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Somatic Capitalism: Reproduction, Futurity, and Feminist Science Fiction

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“Every technology is reproductive technology,” -Donna Haraway

Reproductive futurism in the neoliberal present

Suddenly, it feels a lot like 1984—not the iconic 1984 of Orwell’s dystopia, but the 1984 in which Margaret Atwood composed *The Handmaid’s Tale*. This was the same year that saw the release of the anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream*, and only a few years after the unsuccessful push for congressional ratification of the Human Life Statute, which brought the idea of fetal personhood to the national stage. As Valerie Hartouni notes, the 1980s were “obsessively preoccupied with women and fetuses” (42). We might say the same about the 2010s. The list of newly adopted or narrowly averted anti-abortion legislation from the past year is extensive, and all of it justified through the logic of biopolitics. When Texas State Representative Jodie Laubenberg hails the passage of that state’s 20-week abortion ban as “ensuring that women are given the highest quality of health care in a very vulnerable time of their lives,” she appeals to the general affirmation that it is the state’s business to attend to the health and wellbeing of its population—a mandate then easily extended to the health and wellbeing of the unborn ^[1].

But this virulent form of reproductive futurism is difficult to reconcile with the neoliberal regimes of flexible accumulation that otherwise dominate post-crisis America.^[2] As developed by Lee Edelman, reproductive futurism names the logic by which the social *good* appears co-terminus with human *futurity*, a futurity emblemized by the figure of the child and vouchsafed through reproduction. In this sense, reproductive futurism is one of several disciplinary technologies that links sexuality and domesticity—with their attendant eugenic aspirations and immunitary procedures—to the national domestic as the basis for economic vitality.^[3] It is through the vigor of the household that the nation rises and falls. As Theodore Roosevelt put it in his 1905 speech to the National Congress of Mothers, “the welfare of the state depends absolutely upon whether or not the average family, the average man and woman and their children, represent the kind of citizenship fit for the foundation of a great nation” (204). In her *Wayward Reproductions*, Alys Eve Weinbaum calls this obligation not only to bear children but to bear proper children “the race/reproduction bind” (5). Rightly raised and rightly raced, these children contribute to the “stock” of the

nation, a term whose configuration of market economics, racist ideology, and animal husbandry makes clear how much this ascription of vitality is premised on the promise of a tractable future.^[4] Biologized, the nation's future wealth is in its present reproductive choices, which are fostered and supervised by a whole roster of experts. It is to this state-based biopolitics that Michel Foucault's description in *History of Sexuality 1* best applies, for the production of Roosevelt's "average family" comes from the state's investment in and extension of its disciplinary procedures. Not for nothing is the 20th century both the century of biopolitical governance and the century of the child.^[5]

In its guise as figure for and promise of a national future, the child is tethered to a rapidly fading era in the history of biopolitics. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick trenchantly observed, "since the beginning of the [Reagan-era] tax revolt, the government of the United States [...] has been positively rushing to divest itself of answerability for care to its charges, with no other institution proposing to fill the gap" (141).^[6] It's no surprise then, that the "highest quality of health-care" touted by Representative Laubenberg is in fact none at all, as the law is widely acknowledged to result in the closure of all of the women's health clinics in Texas that provide abortion services. While certain forms of pastoral care and disciplinary control continue, then, they do so as vestigial strata—often with punitive intent—within an overarching ideological framework that privileges deregulation, privatization and risk-amplification. In this context, "stock" ceases to designate the tenderly marshaled wealth of the nation in its variety of forms and instead becomes the financialized object of speculative market manipulation and its unevenly distributed necropolitical consequences. Stock, in this sense, relies on surplus: surplus value, surplus vitality, surplus populations.^[7]

Yet as the fervent pro-natalism of the past several years has shown, reproductive futurism has lost none of its efficacy under neoliberalism.^[8] If anything, the child has become more available and more pervasive, even as economic and legislative policies undermine the very social vitality the child supposedly indexes. Why should this be the case? One possible explanation for the persistence of reproductive futurism is that the child provides a justificatory rhetoric of future growth, a kind of reproductive economics that matches the vehement vitalism of anti-abortion activism. In these terms, we might look to the homology between reproductive and economic futurism as inspiring the money relation and lending the child's beatific innocence and utopian promise to the debt form, fulfilling what sociologist Melinda Cooper calls "the

prophetic, promissory moment of capitalist restructuring, the kind of utopia that is celebrated in neoliberal theories of growth” (60).

For as convincing as this argument is, however, it neglects the *literal* and *material* conjunction of the child and capital, or what I will call “somatic capitalism” – the intervention into and monetization of life-itself. Rather than focusing on the domestic household, somatic capitalism operates above and below the level of the individual subject to amplify or diminish specific bodily capacities. It siphons vitality rather than exerting discipline, swerves and harnesses existing tendencies rather than regulating their emergence. It differentially distributes exposures and zones of safety, but with the implicit acknowledgment that no system is ever really closed enough to be safe. Its accelerant is capital, and it rides on the profits to be reaped from catastrophe. It is an expression of the move from state biopolitics with its rhetoric of concern to neoliberal speculation. Its focus is on species as repositories of recombinant capacities. Thus its paradigmatic artifacts can be found in all that biological plasticity makes possible: stem-cells and transgenic animals, genetically-tailored medicines and bioweapons.^[9] The converse of this activation of organic plasticity is the catalyzation of systemic complexity in the autonomous agency of natural forces, brought home by biospheric change, genetic mutation, and epidemic disease. That reproductive futurism continues unabated into the 21st century, in other words, has less to do with ideologies of unfettered growth and more to do with *uncontrolled biological growth*.

This project, then, concerns the space of encounter between reproductive futurism and reproductive futures, or the profusion of liveliness rendered visible by the harnessing of life-itself in modern production processes.^[10] We are accustomed to thinking about economic-growth futurism as resulting in the actual despoliation of the present. In that version, the fetishization of the child is a bitterly ironic fiction that occludes the harm done to future generations. The examples I have given, however, point in another direction. Taken together, these forms of liveliness suggest other-than-human profusions that threaten to dissolve the bond that seals the child to the future. (Consider here the profusion-as-destitution exemplified by red tides.) Reproductive futurism in the neoliberal present, I argue, is thus a response to this threat that harnesses the associations of the child with the future to reconsolidate liveliness back into human, at the same time that material practices in the life sciences make this sovereign fantasy harder and harder to maintain. In order to further explore this dynamic, I turn to two exemplary representations of reproductive futurism—Margaret Atwood’s groundbreaking dystopia *Handmaid’s Tale* (1986) and her 2003 speculative fiction *Oryx*

and Crake. In both novels, the question of human reproduction gives face to a latent anxiety about nonhuman vitality: for *Handmaid's Tale*, human infertility is both the warrant for state-enforced reproductive futurism and the volte-face of human mutation brought on by industrial waste accumulation; for *Oryx and Crake* and its full-throttle somatic capitalism, reproductive futurism takes the form of direct control over the germ-line through species-wide genocide and our replacement with humanoid transgenics. Though both novels leverage reproductive futurism against reproductive futures, they simultaneously make apprehensible the specter of liveliness within the circuit of wealth (and waste) production.

As Atwood's novels demonstrate, this is a particularly vital nexus of issues for women, as the extraction of nonhuman livelinesses from the child has spurred a host of efforts to graft the culture of life over the *culturing* of life. By the same token, however, the child-figure that emerges from this labor is a queer child, in Kathryn Bond Stockton's sense of that term, or what we might call the queerly-human child. Stockton argues that the construction of the modern child as the fragile interval of innocence before the inevitable fall into adulthood, far from generating a smoothly teleological progression into normative heterosexuality, instead enables the proliferation of lateral potentialities. By shifting the terrain to think about the child's relationship to the reproduction of the species-qua-species, I am arguing that these queer potentialities inhere biologically as well: we are not the smoothly self-similar species we wish to imagine. The child is strange, in other words, and stranger still when given the work of obfuscating the strangers we have already become.^[11] As feminist extrapolations, Atwood's novels map the consequences of this reproductive futurist response to the burgeoning of life and provide a glimpse of the apprehensions of mutation that, I contend, structure and fuel that response. And to the extent that this phobic mode of response denies the very effects that somatic capitalism seeks to induce, its consequences should be of vital concern for everyone—human and nonhuman alike.

Technologies of reproduction

Nowhere has the antimony between biotechnical life and the life celebrated by anti-abortion activists been more fraught than in the realm of reproduction itself. We have already had occasion to note that reproduction is a privileged instrument of social order. Weinbaum argues that “competing understandings of reproduction [...] became central to the organization of knowledge” (2) from the late 18th century on. Alongside Foucault's famous contention that “the whole thematic of species” serves “to obtain results at the level of discipline” (146), her formulation helps to delineate the reverse

correlate: that the disciplining of populations through the regulatory apparatus of sex, gender, and race also serves to shore up the only apparently natural relations of reproduction, relations whose plasticities were made newly visible in the period in which Atwood was composing *The Handmaid's Tale*. Hartouni, for example, records the July 1986 headline news of the surgical removal of a fetus from the womb of a comatose woman, Marie Odette Henderson, noting that in such cases the fetus appears rhetorically unmoored, “an independent life form floating about in the world [...] loose, lonely, abandoned, in need of being saved” (32). Donna Haraway and many other feminists writing in the 80s and 90s made a symmetrical point with reference to the continuing discursive effects of intrauterine fetal visualizations.^[12] These visioning technologies render the fetus fully representable as “not just the signifier of life but [...] as the-thing-in-itself” (Haraway 178).

While this visual and discursive instantiation of the solitary fetus is incontrovertibly attuned to a pro-life politics dedicated to effacing the woman whose body the fetus quite literally is, there is also something anxious lurking behind this adamant isolation. In its monotonous repetitions, the life-itself made sensual in the image of the fetus betrays the lurking presence of another kind of life-itself engendered by reproductive technologies. From the “test-tube” birth of Louise Brown in 1978 to our current “embryo-strewn world of the 21st century” (Franklin 2006, 168), assisted reproductive technologies have begun to unravel the bond between sex, pregnancy, and childbirth and to intimate that life may neither be fully controllable nor fully controlled. As a manipulable object of medical knowledge and intervention, reproduction is shown to be one of many biological functions, in the process blurring the distinction, as Susan Squier delineates, between the unique event of human birth and the kinds of breeding practices long associated with animal life. Indeed, it is under the pressure of IVF technologies and their extraction of bodily capacities from the housing of the individual subject, and in the mix-and-match practices of human and animal surrogacy, that the equation underwriting the fantasy of hetero-reproduction—that $1 + 1$ will always = 1—dramatically transforms. The reaction-formation Lauren Berlant names “fetal motherhood,” then, responds to this transformation by collapsing the reproductive woman into the juridical and discursive primacy of the fetus, retooling the apparatus of fertility as adjunct to the single, sacred child.

The Handmaid's Tale is by far the best known and most commonly read of Atwood's novels and it has garnered much critical commentary.^[13] As a dystopia, it is often considered in light of that genre, and especially through Atwood's formal choice to

write it as a first-person oral record discovered by a later society for which it serves as a historical archive. As a feminist dystopia, it is read as an “if-this-goes-on” warning that asks, as Atwood herself puts it, “how thin is the ice on which supposedly ‘liberated’ modern Western woman stands?” (87). And as a work of feminist science fiction, it engages in the critical distance from the sorts of received notions of the natural and the transhistorical that Darko Suvin calls “cognitive estrangement” and that motivates both Carl Freedman and Earl Jackson Jr. to assimilate science fiction with critical theory tout court. Both science fiction and critical theory strive to formulate “a worldview in which the subject is not the cause but the effect of the system that sustains it” (Jackson 102).

[14] Indeed, Atwood’s novel gives us three different narrative presents—the dystopic future, the remembered past that most closely resembles the period of the book’s composition, and the far future in which the other two texts function as testimony. In juxtaposing these moments, the reader comes to see the differences in their assumptions and thus the “creation of the gendered subject within language and culture” (Lefanu 4).

Despite this broad array of approaches to *Handmaid’s Tale*, however, surprisingly few seriously engage the profound shifts in reproductive technologies that were occurring contemporaneously with its composition. In this, Heather Latimer’s account is both perspicacious and telling. Latimer first describes the novel as acutely “tap[ping] into the time period’s politics” (213) by extrapolating from the 80s backlash against reproductive rights to imagine “a world where maternity is so tightly linked to state oppression that any move against the state, from unlawful sexual interaction to contraception is considered a radical one and punishable by death” (217). Latimer’s insight is to see in this a satiric rejection of the terms in which the abortion question has been framed, one whose symptomatic positing of life against choice is always capable of turning the one back into the other. This satire only works, however, if the primary political context encoded through the novel—violent opposition to abortion rights—is understood only as a technology of gender oppression, without further inquiry into the reasons for such resurgent misogyny.

Yet *Handmaid’s Tale* is a novel *about* reproductive technologies. In an earlier essay, Anne Balsamo casts the novel as a critical mapping of the new technologies of reproduction and their effect of breaking reproduction “into discrete stages: egg production, fertilization, implantation, feeding, and birthing” (236). Her particular focus on the criminalization of maternal drug-use, however, reads reproductive technologies instrumentally as “the means for exercising power relations on the flesh of

the female body” (233). In picking up on Balsamo’s analysis, Squier emphasizes the divisibility engendered by new reproductive technologies and their confusion of inside/outside, part/whole, and human/animal distinctions (1999: 102, 111). While crucial, their focus on how these newly unstable body boundaries get “produce[d] and manage[d]” (102) diminishes the vibrancy of the vibrant matter that is their subject. In getting a handle on the circulations of knowledge and power through the biomedical body, it is easy to overlook the extra-discursive consequentiality of these procedures in their ongoing ecological intra-actions. That reproduction gets “managed,” in other words, is indicative of its unruly escape from that management. As biologist Lynn Margulis and essayist Dorion Sagan write, reproduction refers to the “process of making living copies” that also enables mutational transcription errors, while the genetic transfer that typifies *sexual* reproduction can likewise be achieved through such variegated means as “cosmic irradiation, acquisition of viruses or symbionts, or exposure to ambient chemicals” (19).

In the next section, I turn to a reading of the novel’s wary recognition of the dialectic between official state-sponsored reproductive futurism and its sur-official production of reproductive futures. Rather than tracing the map that Atwood provides for us, my reading picks up on another capacity of science fiction and science fiction criticism: the extrapolation of virtual potentialities. “If the past *persists* in the present,” Steven Shaviro explains, “then the future *insists* in the present.” In what follows, I look to those moments of untimely insistence that bear less on the present from which Atwood generates her extrapolation than on the novel’s wayward registration of a virtual future. My intent is less a good faith analysis of what Atwood is up to in *Handmaid’s Tale*, than a sussing out and sallying forth of odd moments and strange ellipses that grow laterally around the edges of the plot.

Redeemed by childbirth

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the moral imperative of reproductive futurism comes at the end of a cattle prod. In its dystopian present, America has become the young Republic of Gilead, a theocratic military dictatorship whose response to the crisis of fertility is to strip women of their employment and their property, and sort them according to their social roles: the wives of highly ranked men retained their positions, as did religiously and morally acceptable married women of lower ranked men. Proper unmarried lower caste women were divided into laboring Marthas—cooks and housekeepers for upper caste households—and the Aunts who train the Handmaids. It’s around the Handmaids and their fertility that the social structure turns. They are its constitutive exclusion, the

abjected groundwork around which the machinery of state labors. As Offred, the narrator, sourly remarks in connection to the state's brand on her ankle: "I am a national resource" (65). Offred's name, like that of all handmaids, derives from the family she serves and changes as she moves from house to house—three cycles for each high-ranked infertile family, three shots at producing the child that will redeem her and spare her from the label of Unwoman and a life in the colonies clearing toxic waste.

[15] Assigning names to the classes of women is just one example of the disciplinary mechanism by which the women of Gilead are made to disappear behind their social roles. [16] They are not allowed to read, their money has been replaced by government script correlating with a small number of shops, and their uniform, the same color and cut for every woman in her role, is issued to them. "Think of yourselves as seeds," Aunt Lydia tells Offred, "the future is in your hands" (47). It is not her hands, however, that bear the future:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits, but my body was lithe, single, solid, one with me.

Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed, around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. (73-74)

Handmaids are "ambulatory chalices," "two-legged wombs" (136). Offred's disappearance behind her womb, and the social relations that make it more real than she, exemplifies Berlant's notion of fetal motherhood, or the production of the heteroreproductive household through the enormous privilege given to the child as the index of the vitality of the nation. Given this, it is apparent why so many readers of the novel have treated the specter of infertility as a ruse. After all, for all the weight placed on childbirth and the dire consequences for Handmaids who do not succeed in becoming pregnant and birthing healthy children, the mechanisms by which such impregnation is supposed to happen are absurd. In light of the once-monthly Ceremony of copulation triangulated through the body of the infertile wife—with its restriction on female orgasm—and the legal sanctions against claiming that any man is infertile, the discipline taught to the Handmaids begins to look like exactly that: a disciplining technology. No abstaining from liquor or coffee, no amount of Kegel exercises, will make up for the exclusion of male-caused infertility—if the point is indeed to produce more children. [17]

Clearly, then, infertility serves to naturalize patriarchy. Not for nothing does the book underscore that “gender treachery” (43) is as much a capital crime as religious deviance and a history of providing abortions. Since Handmaids only escape punishment for these crimes by virtue of their fertility, their failure to produce life is tantamount to their death. As Latimer writes, Atwood offers “a picture of what the world would look like if a woman’s only reproductive ‘choice’ is pregnancy or death” (2009 213). In a different sense, however, infertility is indeed a ruse. For the novel also includes a third possibility that splits open the opposition of pregnancy and death and that links Handmaids and Unwomen through their shared encounter with reproductive *futures*: that is, the unbabies and the mutagens responsible for their deformities.

The chances are one in four. The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. (112)

The rhetoric of spatial permeability—the constitutive openness in the meeting of radiation and skin, the keen hospitality of fatty cells to chemicals—intersects with the temporal permeability of the “once,” signaling the bleed of other moments into the apparent solidity and permanence of the present. Although never foregrounded in the novel, the conjunction of toxic pollution, infertility, and mutation suggests that Gilead’s militarized reproductive futurism responds as much to the uncontainable liveliness of biological and ecological forces—including those extra-diegetic reproductive technologies whose absence the novel so conspicuously underscores—as to the threatening break up of hetero-patriarchy in pre-coup America.

In this sense, the differences between a state biopolitics of sexuality and population and a neoliberal biopolitics of subindividual capacities and algorithmic databases appear as differing strategies for negotiating and organizing what Hannah Arendt identifies as the key characteristic of modernity: the unnatural growth of the natural. It is a fact not often enough noted that the term “biopolitics” has its origin in Arendt’s *The Human Condition*. Unlike Foucault’s designation of life as the new entrant into the political, Arendt’s biopolitics foregrounds the disaggregation of the labors that sustain life from the domestic household and into industrial reproductions. Symmetrically, her concern is less the form of subjectivity engendered by this shift in production than it is the effect on the planet of the demand for ever greater efficiency in the creation of an ever expanding repertoire of goods and services. This increase in production is accompanied

by two contradictory demands: that extracted resources retain their animacy so that their vitality can be operationalized *and also* that they are not so active that they transform too quickly from value to waste. Industrial production relies on precisely timing the duration of a good's durability and therefore on the management of the metabolic process of production, consumption and decay. The ideal result of such control is a world in which things "manifest themselves and vanish" (134), but the reality is a "waste economy" (134) in which the vibrancy required of the production process is never rendered fully sterile no matter how many layers of lead separate out the spent uranium, to take a paramount example, from the surrounding bedrock.

"The force of life is fertility," Arendt notes. And yet the example of nuclear waste makes clear that biological reproduction is hardly the only source of liveliness. For this reason, queer theorist Mel Chen prefers the term "animacy," which she describes as designating the rich fields that inhere in the interstices of molar binaries like "life and death, positivity and negativity, impulse and substance" (4). In this context, reproductive futurism promises to consolidate the explosion of other-than-human liveliness under the figure of the child at the same time that it suggests an accelerating horizon of unrecuperable vitality. Through the figure of the shredder child, the mutant child, *The Handmaid's Tale* shows us the reproductive future behind the sacred child of reproductive futurism. Indeed the only child born in the space of the novel in a collective ritual of sympathetic identification so powerful it causes phantom pains and false milk in the bodies of the women who attend is an Unbaby. While this may seem less like liveliness than death and despair (a conjunction that resonates with the mandate "breed or die"), a lyric description of an egg, which directly precedes both Offred's explanation of Unbabies and the birth scene that brings another Unbaby into the world, gives us another combination of deathliness and liveliness. I quote from it in full:

The shell of the egg is smooth but also grained; small pebbles of calcium are defined by the sunlight, like craters on the moon. It's a barren landscape, yet perfect; it's the sort of desert the saints went into, so their minds would not be distracted by profusion. I think that this is what God must look like: an egg. The life of the moon may not be on the surface, but inside.

The egg is glowing now, as if it had an energy of its own. (110)

The egg hiding under a cozy the shape of a women's skirt, the egg Offred imagines incubating between her breasts, the egg that reminds her of the moon but is also the

shape of God, is inescapably the fertilized egg of Handmaidenly ambitions. As she notes, “This is how I am expected to react. If I have an egg, what more can I want?” (111). And yet this egg, with its arid, barren landscape repelling all profusion, glows with its own energy—an extra-reproductive vitality whose liveliness like the “swarms of toxic molecules” alerts us to the profusion that surrounds us. As Offred reflects: “the desire to live attaches to the strangest objects” (111). In fact, her gaze insistently picks out these signs of liveliness, from the “worms, evidence of the fertility of the soil, caught by the sun, half dead; flexible and pink, like lips” (17) that she spies in the back garden to her hermaphroditic vision of the tulips “redder than ever, opening, no longer wine cups but chalices, thrusting themselves up” (45). For Offred, this profuse display of natural fecundity offers an alternative mode of conceptualizing futurity—all flesh is grass, as she acutely observes. In *Oryx and Crake*, it is exactly this life that is the target of techniques of control trained on the production of agricultural, biological and ecological liveliness.

The reproductive solution

In a *PMLA* article a year after the publication of *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood objected to the too-easy link to *Handmaid's Tale*. And indeed, the two novels are quite different. Most obviously, *Handmaid's Tale* is narrated by a woman and concerns women's lives under a regime not of their own creation. For this reason Gina Wisker, following Mary McCarthy, calls it a domestic dystopia: “A women's world, ironically policed by men” (McCarthy qtd in Wisker 90). *Oryx and Crake* by contrast is narrated by a man, Jimmy, a survivor of the apocalypse, and it recounts his life with his best friend Crake, the architect of the apocalypse. Where *The Handmaid's Tale* appears to have only two modes of commodity production—agricultural and military—*Oryx and Crake* is wholly given over to commodity innovation: electronics, entertainment, beauty products, fertility clinics, snack foods, vitamin production, coffee, and biomedical devices. Where *Handmaid's Tale* divides the population into a small number of acceptable social roles based on race, class, and gender, the future America of *Oryx and Crake* uses metrics like testing and genetic screens as its sorting mechanism. Like *Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* enforces those boundaries with barbed wire; but where the body exerting regulation in the world of *Handmaid's Tale* is the state and its abiding interest in the welfare of its citizen, the communities inside the fence in *Oryx and Crake* are owned by private multinational corporations. The state function appears only in its most privatized form—through the CorpSeCorps that contracts with corporate compounds to provide policing services. Tellingly, where the guards and the checkpoints in *Handmaid's Tale* kept women from leaving, the most serious boundary concerns in

Oryx and Crake have to do with the flow of nonhuman bodies—proprietary information, patented life forms, and engineered diseases.^[18]

In summary, then, the difference in social and economic organization between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* reflects the extra-diegetic cultural shift from a regulatory state, militarized in *The Handmaid's Tale*, to a neoliberal global order that has shucked off the carapace of nation entirely. This gives *Oryx and Crake* the structure of a double apocalypse: the pre-apocalyptic world is itself a near-future dystopia.^[19] As a teenaged Jimmy mockingly describes:

Everyone's parents moaned on about stuff like that. Remember when you could drive anywhere? Remember when everyone lived in the pleeblands? Remember when you could fly anywhere in the world, without fear? Remember hamburger chains, always real beef, remember hot-dog stands? Remember before New York was New New York? Remember when voting mattered? (63)

Jimmy is right to mock this litany, with its universalization of a narrow set of privileges and its misrecognition of the complicity of the fondly imagined past—precisely by way of jet planes and hot dog stands—in creating the neoliberal present. As this linking of past to present suggests, however, for all their differences, there is a fundamental condition shared by the worlds of *Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*: for as distant as the corporate compounds and necropolitical pleeblands feel from the garden-suburb totalitarianism of Gilead, both are expressions of what Arendt calls the social, or “the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm” (45). The concomitant “tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and private” (45) in the enormous attention to and investment in the stuff of survival promises ever-increasing well-being and instead produces ever-widening immiseration. It is in this sense that we might understand *Oryx and Crake's* most defining feature: its genocide. For perhaps the most acute difference between the two novels is the source animating anxiety about the human: infertility in *Handmaid's Tale*, overpopulation in *Oryx and Crake*.

It's a funny thing about that genocide. In “Arguing Against Ice Cream,” her review of environmentalist Bill McKibben's polemic *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, Atwood seems to concur with McKibben's assessment that while human genetic engineering might be fun, it's a form of fun we should deny ourselves. A similar sensibility informs her retelling of the Scrooge narrative in her *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, in which she poses the ghosts of Earth-day past, present and

future. Like her account of genomics, Atwood discusses debt as an appealing indulgence with a nasty down side. All this contributes to the critical consensus that *Oryx and Crake* privileges environmental innocence against the “god like power of science” (Hengen 140). On one side, the exciting choices available in designer babies (“The line forms to the right, and it’ll be a long one” [Atwood 2011 129]); on the other, the ill effects on our species and our environment of “pigging out” (130) on biotechnology. That utterly recognizable opposition, however, is not supported by the novel. Crake, the architect of the genocide, is just as much of a humanist as Jimmy-the-humanities-major, and far more of an environmentalist. “As a species we’re in deep trouble,” he tells Jimmy, by way of explanation for his Paradise transgenics program:

They’re afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we’re running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geo-political areas, hence the famines and the droughts; but very soon demand is going to exceed supply for everyone. (295)

His solution to this very McKibben-like set of concerns is to engineer a genocide and to replace humanity with a superior species. Explained to the company that supports his research as the “floor models” (305) for a designer genomics clinics, the Children of Crake have many of the features eager parents might wait in line to get: custom-designed beauty, immunity from microbes, UV-resistant skin. But, as Jimmy comments, they have a number of implausible traits as well. The Children of Crake are herbivorous, hard-wired against hierarchy and racism, and unlikely to have a carnivore’s attachment to land and conquest. Most important of all, their estrous cycles have been altered so that they can only reproduce when they are fertile. For Crake, sex is what’s most damaging about homo sapiens, or rather the combination of sex and imagination:

Men can imagine their own deaths, they can see them coming, and the mere thought of impending death acts like an aphrodisiac. A dog or rabbit doesn’t behave like that. Take birds—in a lean season they cut down on eggs, or they won’t mate at all. They put their energy into staying alive. (120)

Crake takes his moniker from an extinct bird that gave him his handle on the hacker-game *Extinctathon*. Many of the other players are environmental activists and many of those are members of the God’s Gardeners group whose off-the-grid collective survives the apocalypse and forms the main perspective in *Year of the Flood*, the next book in the trilogy. They instigate social change through acts of civil disobedience. Crake’s genocide merely takes it one step further. Indeed, for Crake this action is just a less

prolonged version of what would happen inevitably anyway as homo sapiens became one of many species in the great die-off. Crake styles himself immune to the relation between sex and the imagination of death that drives Jimmy's decisions. But, like their ostensible opposition as scientist and humanist, this too is wrong. On the contrary, Crake is the apotheosis of the link he draws between sex and death: his Paradise project is designed to be the last and most successful human eugenics program, leveraging the enormous curatorial power of commercial genomics in the service of reproductive futurism on a mass scale. It is precisely Crake's certainty in his own prognostication, his conviction that his imagination of death is empirical rather than emotional, that allows him to believe in the morality of his genocide.

But, as we learn, controlling the future is also the secret strategy employed by the compounds for assuring profits. Before Crake engineers the disaster that wipes out most of the human population, he makes a discovery. Crake's father is dead by the opening of the novel, apparently of suicide. Midway through the novel, Crake asks Jimmy a hypothetical question: what happens if you're a drug producer like HelthWyzer, but you've cured all the known diseases? He answers: you produce them instead.

Listen, this is brilliant. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills... they embed a virus inside a carrier bacterium, E. coli splice, doesn't get digested, bursts in the pylorus, and bingo! Random insertion... But once you've got a hostile bioform started in the plead population, the way people slosh around out there it more or less runs itself. (211)

It is this discovery for which Crake's father was killed, pushed off a highway overpass outside of the compound's walls, and it is the discovery of his discovery that leads Crake to his reproductive solution: the rapid production of human extinction through the vector of a contraceptive pill and our replacement with a retooled transgenic humanoid species that Crake calls his children. In this reading, what appears as an opposition between a self-indulgent commodity culture and an innocent biological and ecological inheritance on whose side the novel—>and we with it—are assumed to err is in fact a dialectical movement between reproductive futures and the reactionary reinstallation of reproductive futurism. And both are aptly described by the ascendancy of Arendtian biopolitics.

Thus, where *Handmaid's Tale* attempts to disguise the emergent conditions of reproductive futures in the armature of reproductive futurism, *Oryx and Crake* renders

reproductive futurism biological. As a young boy, in the world before the apocalypse, Jimmy lived at OrganInc, a multinational biopharmaceutical firm and suburban compound where his father worked before being recruited to HelthWyzer. At OrganInc, Jimmy's father made *sus multiorganifer* and his mother, before she quit to raise Jimmy, was responsible for defeating the infections and diseases that plagued them. In one of Jimmy's earliest memories, and one of the first he relates to the reader, he and his father attend a bonfire at the compound. They are burning animals, dead animals. Jimmy, who is five at the time, worries that the disinfectant poison they have to walk through will hurt the ducks painted on his boots, but his father assures him that the ducks aren't real and so won't be hurt. Jimmy's confusion is understandable. He is also anxious about the sheep and cows on the pile: "The animals are dead," his father tells him. "They were like steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on" (18). He's joking, but the language is still precise. *Sus multiorganifer*, the product Jimmy's father oversees at OrganInc, are transgenic animals that grow human organs for transplant. Colloquially known as Pigoons for their resemblance to their closest relative, each animal is reaped over and over again as a gene splice allows the organs to grow faster than the animal. It's "much cheaper than getting yourself cloned for spare parts," Jimmy's father quips, "or keeping a for-harvest child or two stashed away in some illegal baby orchard" (23).^[20]

This incident summarizes in miniature the relations that attend somatic capitalism, or what the novel elsewhere describes as AgriCouture—to exhort life, to summon its vitality and torture it to efficiency through careful control over its somatic capacities. This is a world of part objects, like the headless ChickieNobs, plant-like animals that grow bulbs of chicken breast meat on long, rooted stalks. One of a number of telling puns the novel employs, OrganInc encodes the current marketing craze for the organic while dismantling the salience of the organic/artificial distinction. More pointedly, by emphasizing through capitalization the INC of incorporation, Atwood's moniker highlights the property relationship at the heart of somatic capitalism.^[21] OrganInc and its competitor businesses are quite unabashed in their ambition to convert all of nature to patentable standing reserve for human consumption. Indeed, the question that tasks them isn't whether that will be accomplished but when. This is the lesson of the burning cows and sheep, or rather what motivates their conflagration: the attempt to contain an engineered disease. In a conversation Jimmy relates, a friend of his father's blames the animals' destruction on a rival company. "Drive the prices up," he opines. "Make a killing on their own stuff" (18). The invocation of killing here amplifies its already piquant ambivalence and reminds us that what we are witnessing is a scene of

slaughter, however salutatory its intended effects. And, since the desire to Make A Killing is by no means restricted to the hypothetical other company, the benignity of the motivation for this slaughter comes under serious doubt. In the final analysis, though, it's neither OrganInc's actions nor the deliberate dissemination of a new life-form that matters, but the failure of containment. "I thought our people had us tight as a drum," Jimmy's father complains.

Caught between the dual demands for control and for a reserve of vibrant potentiality, somatic capitalism breeds the conditions for its own catastrophe, as Crake—shining son of the compounds and the architect of the apocalypse—makes so emphatically clear. The virus cares not at all why it was created or whose research animals it infects; the pigeons, rakunks, and wolvogs bred in the exuberant early days of created species quickly run feral. And, though feral pigeons may be the paradigmatic emblem of somatic capitalism, it is the apocalypse itself—and its instrumentalization of life's spread—that takes up the position of the shredder child as the system's own constitutive exclusion.

I opened with the suggestion that I wanted to problematize a straightforwardly historical narrative about the transition from reproductive futurism to reproductive futures—and I hope I have shown how the two take each other as their warrant and their redemption. As the recent resurgence of laws concerning women's reproductive freedom attests, the logic of regulation based on reproductive futurism is entirely coherent with a system otherwise dominated by neoliberalism and somatic capitalism. Like Crake's Paradise, our current apprehension of liveliness takes the face of the child as its reproductive solution. But, as the post-apocalyptic pigeons remind us, alterations to the germ-line are not so easily contained. In the Crakers, we have begun to negotiate a space for reproductive futures without triggering the phobic and deadly impulse to reinstall reproductive futurism.

Postscript: change or die

On 20 November 2012, the International Green Awards recognized Charles, Prince of Wales for his lifetime contributions. In his prerecorded acceptance speech, Prince Charles warned that our collective refusal to acknowledge anthropogenic climate change will have dire consequences not only for the Earth but for humanity as a species. "It is therefore an act of suicide on a grand scale," he continued, "to ride roughshod over the checks and balances and flout nature's necessary limit as blatantly as we do." The UK's Independent summarized this position as: "Mankind Must Go Green

or Die.” Like Latimer’s “breed or die,” which it uncannily echoes, this phrase is haunted by its unstated third term: mutation. For species-suicide, as every after-the-end post-apocalypse tells us, is a fantasy of cleanliness formally symmetrical with the quest for origins. And it’s a fantasy we no longer credit. From the agricultural collapse of Paolo Bacigalupi’s *Windup Girl* to the boat called the Tomorrow in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men*, contemporary science fictions replace strategies of aversion with tactics of domestication.

I’d like to close this account of reproductive futures with a sex scene. The scene, from Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus*, coordinates several forms of life around and through the private bedroom of a hetero-reproductive couple. The couple in question, Charlie and Elizabeth, have just gotten confirmation of their theory that life on Earth evolved from the seeding of alien DNA. Starting from cave-paintings at archaeological digs on different continents, they traced the aliens to a distant moon, where they have found proof for their theory that homo sapiens were brought to Earth by a genetically-identical alien culture. And so they are celebrating with liquor and love-making. What the audience knows, however, is that this most protected of acts, spontaneous, private, married heterosex, is in fact a carefully manipulated vector for wholly other reproductions. Just prior, we watched as the android David spiked Charlie’s drink with a mutagenic virus. By the next morning, Charlie is visibly infected and Elizabeth—whose infertility the film carefully establishes—is pregnant with alien life.

This pattern is not limited to *Prometheus*. The same structure informs the Oughts reload of the 70s television series *Battlestar Galactica*, which constellates human and artificial life around population anxieties. The remnant human population, forced by nuclear war to abandon their home planet and pursued across space by genocidal Cylons, bans abortion and keeps running tabs on their population numbers. At the same time, the Cylons—replicants and so infertile by design—are hijacking human women as experimental subjects and surrogate carriers for their breeding ambitions. Ultimately, though, it is not through juridical control or biotechnological intervention that the two populations find their renaissance, but instead through trans-species sexual reproduction. Hera, the child born of a Cylon mother and human father, in the innocence of childhood, leads her people to their new home and becomes in the process both generatrix and messiah. From the filthy workshops of creation to the iconic family romance, the no-longer-human child steps into the role of savior in an alliance of reproductive futurism and synthetic biology whose basis of acceptability—that they look like us!—is so spectacularly denied in *Prometheus*’ monstrous birth scene. For the

child Elizabeth carries, like the shredder babies of *Handmaid's Tale*, gives the lie to the fantasy of lineal descent that animates reproductive futurism. The child emerges from her, but it is not like her. And in this sense, could there have been any other day for Elizabeth and Charlie's success than Christmas Eve, that most hetero-reproductive of holidays, or any other context for their mission than the desire by their corporate sponsor for new investment opportunities? They went looking for redemption in the origin, for a clean line of patrilineation, and what they found instead was the mess of the biological: complex system triggering complex system until everything teems with life.

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Footnotes (returns to text)

1. Laubenberg is quoted by Eric Nicholson in his *Dallas Observer* blog of **June 23, 2013** (http://blogs.dallasobserver.com/unfairpark/2013/06/after_another_all-night_fight.php).
2. By “neoliberalism,” I mean the move toward deregulation, privatization, and putatively free global markets that though ongoing since the 1970s reached a particularly fevered pitch after the 2008 credit crunch. For more on the meaning of the term and its domains of operation, see Harvey.
3. By “immunitary,” I mean the analogy of the body of the state with the biological body and the concomitant capacity to distinguish host from parasite, welcome guest from invading stranger. For an account of immunity as the central organizing logic of modernity, see Esposito.
4. I am indebted to Nicole Shukin’s sophisticated analysis of the relations encoded in the notion of stock in her *Animal Capital*, as well as Sarah Franklin’s wonderful *Dolly Mixtures*.
5. “The Century of the Child” was the title of an influential 1909 monograph by Ellen Key that advocated for the centrality of the child to a well-functioning society. On biopolitics: Foucault’s description of biopolitics unfolds in “Part Five” of *History of Sexuality*, but it is by no means the only one. For an excellent overview of the various and competing meanings of biopolitics, see Michael Dillon and Luis Labo-Guerrero’s essay “The Biopolitical Imaginary of Species-Being.”
6. I am aware of the extent to which I am un/naming queer theory here. That this is an argument for the queerness of nature—both in the sense that nature moves in nonlinear chains that belie the logic of heteroreproduction and in the sense that classical queer theory can be understood as an incisive deconstructive reading of the epistemic co-constitution of gender, sexuality and nature—emerges far more emphatically in the larger project from which this essay is derived.
7. In this connection, see Dorothy Roberts’ excoriating exposure of the structuring exploitation of women of color in reproductive services and of the differential treatment of and access to women’s reproductive health services for wealthy white woman and women of color. As Roberts makes clear, racial oppression merely changes form under conditions of neoliberalism.

8. Pro-natalism and reproductive futurism have very different objects and affective registers: tied as it is to abortion politics, pro-natalism appears angry and aggrieved and is directed toward women, while reproductive futurism is often expressed as a relation of hopeful delight around children. Despite these differences, I submit that pro-natalism takes part in the logic of reproductive futurism. Where reproductive futurism exhorts us to do the (reproductive) labor of futurity, pro-natalism generates that legal bonds that make such labor compulsory.
9. For a convincing reading of postmodernism in terms of this activation of subindividual capacities, or what he calls the “postbiological,” see Milburn 2005.
10. Not all of these are “reproductive” in the same sense. By putting them together under this rubric, I hope to underscore a) the extent to which the products of production processes have their own internal dynamism and b) the way that this dynamism exceeds the filial to include unexpected germinal horizons.
11. See Stockton 2009. For another examination of the strange temporality of the child, see my “Reproductive Futurism and Feminist Rhetoric.”
12. See in particular Petchesky 1987 and Stabile 1992.
13. It not only has its own Sparknotes manual, an indication of its tendency to be taught to secondary school students, but it also sports a place on the American Library Association’s list of 100 most banned novels.
14. With regard to *Handmaid’s Tale*, both “feminist” and “science fiction” are contentious terms. Atwood famously rejected science fiction in an interview about the book, proffering “speculative fiction” instead; since its publication in 1986, *Handmaid’s Tale* has elicited mixed reactions from feminist readers some of whom see its critique of difference feminism as swamping its denunciation of gender-based totalitarianism.
15. In an excursus on *Handmaid’s Tale* in the context of her reading of *Children of Men*, Sarah Trimble calls attention to the context implied by the presence of the colonies and the expulsion of all people of color —“the children of Ham” (83) in the world of Gilead—to those colonies. Trimble argues that this is evidence that the novel primarily encodes fears of the decline of the white race, an explanation also endorsed by Professor Pieixoto, the condescending historian whose lecture about the reconstructed narrative ends the novel.

16. As Sharon Rose Wilson explains, however, the name Offred offers a range of subversive connotations to astute readers. Most prominently, its encoding of the word “red” connects Offred both to the Red Cap fairy tale tradition and to the color’s connection to political dissent. Read slant, Offred resembles the word offered.
17. It is worth noting that the second half of the novel, which concerns an illicit romance between Offred and the household chauffeur Nick, also reveals a sexual underground. Offred is courted by the Commander and eventually taken to a nightclub where sex outside of the Ceremony takes place. This section extends Atwood’s critique of gendered relations of power around sex and sexuality.
18. Which is not to say that these checkpoints are not also fraught with the gendered dimensions of power that accompany surveillance. Jimmy’s mother, who eventually joins the resistance, rants about the disproportionate use of strip-search by the male guards on the women of the compound (51). In an allusion to Offred’s story, Jimmy’s mother’s accomplice is one of the guards. (60).
19. For Gerry Canavan, the novel “effectively destabilize[s] the affective coordinates of post-apocalyptic fiction, in which the post-apocalyptic landscape is a horror and the pre-apocalyptic landscape the longed-for object of nostalgia” (141).
20. This aspect of *Oryx and Crake* echoes in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go*, a connection that demands further attention than I can give it here.
21. It is worth noting that an important thematic is child sexual slavery. That these various forms of property relationship exist on a continuum—rather than occupying their usual polarities of legal/illegal—is one of the novel’s interventions. This comes to us through the character Oryx and, like the connection with Ishiguro, deserves further consideration than I can give it in this essay.



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