands of worlds. They could be utterly deadly, but they paid for it later. It cost them so dearly that they had no history at all of striking out in anger, frustration, jealousy, or any other emotion, no matter how keenly they felt it. When they killed even to save life, they died a little themselves. (*Imago* 51)

In a nutshell, human survivors are antithetical, patriarchal, androcentric, and hierarchical. To be human means a man-centered community as a form of immunity, while the insect-like aliens are stopped short. They are not allowed to mix with the humans. According to Dawson, thanatos and biopolitics are techniques and technologies that are used to “manage, administer, modify, regulate, and control” the mechanism of life. The Oankali attempt to foster life and disallow it to the point of death (43). Their biopower aims at letting life live without taking life. However, humans try to take life and let die. The consequence of human killing and letting die left the Earth devastated in the wake of the anthropogenic nuclear war. Unlike humans, the Oankali Ahajas asserts that

“When I’m dead,” she said, “I will nourish other life.... If I died on a lifeless world, a world that could sustain some form of life, if it were tenacious enough, organelles within each cell of my body would survive and evolve. In perhaps a thousand million years, that world would be as full of life as this one.... Yes. Our ancestors have seeded a great many barren worlds that way. Nothing is more tenacious than the life we are made of. A world of life from apparent death, from dissolution. That’s what we believe in.” (*Imago* 166)

Leah and Tate, two human resisters from Lo, do not believe in “any manipulation of DNA that can “mix humans with extraterrestrial aliens” (149). In spite of all this, in *Adulthood Rites*, the concretization of the mixture of human and Oankali’s genetic reproduction is embodied in Akin, the first human-Oankali child with the ability to have bodily transformation.

The Oankali concept of genetics is based on biological essentialism. They think that humans are self-destructive in that humans have “selfish” genes. For them, humanism is a form of individualism, and the idea of the post-human treasures assemblages, structural coupling, and relationality, no matter whether it is creative, dark, or unlikely. This line of thought on assemblage between human and human, or human and nonhuman highlight the becoming of being and the being of becoming<sup>⑨</sup>. For Haraway, procreative alliances with the Oankali points to a world of “crossovers” based on “boundary-transgressions” and “genetic constructivism” (qtd. in Clarke 264).

Lilith, the matriarch of *Xenogenesis*, is the first traitor to the human, who takes posthumanity upon her when she accepts her Oankali companion Nikanj’s offer of bodily upgrading and submits herself to the hypodermic prick of its sensory tentacles. The subsequent genetic merger of human and Oankali leads to construct offspring who metamorphose further with each generation. (Clarke 165; *Adulthood* 117)

Having said this, my reading of Bulter’s *Xenogenesis* goes beyond a post-colonial reading that focuses its attention on violence, nostalgia, and the defense of humanism and humanity and the conflicts between slaves [the humans] and masters [the aliens]. My main concern is with autopoiesis (self-production) and potentiality. In other words, humans could have a second chance to redeem themselves and the Oankali are in a position to continue their search for future possible genetic interspecies fusion. Thus my focus is on how biopolitics and the technology of the self can be used as a possibility of future redemption, as in the cases of Akin in *Adulthood Rites* and Jodahs in *Imago*.

### III. The Posthuman Body

There are three waves of utopianism: (1) classical dystopianism, (2) critical utopianism, and (3) critical dystopianism. Though different in approaches, these trends share one important feature: the body as an interface. For Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, such female authors of hard science fiction as Ursula Le Guin, Joan Slonczewsky, Marge Peirce, and Octavia Butler



seem interested in this question: [W]hat forms best imagine the potential viability of post-human evolution?" Similarly, Dana Haraway confesses owing a lot of her political imaginations of the cyborg to a plethora of writers, including Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany and others (*Simians* 173). Among these female writers, Butler is particularly good at portraying the evolution of the body as a cultural node that intersects with others. For Haraway, these writers are "theorists for cyborgs" (*Simians* 173), suggesting that "'women of colour' might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings of her 'biomythography'" (174). For Haraway, becoming and metamorphosis can be monstrous and dangerous, but "Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (175). An advocate of the nature-culture intra-actions, Haraway's cyborg politics attempts to de-translate "the central dogma of phallogocentrism," thus promulgating an interdependent yet liberatory survival politics. In "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," Haraway goes a step further to trace the development of the "immune system discourse" in relation to symbolic and material "difference" in late capitalism (*Simians* 204). For Haraway, as for Butler, the immune system based on rules of inclusion and exclusion is conceived as a Foucaudian technology of the self and a dialectic of "biopolitics" between the normal and the pathological. In other words: "[i]mmune system discourse is about constraint and possibility for engaging in a world full of 'difference,' replete with non-self" (214). In the trilogy, the humans "seem invaded not just by the threatening 'non-selves'" but also by themselves. For the humans, the Oankali are space "invaders" and they are "obsessed with the notion of contagion and hostile penetration of the healthy body" (*Simians* 223). They have qualms about these not-self other-oriented boundary-crossing alien-dominated interspecies.

In *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Butler ponders on what it means to be post-human when "Humanity was doomed" after the holocaust (*Adulthood Rites* 234). At the thought of her future son who "will be a thing—not human" (262), Lilith becomes disconcerted. With an optimistic air, the Ooloi Nikanj tries to convince Lilith to accept the fact that "Our children will be better than either of us.... We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations. Our children won't destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way they'll be able to do it" (263). For Lilith, post-humanity means another life form to come other than human (Youngquist 182). Butler daringly invites us to envision a future with different life forms in an age of post-humanity and immunity.

The post-human body is a theater of gender performativity. Being a human-Oankali construct, Akin has five parents: "two Oankali, one Human male-female pair... mixed by an Ooloi, who contributes the 'organelle' that inhabits every cell of an Oankali, driving and enabling its capability for metamorphosis" (Jacobs 102). Butler tries to offer a gender spectacle by destabilizing the gender boundary between the human and the alien. When mating, both Joseph and Lilith find themselves resistant at first; however, the tripling between them has a good turnout:

“Then she lay down, perversely eager for what it could give her. She positioned herself against it, and was not content until she felt the deceptively light touch of the sensory hand and felt the Ooloi body tremble against her” (*Adulthood Rites* 201).

In *Dawn*, the humans are worried about non-human offspring due to the miscegenation between the Oankali and the human. The Oankali, like the monster in *Frankenstein*, are looked upon as a “creature”. As creatures, animals or monsters, the Oankali are deemed grotesque and ugly. Butler pits the creaturely life of the post-human Oankali against the biolife of the resisters. Therefore, Butler seems to challenge the core values of humanity with a possible posthuman world with genes mixing between human survivors and the aliens. Human beings’ xenophobic fear misrecognizes the Oankali as “big worms”, and the “enemy alien Oankali” have finally become “frighteningly alien” and radically other. For Naomi Jacobs, however, Butler’s “representation of Oankali sexuality, epistemology, communication, and politics” suggests “fluidity and openness of the post-human body might enable new forms of subjectivity and agency” (92).

In addition to the humans on the spaceship orbiting the Moon, there are still resisters on earth, especially in the two villages Lo and Phoenix. These human resisters don’t like the Oankali in part because they are being made into women (Francis 113). They even kidnap the aliens in retaliation for their hurt egos. From the Oankali, they “*know to the bone* that it’s wrong to help the Human species regenerate unchanged because it will destroy itself again. To them it’s like deliberately causing the conception of a child who is so defective that it must die in infancy” (*Imago* 12). Because of the human con(tra)diction, the Oankali have made precautionary principles to render the humans infertile for them to live in the resister villages. In *Adulthood Rites*, the Oankali-human Akin first encountered the resisters and was kidnapped traveling from Lo to Phoenix with his friend Tino. He is empathetic, but the human resisters are violent, oppositional, hierarchical and androcentric, zero-tolerant to the Oankali. In order to defend humanity from being contaminated by the Oankali, they loot, kidnap, and kill. Unlike traditional humanists, Lilith advises his son Akin to embrace “difference,” not discrimination. In *The Posthuman Bodies*, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston argue that post-human bodies are not passive, “slaves to masterdiscourse,” but “nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourse of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context” (2). Akin, a Nigerian name for “hero” and the first boy born to a human mother on earth after the war (*Adulthood Rites* 104), suffers a lot when he was kidnapped by human resisters; however, he still chooses to stay with the humans and would like to terraform Mars with a group of them. His thinking is beyond anthropocentrism; his body has become transcorporeal, a nature-cultural nexus as well as an interface that enables him “to know that he was also part of the people who touched him—that within them, he could find fragments of himself. He was himself, and he was those others” (*Adulthood Rites* 6). Here, Akin’s liaisons, interchanges, and interrelations between posthuman transcorporeality and the dynamic world create an interlacing and interlocking chiasmus that puts him in contact with the other (Alaimo 142); hence, the central dichotomy seems passing due to mutuality and shape-shifting:

They might choose to keep contact with their children. They won't live with them permanently—and no construct, male or female, young or old, will feel that as a deprivation. It will be normal to them, and purposeful, since there will always be many more females and Ooloi than males.” It rustled its head and body tentacles. “Trade means change. Bodies change. Ways of living must change. Did you think your children would only look different?” (*Adulthood and Rites* 11)

In *Imago*, the third novel of the *Xenogenesis* series, Jodahs has become a master genetic engineer and his body is even more fluid and protean than Akin. Akin is an Oankali-human whereas Jodahs is an Ooloi construct. Jodahs comments that “There was immense newness. Life in more varieties than I could possibly have imagined—unique units of life, most never seen on Earth. Generations of memory to be examined, memorized, and either preserved alive in stasis or allowed to live their natural span and die. Those that I could re-create from my own genetic material, I did not have to maintain alive” (200). Perhaps, Jodahs functions as a coyote-trickster figure who represents a witty “agent and actor” in the posthuman world (209). The human have their own culture (Youngquist 184); however, the Oankali do not have culture or ethnicity. For the aliens, what matters is mattering, worlding, and metamorphosis—the basic requirement of life. For Jodahs, “life was treasure”: “I knew all this because it was as much a part of me as it was of them. Life was treasure. The only treasure. Nikanj was the one who had made it part of me” (*Imago* 51). For Jodahs, “There’s no safe way to begin a new species” (*Imago* 261). Like Abelard Lindsay who transforms from a mechanist to a shift-shaper, betraying his own humanity for the sake of posthumanity in Bruce Sterling’s *Schismatrix Plus*, Lilith’s brood thus belongs to “Post-humanism,” not to “nation-states, or factions”; it “belongs to life, and life moves in clades.”

#### IV. Conclusion: Beyond the Anthropological Machine

For Darko Suvin, science fiction offers a utopian/destopian mode of “cognitive estrangement” to alert us to the awareness of the difference between reality and the real. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Butler not only lays bare the pitfalls of humanist subjects (Jacobs 91), especially the working of an anthropological machine based on the judgment of *hierarchical* thinking, but also hints at a possibility of posthumanist becoming with the promulgation of a more symbiotic posthumanist hybrid subjectivity.

For Haraway, cyborg writing is not a swansong of humanities, or a praisesong of liberal humanism that sings the nostalgic good old days and prelasparian innocence and harmony. It is about becoming-other, an endless pursuit for post-national, post-humanist, post-nature, post-gendered difference. In Butler’s hands, the post-humanist alien is a creature of the mixture between human and the alien in a post-gendered world. Oppositional, utopian, and anti-innocence, the dystopian vision is not without its utopian hope. Lilith and her offsprings Akin and Jodahs represent different stages of post-human evolutions. In *Xenogenesis*, Butler ventures a perception-altering mindset so as to sketch steps into ecological minds: “What I intended to do when I began the novels, what I really wanted to do, was change males enough so that the hierarchical

behavior... would no longer be a big problem" (105). Though change means the loss of humanity, it also means the arrival of post-humanity. Through the use of the body as a narrative agency, *Xenogenesis* is not situated in a moral allegory or Oankali-human master-slave post-colonial narrative but a post-human orthothetic morphogenesis about "to-come."

### Notes

- ① For Butler, the Oankali "have no traditional government," and "they come together by way of the nerve systems" to "get a consensus". As for the Ooloi, they make no genetic contribution to the offspring in that they are "cut off" from "their own young." "Hierarchical," for the Oankali, implies a "sexual division of labor" (Francis 114).
- ② For Jackson and Moody-Freeman, these works focus on "science and transgression of a moral code and ethics, human arrogance, humankind's relationship with nature... as well as virtual war with aliens as symbols of imperialism and militarism in an age of empire" (3). Also see John Corbett, Anthony Elms and Terri Kapsalis, eds., *Traveling the Spaceways: Sun-Ra, the Astro Black and Other Solar Myths* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010) 79-82.
- ③ Jim Miller points out that Lilith Iyapo is "both the mother of a new race and a Judas to humanity" (qtd. in Tucker 164). Also see Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 173, 179; Tucker 166. Also see Sun-Ra:
- ④ The Ooloi "would control the fertility and 'mix' the children of both groups" (212).
- ⑤ Nikanj tells Lilith that the offspring of their union "will be better than either of us.... We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations" (*Dawn* 243).
- ⑥ Nie Zhenzao rightly points out that the question of an ethical selection coexists with an ethical dilemma or conflict (266).
- ⑦ Hylomorphism is a substantialist metaphysics; it argues that the birth of an individual begins from "a form encountering matter," placing "the principle of individuation *anterior* to individuation" (Scott 4).
- ⑧ "Because the leaves are green? Hell, they're green because they're alive. We didn't build this house, Tino, we grew it. Nikanj provided the seed; we cleared the land; everyone who was going to live here trained the walls and made them aware of us.... It's an Oankali construct. Actually, it's a kind of larval version of the ship. A neotenic larva. It can reproduce without growing up. It can also get a lot bigger without maturing sexually. This one will have to do that for a while. We don't need more than one" (*Adulthood Rites* 34).
- ⑨ Deleuze and Guattari "oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production" (242).

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