

# Towards an Ethics of the Unimaginable

Feminism, Literary Thinking, and the Question of 'Relating Differently'



Simone van Hulst

Student number: 3490599

RMA Thesis Gender & Ethnicity

Utrecht University

Supervisor: Dr. Kathrin Thiele

Second reader: Dr. Liesbeth Minnaard

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## Introduction

She was able to approach him hesitantly. Even viewed from only a couple of feet away, the tentacles looked like a smooth second skin. “Do you mind if...” She stopped and began again. “I mean...may I touch you?” (Butler 1987: 25)

From looking to touching what is other: this is a crucial moment in the first encounter between Lilith, the protagonist of Octavia Butler’s *Dawn* (1987) and Jdahya. The oankali are a new species introduced in the novel. Their exterior features are not anthropomorphic *per se* but do show significant similarities. Lilith focuses on these similarities in the first encounter, she seems keen to ‘translate’, or render familiar what is new to her. This means that she tries to relate to the new – the oankali- by comparing it, or – if you will - reducing it to what is familiar to her. Lilith does not ‘succeed’ in this, and by this I mean that she is not able to situate the otherness of Jdahya in a ‘category’ that is reassuring to her. She can only *classify* this other as ‘monstrous’, for it is so radically different from all that is familiar to her. It is precisely this uncompromising difference that makes Lilith so anxious that initially, all she desires is to be as far away from this stranger as she can. The specific passage I have chosen to introduce this thesis with indicates a shift: Lilith’s fear is slowly changing into a curiosity. This curiosity eventually stimulates Lilith to enter into a relation of proximity rather than remoteness. She *approximates* Jdahya in order to learn what ‘it’ is. What characterizes Lilith’s relating to the oankali is that, instead of merely *looking* at it – i.e. classifying it by means of its exteriority - she chooses to touch it. Touching is a first step into a different relating towards the other.

These first steps of Lilith are the starting point of this project. In the quoted passage the problematic nature of relating towards the new or the other is explicated. The anxiety is an effect of the absence of recognition, preventing Lilith from categorizing Jdahya ‘properly’. What I want to work towards in this thesis is a problematization of this kind of relating in terms of recognition and categorization in order to work towards a different mode of relating to what is new and other; a relating that is no longer appropriating or fixing of what it relates to but a relating is characterized by an ‘openness’ towards what is different. The turn to the notion of the unimaginable is a means by which I try to envision the kind of relating to the new and the other. What is unimaginable cannot be appropriated in familiar terms; we cannot explain or describe the unimaginable. As soon as we do, it turns into what is imaginable. This

is what inspires the different relating towards the new that is proposed in this thesis. In order to provoke a more open and generous approach towards difference, the main question this thesis concentrates on is how to envision a different relating towards the new by means of an ethics of the unimaginable.

I have chosen to divide this thesis into three chapters. In order to get a clear image of what is at stake in discussing a different relating towards the new in the light of the unimaginable, I will first turn to a contextualization and engagement with normative structures that *shape* our thinking about others, the new and the different. I will situate the central questions that structure this research in the context of feminist theory, Deleuzian philosophy and feminist science studies. In this part the urgency and more general relevance of the questions will be explicated. In the first chapter, I will depart from the feminist maxim ‘imagine the unimaginable’ and elaborate on the contexts in which this phrase is ‘used’, in order to clarify what it means to work with this notion.

After having discussed the (problematic) images of thought that structure the ideas about the new and *prescribe* the approach toward it, in the second chapter an alternative to this image of thought will be offered. Michel Foucault’s call to ‘think through fiction’ (Foucault 1987: 13) inspires the turn to literature as ‘alternative space of becoming’. This alternative space stirs a constant rewriting of hegemonic axes of ‘understanding’ in terms of grasping and appropriating in order to imagine a relating to the new that is less fixing, less determining, less controlling. A mode of ‘literary thinking’ is proposed to go beyond a normative and appropriating relating towards the new. I will work from the affirmation that literary thinking ‘accommodates’ the new and works with difference as productive force instead of continuous threat.

The third chapter then turns to literature itself and in particular to Octavia Butler’s science fiction novel *Dawn*. I read this novel as an expression of the problematic nature of relating differently towards the new. The continuous and painful confrontation with difference is a red thread throughout Lilith’s life and is a central issue in the novel. *Dawn* is not a mere illustration of the issues addressed in the first two chapters of this thesis. On the contrary, it has played a significant role in calling attention to the problematic nature of relating to the new, the other and difference. The third chapter explicates what and how *Dawn* addresses the central questions of this thesis. I will demonstrate how we can read the novel as an approximation of the unimaginable and how it, accordingly, demonstrates a different relating

towards the new or the other. The novel centers around the encounter with what is completely different and other. In my analysis, I have chosen specific moments or encounters that I think are important indications of the *process* of relating differently; they mark particular shifts and contrasts in Lilith's development.

In the novel there is a vast concentration on the senses. Not only the 'common senses' are addressed, but we are confronted with a *restructuring* of the sensorial economy in which vision is the primary signifier. In *Dawn* the status of vision is ambiguous. Because vision as most valued sensorial capacity is scrutinized in feminist theory as well, this will be a recurrent topic throughout this thesis. In the third chapter I will analyze in what way vision, initially, determines Lilith's mode of relating to what is 'other', 'new', or 'different'. The argument that vision is not the ultimate signifier in trying to relate differently to what is other is anticipated in the first chapter and explicated in the third chapter. Added to this, in the last chapter I will discuss the way in which the other is essential to the constitution of the 'self'. The notions of autopoiesis and copoiesis will be called forth in order to work towards a dynamic between self and other that is not founded on an 'inside and outside-structure' but more in terms of entanglement.

In this thesis a transdisciplinary method is attained. This means that the examples and theories to which I will refer are not bound to one or two disciplines in particular, but rather stem from a wide variety of discourses and disciplines such as feminist theory and philosophy, biology, science (studies), Deleuzian philosophy, psychoanalysis and literary studies. Transdisciplinarity as such carries the potential to subvert, according to Rosi Braidotti: "[It] means the crossing of disciplinary boundaries without concern for the vertical distinctions around which they have been organized" (Braidotti 2011: 66). Such transdisciplinary orientation resonates in the theories and scholars that will be discussed in my thesis. For example, in Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan's work we can no longer clearly distinguish the boundaries between biology, physics, philosophy and ethics. Likewise, Donna Haraway's writings cannot be categorized in terms of one or two disciplines, but she manages to incorporate a wide range of discourses and disciplines within her writing.

I will not use the unimaginable – that is the central term in this project - as a concept, an object or a space. In this sense, I mean that I will not 'theorize' the unimaginable. Instead, I will use this notion in an *exemplary* way. Together with Butler's novel *Dawn*, I want to work towards an envisioning of a different relating to the other and the new. Since the

unimaginable is only 'effective' as a kind of *horizon*, I will not concentrate on *what* or *where* it is. Rather, the notion is called forth strategically in order to stir another mode of thinking that is not aiming for control, immediate intelligibility and appropriation in terms of what is familiar. In other words, the unimaginable 'as such' will not be discussed or resolved; this would mean yielding to rendering it imaginable. The potential of this notion for me lies especially in the fact that we cannot grasp it without falling into the trap of making it into something that *is* imaginable. The way in which we relate to the notion of the unimaginable, in order to not let it dissolve into the imaginable, exemplifies and inspires a different relating to the other and the new. Throughout the three chapters, I call forth the unimaginable in order to move towards a mode of approximation rather than appropriation. This mode of relating, in terms of approximation is a means to engage with the new, the different or the other without suffocating them or rendering them familiar in terms of recognition.

This takes me to the notions of the new, difference and the other that I already mentioned a few times up to here. These three notions are referred to in a way that might puzzle the reader, for what distinguishes the new, from difference and both from the other? This complex question, that cannot be answered directly, has been the motivation to use these terms not interchangeably or arbitrarily but in constant exchange. I do not mean to conflate these terms and am aware that they are historically, culturally and philosophically charged in ways that cannot fully be covered in this thesis. However, I do argue that these three terms are inextricably connected to each other. What connects the new to the other is difference, a moment of *differing*. As we will see especially in *Dawn*, - the new is characterized by a fundamental difference with the familiar, embodied by the other (for example the oankali). This fundamental difference makes Lilith anxious towards this other simply because she cannot render 'it' familiar by means of recognition. The failure of recognition is a prominent theme in the novel, that will be addressed especially in relation to the Deleuzian and Irigarayan critique of the image of thought that determines relating to the new in terms of fear and mere deviation from what is familiar.

The gesture of proposing a *different* relating might suggest an insistent dissatisfaction with the status quo. Such dissatisfaction is, however, not to be understood as moralistic discontent, believing we could relate in a merely 'better' way to what is new. Instead, this project critically engages with the images of thought (in Deleuzian terms) that shape the approach towards the new, in order to rewrite them and offer alternatives to these modes of

thinking and relating. I am not aiming for a general discarding of status quo, common sense or normative terms and concepts such as 'truth', 'rationality' and 'control', but rather mean to rewrite them in order to move towards a different relating to the new, the other and difference.

# Chapter I: 'Imagine the unimaginable'

## Feminist theory and the question of relating *differently* to the new and the other.

“Trying to think the unthought is an enterprise of colossal difficulty and unpredictability” (Margaret Whitford, 1991)

“Imagination as both source of cognition and as the motor of political action” (Rosi Braidotti, 2011)

### Introduction

What is the connection between imagination, difference and relating to the other? And why should we take the feminist plea to ‘imagine the unimaginable’ as seriously? These questions serve as guiding threads in this first chapter. I will contextualize them by turning to feminist theory, feminist science studies and Deleuzian philosophy. What these three discourses share is their interest in formulating, providing or provoking a different kind of thinking that aims for change. Change is to be understood in the broadest sense of the word and in this project, particularly, in the light of a different relating to what is unknown or *unimaginable*. What I will argue throughout this chapter is that we need a different kind of relating to others, strangers or what is new. The kind of relating to the new in scientific discourse, to mention one example, is highly influenced by the urge to grasp, determine and control what is not familiar or ‘just’ different. If we compare this to feminist methodologies and ethics, the contrast that is most striking is that the approach towards the new, the different or the unknown is inviting and generous rather than appropriating or determining. The ethical relation towards the new and the different manifest in feminist theory is what has energized this project.

The notion of the unimaginable is not typical to feminist theory per se; it is not an exclusive notion but appears in a broad range of discourses, among which (popular) scientific discourse. In ‘everyday-discourse’, which I use to refer to the more vernacular use of the word, it is used in a rather random way. What the scientific and the vernacular discourse share is their arbitrary usage of the word ‘unimaginable’. It is a matter of speech that is not indicating something so obscure we cannot appropriate it through language. There is little



reference to ‘something’ that reaches beyond the limits of our thought. Instead, what is classified as ‘unimaginable’ usually is not that hard to imagine in itself. It mostly refers to the ‘unlikely’, the ‘hard to imagine’. This takes us to the crucial paradox that runs through this entire project: the unimaginable as such does *not* exist. It is not a concept; it has no meaning in itself, but only is significant when put to work in a dialogue. A risk of working with this notion is that as soon as we even start to ‘imagine what is unimaginable’, it changes into what is imaginable. Hence, the notion *as such* cannot and will not be discussed. Instead, I will propose to think *with* or *through* the term strategically. This means that I use the unimaginable in an exemplary way, as giving direction in thinking about what it means to relate differently towards the new.

In this chapter I will contextualize the term of the unimaginable and the question of relating differently towards the new. First, I will turn to a discussion of phallogocentrism and the way in which it determines and prescribes our modes of thinking and the axes that structure it. Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler will be referred to in this part. I will elaborate on these critiques on phallogocentric modes of thinking, by turning to scientific discourse and feminist science studies’ critique on this discourse. I will turn to Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway. The objective is to highlight how our thought and accordingly our relating to the world are influenced by scientific methodologies, aiming for control and appropriation rather than generosity and curiosity. In this part a general critique on western (phallogocentric) mode of thought – in which rationality, coherence and logic prevail – will be formulated by turning to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ‘diagnoses’ and alternative. After this I will dwell on potential alternatives to this phallogocentric, common sense method of thinking. The last part of this chapter elaborates on the subversive spaces of becoming, on an-other image of thought that privileges generosity towards the new. Rosi Braidotti and Bracha Ettinger will be the main inspirations for these alternative spaces and/or a different conception of relating to the new. In this part the ground will be prepared for the next chapter, in which a literary mode of thinking will be configured to accommodate a different way of thinking and relating alike.

## Phallogocentrism and (its) elsewhere(s)

“It is because everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think” (Gilles Deleuze, 1994)

We will start this discussion with the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985) Irigaray states that we should challenge philosophical discourse because it “sets forth the law for all others, inasmuch as it constitutes the discourse on discourse” (1985: 74). According to her, we should analyze how philosophy’s ‘position of mastery’ elicits a philosophical ‘logos’ that is founded on an economy of the same to which all others are appropriated. This leads to an elimination of the element of difference, as Irigaray formulates, “in systems that are self-representative of a ‘masculine subject’” (74). The concepts constructed by this mechanism are among others the ‘idea’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘absolute knowledge’. Irigaray wonders in what sense these terms have or can have a ‘feminine’ legacy. She proposes to perform an ‘interpretative rereading’ of these terms, which implies asking the question of “what the coherence of the discursive utterance conceals of the conditions under which it is produced, whatever it may say about these conditions in discourse” (75). This project is of a psychoanalytic nature because it emphasizes the workings of the unconscious in philosophy:

We need to listen (psycho)analytically to its procedures of repression, to the structuration of language that shores up its representations, separating the true from the false, the meaningful from the meaningless and so forth (...) This does not mean that we have to give ourselves over to some kind of symbolic, point-by-point interpretation of philosophers’ utterances. Moreover, even if we were to do so, we would still be leaving the mystery of ‘the origin’ intact. What is called for instead is an examination of the *operation of the ‘grammar’* of each figure of discourse, its syntactic laws or requirements, its imaginary configurations, its metaphoric networks, and also, of course, what it does not articulate at the level of utterance: *its silences*. (75)

This extensive quote questions philosophy’s self-evidence and hegemonic position. Searching for the feminine in philosophy does not mean we should construct a new theoretical framework, but asks for a ‘jamming of the theoretical machine itself’ (78). This enterprise is a very complex and even painful one. The route Irigaray suggests is that of ‘tactic mimicry’, in which subordination is replaced by affirmation. This is an important point: The methodology

Irigaray proposes is not one of denial or mere opposition but is deeply *relational*. We need to *engage* with the norm of the intelligible in order to disturb it. The fact that the feminine is always already within a masculine logic should not discourage one to abduct the conception of knowledge from the dominant logos. It poses the question of how this ‘away from the logos’ can be thought. This ‘elsewhere’ is feminine and thus potentially subversive. To state that ‘one is a woman’, Irigaray explains in *This Sex Which is Not One*, means to accommodate oneself in a category designed and consolidated by phallogocentric logic. Therefore, the ‘elsewhere’ she calls upon is not ‘properly’ (that is, according to phallogocentric norms and conventions) described and determined. It cannot be described on beforehand nor be positioned. We cannot set this elsewhere as ‘destination’ – because it cannot be located – but we can hover towards it from where we are in the prevalent order. The elsewhere thus functions more as a direction, a horizon than as a concrete destination we want to arrive *at*. Irigaray is very clear on the fact that we cannot easily escape from phallogocentrism, especially not under the flag of ‘being a woman’. She states

There is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism, *nor any possible way to situate oneself there, that would result from the simple fact of being a woman*. (...) If I was attempting to move back through the ‘masculine imaginary’, that is, our cultural imaginary, it is because that move imposed itself, both in order to demarcate the possible ‘outside’ of this imaginary and to allow me to situate myself with respect to it as a woman, implicated in it and at the same time exceeding its limits. (1985: 162: emphasis original)

This ‘elsewhere’ here does not serve escapist interests.<sup>1</sup> Instead, it asks for a moving back *through* the masculine imaginary. In order to move somewhere, Irigaray thus emphasizes the need to first retrace and rework past and present situations. Besides, *being* a woman is neither a position nor a tool with which one can either enter or exit the order of phallogocentrism. Being a woman as such is not sufficient in this context, it is about an active relating to the dominant order.

The value of Irigaray’s writings in the context of the project of the unimaginable lies in what Margaret Whitford in an introduction to Irigaray’s work formulates as: “what Irigaray

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<sup>1</sup> The connection to escapism will be elaborated on more thoroughly in the second and third chapter of this thesis.

makes it possible for us to think” (Whitford 1991: 4). She evokes the unthought in the context of phallogocentrism in which the feminine as such is unthinkable. The strength of Irigaray’s arguments does not lie in the conclusive answers she presents but in the way in which she tries to galvanize our thought, not only in trying to think sexual difference in the way she suggests but also of thought and knowledge in general. Obviously, Irigaray does not operate merely by herself in this feminist endeavor. Many feminist thinkers have engaged, and still do, with the question of sexual difference. This debate has an immense reach and evokes a large variety of approaches; their common ground is the necessity to think differently and to relate differently to the unthought and unknown or ‘the new’.

This unknown and the possibility of the new to evolve take me to Judith Butler’s work. In her work ‘opening up thought’ is an important move. In the 1990’ Preface to *Gender Trouble* she states that

the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. (Butler 1990: viii)

Butler’s strategic move is about the realization of possibilities. She does not formulate an imperative of what options are best, but makes the initial move of opening our thought to the ‘possible’. In Irigaray’s work a similar move is made: opening up thought to its outside without *determining* what this outside looks like. For Butler it is not about merely summarizing the options or possibilities we have in thinking about gender. Rather, she searches for “the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions” (viii). This foreclosing of the possible is among others detected in language, more specifically in grammar and style. According to Butler, these carry potential to subvert but we should be cautious to the fact that we cannot strategically choose and control our practice of style and grammar. It is not an arbitrary process in which the possible stretches out before us without restrictions. Rather, Butler describes how

Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language, where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself. As Drucilla Cornell, in the tradition of Adorno, reminds me: there is nothing radical about common sense. It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best

vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself. (xix)

Even though language possesses revolutionary powers, the risk of gliding back into common sense thought is not to be underestimated.<sup>2</sup> Language has a significant role in constituting the ‘thinkable’, and what is thinkable is, in Butler’s thought, connected to what is considered ‘normal’. Normalized language, normalizing language and naturalized knowledge following from this, are of high interest in Butler’s elaboration of gender trouble. She connects these to a problematization of the notion of ‘reality’. In her discussion of drag for example, she describes how our perception of what is the ‘reality of gender’ categorizes what is ‘*other* to that’ as unreal, false, illusory and play (1990: xxiii). According to Butler, we should engage critically with this determination of other as unreal or illusory. A critical analysis asks in the first place for a blurring of what counts as real and unreal. In other words, in order to engage with the question of sexual difference we should start with analyzing what the axes are that structure (common sense-) thought about it. For Butler, a reconfiguration of the notions of ‘real’ and ‘possible’ is necessary in this context. How does one decide what counts as real and what does not? The ‘real’ is situated in a phallogocentric, dualistic logic that privileges reason over imagination, order over chaos and certainty over ambiguity. It desires ultimate, unchangeable and universal truths. The invocation of prescriptive truths within phallogocentric logic implies that the feminine or the subject of woman is only imagined in phallogocentric – thus, normative – terms that restrain its possibilities and eliminates the productive and differentiating potential of thinking sexual difference. This kind of relationality is highly dualistic and does not allow any space for the different, or differentiating to evolve.

#### **‘Logic of discovery’ – science and difference.**

“The survival of productive difference in science requires that we put all claims for intellectual hegemony in their proper place – that we understand that such claims are, by their very nature, political rather than scientific” (Evelyn Fox Keller, 1985)

Before we move towards the alternative to this kind of relationality towards the different, it is necessary to engage with what constitutes it. In order to formulate a critique on this Western

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<sup>2</sup> Extensive and enlightening elaborations of the potential of language in a feminist context can be found in Julia Kristeva’s work *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984).

image of thought that eliminates difference rather than inviting it, I will turn to feminist science studies theories' on the construction of knowledge, which is essentially a critique on the relationary image between I and non-I, and I and the world. In this discourse, sexual difference is a productive and strategic means to assess what axes structure thought and what determines the relation between the familiar and the new. A general line of thought is that the discourse of science is a masculine discourse. Evelyn Fox Keller elaborates on this and argues that the gendered structure of science manifests in the division between mind and nature as respectively masculine and feminine, scientist and subject of science.

In one of her works *Reflections on Gender and Science* (1985) she discusses sexual intercourse as one way to metaphorize how in modern Western science the relation between subject and object of research is (hierarchically) structured. The object of research (nature or the feminine) is subjugated to the subject of research (mind or the masculine). Keller delineates how science, and in particular the question what knowledge is, have been permeated by a tension between immanence and transcendence.<sup>3</sup> With this she means that on the one hand the process of knowing is deeply rooted in the carnal, in the body, while on the other hand there is a prominent urge to elevate this process and transcend from the level of matter. Mind and matter in this sense are separate and relate hierarchically to one another. Keller's argument exists in undoing this hierarchical relation of mind (masculine) and matter (feminine) that exist in a dualist relation in which one is prevalent over the other.

In Sandra Harding's important work *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986) we find a similar problematization of the classical pillars of modern scientific discourse. She formulates a feminist critique on science, mainly concentrating on its dominant anthropocentrism and regressive rather than progressive character. The presupposed anthropocentrism presented as 'natural' and 'right' according to Harding is what needs to be contested. She makes a very strong statement about the pervasiveness and influence of scientific rationality in particular. The latter is determining not only in the discourse of science itself, but permeates our everyday life and our thought in general.<sup>4</sup> To deconstruct the

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<sup>3</sup>The notion of transcendence is also discussed in Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" (1988) that will be discussed later in detail. She states that the desire for transcendence manifests in the pursuing of objectivity. Haraway rewrites the term of objectivity, among others by calling forth of the question of responsibility that becomes obsolete when participating in knowledge production with transcendental interest.

<sup>4</sup>A similar claim is made in feminist physicist Renée Heller's essay "The Tale of the Universe for Others" (1996) in which she states that as feminists we should "take a discourse such as physics seriously, because in our

quasi-divine status of science is part of the project Harding and other feminists in the feminist science studies context are pursuing.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside Keller and Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway is highly influential in the field of feminist science studies. In her provocative essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988) she argues that science, objectivity and rationality are decisive of how we conceptualize ‘knowing’, ‘understanding’ and accordingly: our relation to the outside, our ideas on what it means to relate to the world. In “Situated Knowledges”, Haraway offers a disturbing yet illuminating analysis of scientific discourse and rhetoric. She delineates how scientific practice is informed by certain ethics and demonstrates what these ethical implications tell us about the question how to relate to the world and what happens in this relating.

One of the pressing issues she addresses is the way in which scientific rhetoric creates an image of the world as inert, waiting to be discovered. The view of the world as passively awaiting its destiny is contested by Haraway.<sup>6</sup> Instead, she claims we should acknowledge the world’s agency, in the production of knowledge. She states that

Accounts of a ‘real world’ do not then, depend on a logic of discovery but on a power charged social relation of conversation. The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder. The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read. The world is not raw material for humanization (Haraway 1988: 198).

The ‘power charged social relation of conversation’ is the model Haraway proposes as alternative in doing research. Especially in contrast to the ‘logic of discovery’, that presupposes the world ‘out there’ and the subject trying to grasp that world, Haraway’s rewriting is provocative. ‘Her’ alternative exists in thinking in terms of conversation and

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Western, post-capitalist, postmodern, cybernetic context, it not only rules our material world through household, computer and war technology but also influences our conception of the world (75).

<sup>5</sup> What I find particularly interesting is how Harding explains the fear that comes with scrutinizing scientific practices and rationality even in a feminist context. This fear according to her is caused by the fact that scientific rationality is an essential part of our thinking. She states that “the day-to-day world we live in is so permeated by scientific rationality as well as gender that to non-feminists and perhaps even some feminists, the very idea of a feminist critique of scientific rationality appears closer to blasphemy than to social-criticism-as-usual” (Harding 1986: 19).

<sup>6</sup> Besides, in analyzing scientific rhetoric she detects hostility towards the object of research can be traced. Haraway provokingly defines the scientific ‘games’ in terms of a ‘high-tech military field’, an ‘academic battlefield’ (185) in which every move is meant to either stay in the game, or win it.

reinvigorating ‘previously passive categories’ such as the world, but also the body. Scientific rhetoric suggests a methodology in which objects and subjects are presented as existing in advance of the production of knowledge. Haraway sheds light on how the actual objects of research come into being and connects this to the notion of boundary:

Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remains generative, productive of meanings and bodies (1988: 201).

Through this analysis the production of knowledge becomes an embodied *practice* that is not about merely ‘objectively’ describing what is there but implies an engagement in the production of this ‘object’. The relation to the object of inquiry, in other words, the relation towards the new is not about mastering or controlling, but about conversation and mutual interaction. Haraway makes an explicit call in her text for a science that does not serve ‘closure’, but that accentuates the “cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated” (1988: 196). The rational, for Haraway, is not understood in terms of clarity and distinctiveness but rather in terms of ‘splitting of sense’, causing a sensory confusion. Instead of recognition (by means of vision for example), the approach to the world is characterized by a generosity towards what is not recognized or cognized for that matter.<sup>7</sup>

The hegemony of rationality and reason as main condition in the production of knowledge is dismantled in feminist critiques of scientific discourse, particularly in favor of the imagination that becomes a vital ‘faculty’ in the generosity towards the unknown. The unknown is not to be mastered because of its threatening difference but should be invited instead by means of imagination.

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<sup>7</sup> There are several, suggestive examples of the kind of scientific practice Haraway envisions. An example of scientific work in which the axe of rationality is complemented with the axe of imagination is the interdisciplinary work *Dazzle Gradually: Reflections on the Nature of Nature* (2007) written by Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan. Instead of exorcizing imagination, they explicitly call upon this faculty in order to move beyond the borders of what is accepted as common knowledge. An example I would like to highlight here is their discussion of bacteria as essential and highly ingenious life-form, reforming the idea of bacteria as something we should want to get rid of as is proclaimed in contemporary media culture. Bacteria are crucial in thinking beyond the scope of the human. Margulis and Sagan succeed admirably in subverting the supremacy of the human in *Dazzle Gradually*, without (p)reserving their own superior position within the research by implementing ethics within their research. I will turn to their work in the third chapter.



In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in contemporary Feminist Theory* (2011), Rosi Braidotti posits that imagination could provide us with other ways of knowing and other ways of relating to the familiar and more importantly: the unfamiliar. In order to subvert or alter the prevalent ‘phallo-Eurocentric master code’ we need to move to difference instead of sameness and elicit other lines of flight than this master-code facilitates. In other words, to provoke change and a thought that is different and aims for difference. According to Braidotti’s central critique, advanced capitalism is causing the fetish for sameness and coherence and appropriates difference instead of granting it space to become. She calls for a search for ‘alternative spaces of becoming’ that accommodate a different mode of thinking that is not advocating free association with what-is-not-there-yet but instead asks for a deep engagement with the present in order to envision difference in the future and status quo.

### **Towards another image of thought**

To elaborate on the envisioning of difference in the future and status quo I turn to Gilles Deleuze at this point. Difference is a recurrent notion in Deleuzian theory. The specific difference he discusses cannot be conceived of in terms of the routes and structures of thought offered by a Western, modernist tradition. This tradition will be scrutinized in this part in order to prepare the ground for a different kind of thought and a different kind of relating to what is new, other, or different.

Difference is often subordinated to ‘identity’, ‘resemblance’, ‘opposition’ or ‘analogy’ Deleuze argues in *Difference and Repetition* (1994). Difference in itself we cannot think and this is due to the traditional ‘image of thought’ that is among others, as argued before in this chapter, structured by means of recognition. Recognition hinders thinking about difference: It reduces difference ‘in itself’ to sameness. The ‘task’ of thought is to release difference from this. According to Deleuze the image of thought that causes this reduction is a “dogmatic, orthodox or moral image” (1994: 167) that presupposes thought’s ‘natural’ inclination towards the ‘true’. The model of recognition is defined by Deleuze as “a harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object: the same object may be seen, touched, remembered, imagined or conceived” (169). This ‘harmonious’ exercise assumes a unity and equal dispersion of these faculties and accordingly a unity of the subject that ‘performs’ this exercise. Besides, the perpetual stability and stasis of the object is presumed. Deleuze argues that this mode of thinking underlies classical philosophy (Descartes and Kant for example)

and it should be contested in order to think (differently). Reconsidering the self-evidence of the ‘stability’ and fixation of the object, converges with the Harawayan analysis of the object being determined by boundaries set by the subject. The object that is approached can thus never be the same or even similar because the subject’s position and the ‘contribution of the faculties’ (Deleuze 1994: 169) constantly changes.

‘Common sense’ plays a determining role in Deleuzian thought; it “is the norm of identity from the point of view of the pure Self and the form of the unspecified object which corresponds to it”, and “contributes the form of the Same” (1994: 169). Common sense in this way prescribes a logic of recognition and similarity in relating towards the new that does not respect or generate difference but restrains it. For Deleuze the new is a highly generative term. He argues that the new

with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new (...) For the new – in other words, difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable *terra incognita*. (172, emphasis original)

The strategic conflation of the new and difference is highly significant because it guarantees that a relating towards the new is always already a relating to difference. The critique on recognition is connected to a critique on representation in general. For Deleuze, difference as ‘object of representation’ connects to identity, analogy, opposition and/or similitude; which makes it comparable to what is existent. Representation in this sense is “characterized by its inability to conceive of difference in itself” (174).

The encounter is a productive moment for Deleuze; it is the encounter “that forces us to think” (176). Contrary to recognition, this moment can only be sensed or perceived in its affect. The senses offer the productive alternative to recognition; what is sensed, truly sensed, is not recognized because it is not a matter of recalling what has been perceived before but is an intense encounter with the new. In the context of relating to the new in a manner that is not destined towards recognition but instead is generous towards difference we need to turn now to the notion of becoming.

‘Becoming’ is a central term in Deleuzian thought and problematizes the fact that in Western thought the emphasis is on ‘being’. This emphasis is connected to the notion of identity because it suggests that life is basically understood in terms of fixation (Colebrook

2002). One is *either this or that*; one's subjectivity is determined before relating to the world, as an *a priori* position. 'Becoming' is a means to release life and living from its (this) fixed nature and evokes instead to think in terms of openness and difference. To consider life in terms of becoming generates a radically different attitude towards what is new, different or other; especially because it does not presuppose given identities and considers the encounter as constitutive of 'subjectivity' rather than 'following' from it. The main implication of this is that the encounter with the other is vital and thus demands a different relating to the other and the new in terms of generosity towards change. The element of change is what connects Deleuzian philosophy to feminist theory; the force of becoming implements change in a philosophy of life and establishes a different relation to the other and another relation to difference.

In the next part I will work with becoming as fundamental means to move to another kind of relating to the new, in which imagination is a vital element. 'Where' and 'how' to think with the objective of change and becoming will be the main interest in the upcoming parts.<sup>8</sup>

### **Alternative feminist spaces of becoming**

The imagination is not utopian, but rather transformative and inspirational. It expresses an active commitment to the construction of social horizons of hope. Hope is a vote of confidence in the future. This brings me back to the emphasis I want to place on issues of figuration: political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems. (Rosi Braidotti, 2011)

The key feature I wish to elaborate on here is the non-utopian nature of imagination in the process of becoming. The reason for this is that it helps us to think through the implications of an ethics of the unimaginable in the light of these spaces. Braidotti proposes to think in terms of constructing horizons which is a very strong statement and asks for thinking not in terms of destination and arriving but of direction and becoming. What I mean by this is that the (nomadic) philosophy Braidotti envisions is characterized by movement and perpetual

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<sup>8</sup> In Kathrin Thiele's *The Thought of Becoming: Gilles Deleuze's Poetics of Life* (2008) a significant argument is formulated on the 'impossible' nature of becoming. She states that: "Becoming always remains in the state of a *problem to be solved*. 'To become!' speaks of an infinit(iv)e task, one that we will never fully accomplish, one that, therefore, we are utterly *incapable of* (191)". This is not to say that we should or cannot move towards becoming but is, in my opinion, a way to instate its perpetual inaccessibility. 'Becoming' works as a horizon, producing movement but guaranteeing, at the same time, a perpetual non-arrival.

transition and transposition. This anticipates the argument that ‘Utopia’ is in this context not entirely satisfactory: it is a location that can be (even though it might be unlikely) imagined on beforehand or even arrived at.

The notion of utopia is a rather ambivalent term; we cannot define it conceptually because it changes shape when put into different contexts. This is a positive virtue of utopia; it is a lens we can take on, more than it is a fixed concept. Utopia has in common with the unimaginable that it comes to matter as soon as it is put into dialogue with something else – whether this be a concept, a discipline, a subject-position. Utopia is very often called forth in feminist theory, but there are very crucial differences between the usages of the term.

In the last quote by Braidotti the productivity of utopia is contested. When she states that “the imagination is not utopian, but rather transformative and inspirational”, her tone is not affirmative towards the notion of utopia. In Irigaray’s thought, a negative side of utopianism would be the projection of ourselves and the status quo into the future, which would be the ultimate stagnation of change. The future would contain merely replicas or variations from the present, while the interest served in feminist theory is, on the contrary, to call for(th) difference and to think differently. The future as a mere continuation of the present in terms of sameness is not desirable when aiming for change. This is adequately and sophisticatedly formulated by Irigaray:

In this question, I hear a desire to anticipate and codify the future, rather than to work here and now to construct it. To concern oneself in the present about the future certainly does not consist in programming it in advance but in trying to bring it into existence... Your remarks seem to assume that the future will be no more than the past. (Jardine & Menke 1991: 14)<sup>9</sup>

Thinking differently and imagining change is thus not a matter of a mere projection of the present into the future. In ‘bringing the future into existence’, there is the risk to think only in terms a continuation of the familiar, instead of opening it up towards the new. Alternative spaces of becoming and difference are thus not utopian *per se* because the present and status quo are points of departure that need to be thought through. This thinking-through of the

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<sup>9</sup>This is an answer she gives when asked for her ideas on the future in an interview with Alice Jardine and Anne Menke. This interview is published in Alice Jardine and Anne Menke’s edited volume *Shifting Scenes: Interviews on Women, Writing and Politics in Post ’68 France*, published in 1991.

present is non-utopian because it does not accept romanticism or mere flight from the present.<sup>10</sup> This romanticism results in a flight from the present, discarding any engagement with it accordingly. ‘Imagining the unimaginable’, is an endeavor that is radically non-romanticizing and non-utopian because with it we try to move beyond what is thinkable and imaginable and therefore need to alter the common frame of reference. Irigaray’s imagining of the unimaginable is expressed by her “aim for a state ‘beyond [sexual] difference’ without rearticulating our present organization of male and female” (Whitford 1991: 22). The way in which this ‘beyond’ can be thought is by imagining a different symbolic that provides a different relating between familiar and non-familiar altogether.

This different symbolic envisioned by feminist theory is not programmed or determined on beforehand but becomes a versatile thought-strategy in which other axes than sterile logic, rationality and coherence are privileged. One of these axes is the imagination. Imagination has an ambiguous status in Western thought. It is not seen as ‘reliable’ source of knowledge because it diffuses and confuses and does not ‘respect’ the (phallogocentric) dogmas of coherence, linearity and rationality as constitutive in the process of knowledge production.

In general, imagination is abandoned to the realm of literature, serving the creative process, and neglected in production of (scientific) knowledge. The aim for ‘genuine’ objectivity is what motivates this separation of knowledge and imagination. Irigaray and many feminist thinkers with her argue that we cannot and should not want to maintain this rigid division. She states that knowledge is permanently imprinted by imagination. In her critique on rationality as primary axe in the production of knowledge, she emphasizes that it serves the principles of non-contradiction and binarism.<sup>11</sup> These demands imply the abandoning of ambiguity, plurality and obscurity in favor of clarity and coherence. It means that the new or the unknown is not welcomed in terms of its difference with the familiar but instead is appropriated in such a way that it *does* match these conditions and thus erases difference.

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<sup>10</sup>Whitford’s work on Irigaray deals with the problematic nature of the term utopia. The main tension she detects in this context is that “between the critique of an unsatisfactory present and the requirement, experienced as psychological or political, for some blueprint, however sketchy, of the future. The utopian visions to which this tension gives rise produce in turn a further tension – between two views of utopia, either a kind of political romanticism (harmony with nature, Elysian future) or else a view of the future ‘in process’, the struggles taking different forms, but never finally eliminated” (18).

<sup>11</sup>This is a general argument throughout her work but is explicated for example in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *Parler n’est jamais neutre* (1985).

Irigaray proposes a female symbolic in which these features are not erased but invited instead in order to establish a place for a new kind of thinking about thought, rationality and imagination.

To think in different terms, or to think in terms of difference in order to provide space for the new to become without being assimilated or appropriated is a project Elizabeth Grosz writes extensively on. In *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (2005) an admirable coupling of Irigaray and Deleuze is established. Grosz finds a significant parallel in their thinking about “difference as force, to the force of difference, to the forces of differentiation and the differentiation of forces” (2005: 172). Her account of this collaboration prepares for the extension and elaboration of (sexual) difference as provocative in thinking about the elsewhere of phallogocentrism and the different kind of relating these elsewhere enable. Grosz works with Irigaray’s *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993) and the specific feminist need to formulate a ‘becoming beyond the one’ (Grosz 2005: 174). She demonstrates in what way sexual difference is “entirely the order of the surprise, the encounter with the new” (176), since in Irigarayan thought sexual difference as such does not exist, *yet*. Therefore, to determine it at this stage would be, as we have seen in the first part of this chapter, to codify it on beforehand. Grosz’ account is enlightening in discussing how sexual difference is unimaginable; we should not try to grasp or imagine on beforehand because that will only restrain it. She is careful not to *classify* Irigaray’s idea of sexual difference since this would, - again - make it just a possible alteration of what already is there. The question of sexual difference is inextricably connected to the question of the future, a future in which difference is not conceived of as dualistic, but more in terms of a perpetual differentiating that is to evolve in a female symbolic.

The female symbolic as alternative space of becoming takes me to the work of psychoanalyst, artist and theoretician Bracha Ettinger, in which the potential of the female symbolic is affirmed and envisioned by means of notions such as matrixial trans-subjectivity, the matrixial borderspace and copoiesis. The turn to Ettinger’s work at this point is productive for it offers an alternative that is highly generative in the context of change and the celebration of difference that was discussed so far. In the first place her work is illuminative because it combines psychoanalysis, aesthetics and the arts in a manner that works towards a different (feminist) ethics of relating. Secondly, Ettinger is able to rewrite ‘woman’ without determining it merely in terms of ‘other’ to what is the norm, namely phallogocentrism. Her

writing is informed by psychoanalytic discourse, through which she tries to evoke an-other symbolic in which (sexual) difference is not evaded but invited. An important dimension of her work is that she reconsiders subjectivity not in terms of essentially autonomous individuality but in terms of necessary encounters. The kind of subjectivity she envisions is shaped (to a certain extent) by encounters with others, which implies she moves away from thinking of self and other in oppositional terms. Relating to others in this sense is a vital and ethical event. The 'sphere' in which this event evolves is a 'feminine' dimension, linked to what Ettinger defines as the 'matrixial borderspace'. 'In' this space 'woman' is thus drastically rewritten in order to call forth a way of relating to the other that is not oppositional or hierarchical but thought of in terms of 'co-emergence'. What this term implies is a move away from the urge to objectify what is other to oneself and to establish a dialectic relating in which the self is superior over the other. Ettinger argues for a relating to the other that *preserves* its specific subjectivity and objectivity. This preservation of the Other's integrity constitutes an ethics of relating that is highly significant in this context, for it constitutes a relating differently to what is other; difference in this way is not challenged but invited. The difference Ettinger works with is not to be thought of as 'multiplicity' but rather in terms of 'severality'. Ettinger makes a strategic move in which a 'countable' difference is avoided. In "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" (2006), she states that

The several is a specific configuration. Not 'one'. Not 'two' in symbiosis or intersubjective relations, not Oedipalizing 'three' and not 'collective consciousness'. (Ettinger 2006: 219).

Difference in this sense is thus not to be appropriated through calculation<sup>12</sup>; which would be a means to 'contain' it yet again. On the contrary, Ettinger proposes to think in terms of 'differentiating', in order to ensure the perpetual becoming of difference. Thinking in terms of 'counting' when dealing with difference is based on a specifically phallogocentric logic, in which as we have seen, the urge for appropriation in the process of gaining knowledge is prevalent. Knowing as such is reconceptualized by Ettinger. In a gesture that I consider to be highly feminist, subversive and converging with Irigarayan and Butlerian politics, Ettinger

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<sup>12</sup> This is a prevalent tendency in scientific discourse. The problematization of this kind of counting, or countable difference as general tendency provoked in scientific discourse is also discussed in Friedrich Nietzsche's exemplary work *Human, All Too Human* (1878): "Whenever we establish something scientifically, we are inevitably always reckoning with some incorrect quantities; but because these quantities are at least constant (as is, for example, our feeling of time and space), the results of science do acquire a perfect strictness and certainty in their relationship to each other" (26).

emphasizes other axes that structure the process of knowledge production and roots this process *in* the body. She coins the notion ‘metramorphosis’, that designates a potentiality for “reciprocal yet asymmetrical crossing of borderlines between I and non-I” (2006: 221), and blurs the rigid, sterile distinction between mind and body, reason and imagination.

The concept of metramorphosis calls for rethinking empathy, intuition, inspiration, telepathy and even initiation – this invisible unconscious trans-subjective aspect that is not yet recognized as a part of the psychoanalytic process. Initiation occurs when in a way similar to that by which my mind translates intensities, wavelengths, frequencies, vibrations and all kinds of resonance and signals arriving from my own ‘internal’ sources and perceptions into feelings, images and thoughts, my mind also con-cepts and reattunes itself to elaborate and translate similar waves that arise in the mind of the matrixial other into affective preconceptual knowledge, images and thoughts. (2006: 221)

Especially the last sentence of this quote is interesting in this context for it disturbs the idea of knowledge as purely consistent of sterile ‘thought’ and logical reasoning. Ettinger configures the idea of the mind as receptive and generative of the things we cannot ‘see’, such as intensities and vibrations. The mind as always already embodied founds the process of thinking *as* bodily process. What ‘counts’ as knowledge, in Ettinger’s view, goes beyond what we can ‘see’ and thus recognize (in a Deleuzian sense) as such. Other sensorial economies are addressed, which in itself stimulates a move beyond the phallogocentric privilege of specific senses, such as the eyes.<sup>13</sup> Besides, Ettinger states, the encounter with the other by borderlinking and the knowledge that is derived from it is not cognitive (222), but is instead “accessed by aesthetical and ethical joining-in-differentiating and working-through” (222). The phallogocentric conception of knowledge is thus rewritten. The space of the feminine, or the ‘Matrix’ that Ettinger introduces, does not relate to the phallogocentric order in terms of opposition. Rather, it functions as a ‘supplementary’. This supplementary logic serves as a means to avoid thinking in terms of sexual difference as ‘countable’ or potentially ‘adding up’, through which its specificity would dissolve. In this manner, it converges with the implications of the term ‘the several’ that was discussed earlier.

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<sup>13</sup> The ‘other’ sensorial economies will be elaborated on in the reading of *Dawn*. In the novel, there is a vast concentration on sense and the way in which the senses are addressed and valued.



In “Thinking the Feminine” (2004), Griselda Pollock elaborates extensively on Ettinger’s work, concentrating on aesthetic practice, the matrix and metramorphosis.<sup>14</sup> Pollock describes Ettinger’s project as proposing a ‘sexual other-difference’, with which we can think ‘subjectivity-as-encounter’ (2004: 6). This means that the encounter with the other is implied in the becoming of the self. The several as such is a mode of thinking that needs to be adopted when considering this kind of self-constitution, which demands a move away from dualistic thought, simply since there are no longer distinct, countable categories that can oppose one another. This asks for a different approach to what the common conception of the self as self-referential and self-reliant. In order to think through this, the axes of what ‘counts’ as knowledge have to be reconsidered. Ettinger writes on the condition of ‘com-passionate hospitality’ in the encounter with the other, in order to generate a subjectivity-as-encounter. This hospitality is intricately connected to, I would argue, a generosity or openness towards another kind of thinking and another kind of relating to what is other.

### **Hospitality towards the new and other: ‘the space of literature’**

To anticipate the next chapter of this project in which I will work with ‘literary thinking’ - as providing another mode of thinking that is indeed generous towards the new - a recapitulation of this chapter is fruitful. The critiques on the phallogocentric, western image of thought in which the notions of coherence, logic, resemblance and recognition prevail as formulated by feminist theorists in psychoanalytic and science studies-discourse and Deleuze (and Guattari) converge in their objective to envision the possibility of change in a very broad sense. Change is aimed for, both in the conception of the self, the conception of the other or the new and accordingly a chance in the relation between the self and the other. By turning to feminist and Deleuzian alternatives to this western image of thought, the urgency and vitality of this relation to the other and the new was emphasized and prioritized. Especially in the different constitution of the self, proposed among others in Ettinger’s work (subjectivity-as-encounter), the encounter with the other or the new is of crucial importance.

In this chapter the possible connections between imagination, difference and relating to the other have been explored. The implications of the feminist motto ‘imagine the unimaginable’ are both a move beyond the mode of recognition as main vehicle of relating

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<sup>14</sup> The full title of this article is “Thinking the Feminine: Aesthetic Practice as Introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the Concepts of Matrix and Metramorphosis”.

and an expression of the need to think beyond the general image of thought that is compelled in a tradition of western rationality. To think beyond this does not mean to discard it, but refers to the feminist gesture to think 'through' the discourse or tradition as proposed for example by Irigaray. We cannot escape the dominant (phallogocentric) order but should explore its outsides and elsewhere to formulate another kind of thought that provides a more open relating to difference instead of an appropriative one. In the next chapter, the move towards such an 'outside' or 'elsewhere' will be made. In order to imagine a different kind of relating towards the other and another relating towards difference we will move towards the space of literature, which, as I will argue, provides and provokes a different kind of thought altogether.

## Chapter II: ‘The Space of Literature’

### Towards a literary thinking

“There is no other truth than the creation of the New” (Gilles Deleuze, 1989)

“Where does ‘the new’ come from?” (Rosi Braidotti, 2011)

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will move to ‘the space of literature’, which in Maurice Blanchot’s words can create a new ‘reality’, open up the ‘field of possibility’ (Blanchot 1955). In this sense, this chapter literature is not called forth as merely another option for thinking differently and relating differently, but as converging with the desire for alternative spaces of becoming that was discussed in the previous chapter. Literature is not a means of mere enjoyment, entertainment or escapism but is a productive space that instead of offering an escape, provides a possibility to think through the status quo and from here offers an alternative. The Deleuzian and feminist question of relating differently towards the new, the other and difference is in this chapter enriched by Michel Foucault’s call to ‘think through fiction’ that was made in “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside” (1987). This ‘call’ will be regenerated and thoroughly thought through in this chapter. The affirmation that fiction can produce a productive space, inviting and provoking a different way of thinking and relating to the new will serve as a red thread. Thinking through fiction, or literary thinking as I will refer to it, provides a space for the new to become, without being reduced to what is familiar. The theories that will be discussed in this chapter have in common their conviction in the transformative powers of fiction. Resemblance to what-already-is is not what literary thinking adheres to. Within the context of feminism, literature is neither referred to as a means of mere enjoyment nor solely serving escapism. The feminist tradition of the *écriture féminine* is but one way in which literature has been embraced to not only describe, but *provoke* different realities. The ‘*écriture féminine*’ elaborated and demonstrated by Hélène Cixous and the writing *as woman* Luce Irigaray dedicated herself to are two foundational modes of thought that ascribe a fundamental role to the process of writing and thinking through fiction. In this tradition literature is affirmed as provoking the new and envisioning change and different futures.

The function of this second chapter is twofold: it demonstrates both how a literary mode of thinking can be traced with a specific interest in the unimaginable (as mode of thinking), which is its link with the previous chapter, and it prepares for a specific analysis of Octavia Butler's science fiction novel *Dawn* (1987) which will be performed in the third chapter. In the upcoming chapter I will anticipate the reading of *Dawn*, concentrating on the way in which the new is or can be called forth in literature and literary thinking. In discussing the literary mode of thinking that has its foundations in literary, philosophical and feminist traditions, some potential axes of analysis will be discerned. These axes will be put to work in the third and last chapter, which will be a synthesis of the first theoretical chapter and this more specialized, literary chapter.

The writings by Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot are elementary in combination with the feminist *écriture féminine* writers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. These theories on the place, space and function of literature function as point of departure in exploring what a literary thinking can entail, in the context of the unimaginable, how it can 'imagine the unimaginable' without falling into the trap of merely describing what is imaginable.

### **Towards a different conception of literature**

The *écriture féminine* calls for a different conception of writing and a changing awareness of its potential for change and difference. The sphere of literature has potential in avoiding and subverting what the female voice was restricted to in the masculine symbolic: silence. Cixous' writing on this subject constantly emphasizes the fact that we cannot and should not try to theorize *écriture féminine* excessively. We should always analyze this feminine practice for what it *does* (Blyth & Sellers, 2004). The *écriture féminine* expresses the need to move beyond 'masculine' writing that privileges the axes of coherence, linearity and logic, and aims to controlling one's 'object' as we have seen in the first chapter. Cixous emphasizes "the controlling devices of phallic/Symbolic discourse: 'syntax', 'explanation', 'interpretation' and 'localization'" (Blyth and Sellers 2004: 34). For both Cixous and Irigaray writing is about exploring. It is not aimed at grasping, appropriating or fixing, rather it is in itself an openness, providing difference instead of erasing it. As such, it is in writing that we can find alternative spaces of becoming. The way in which this alternative literary space relates to change is explicated by Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976):

Writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. (1976: 879, emphasis original)

In the *écriture féminine* the physicality and materiality of writing are addressed; writing on, with or through the body are central. In masculine or more traditional notions of writing the element of reason was highly privileged in order to serve the western image of thought as discussed in the first chapter. In the *écriture féminine* this is contested by a radical presence of the body but also by a different logic that subverts the dualist norm of reason. The logic Irigaray articulates moves away from reasoning in terms of the Same, resemblance and recognition and emphasizes the need to think beyond the hegemony of the One. Instead, an intense multiplicity is proposed, especially in one's writing. In *This sex which is not one* (1985) Irigaray argues that:

“She” is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious... not to mention her language (...) Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. (1985: 29)

‘Feminine’ writing in particular, expresses an intensification of difference and moreover a conviction of subjectivity-as-encounter as elaborated on by Ettinger. Besides, the ‘ready-made grids’ Irigaray calls forth converge with the Deleuzian criticism of ‘common sense’ as being founded on recognition and recalling of what-already-has-been. These criticisms are at the core of the argument of why in feminist theory the motto to ‘imagine the unimaginable’ is important. *Écriture féminine* tries to do this by means of writing against the grain of the phallogocentric order that is structured by an idea of language as functional, communicative and free of sensation.

Style is one of the means in which this transformational force of writing can be elicited. In Braidotti's *The Nomadic Subject* style is discussed in the context of the philosophical ‘nomadism’ she elaborates. For the nomadic subject style is a tool with which to

play the game of politics of location.<sup>15</sup> Style thus functions as an instrument that can be manipulated strategically. Braidotti focuses on the so called ‘collective-minded, apersonal mode’ of writing which is about “disengaging the sedentary nature of words, destabilizing common sensical meanings, deconstructing established forms of consciousness” (44). The ‘apersonal’ is a mode that destabilizes the fixed conception of identities, and does not support on the comfortable reliance on common sense.

Writing is not a way to confirm, preserve or reinforce the ‘reliable’ nature of words and language but becomes a means to dramatically disrupt it. The writing Braidotti refers to is not specified as either academic writing, or fiction. This is significant, for in the *écriture féminine* a mode of thought is appealed to that is not respecting these boundaries between disciplines or categories *per se*. It does not favor one style of writing over others but instead embodies a thorough merging, causing a cacophony of voices that can no longer be structured and appropriated alongside the axes of coherence, linearity and common sense logic. Literature is seen as potential space in which this experimental, dispersive writing that favors difference over sameness can be exercised. To call upon literature as a space in which difference is not shunned but accommodated is not a novelty. Not only in feminist theory but also in philosophy and literary studies many have written on the subversive potential of literature. We will now turn to some of these writings and analyze in what ways they address literature’s potential for change and subversion.

### **Foucault’s laughter: fiction and subversion**

In the literary tradition known as realism, language served merely to provide moments of meaning, it consisted in being a vehicle to transfer meaning without direct interference (Eagleton 1983). In itself it needed to be ‘absent’ and served only the transparent reflection of ‘reality’. The real was not inextricably interwoven with language and functioned as destination which could be reached through literature. This conception of literature and language as ‘transparent’ and serving the realm of the real was radically disturbed in

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<sup>15</sup> The ‘politics of location’ is a feminist strategy that is used to “critique dominant models of hegemony” (Braidotti 2011: 57). It was coined by Simone de Beauvoir (1953) and elaborated on by Adrienne Rich (1984), who “diversifies the foundational category of ‘experience’ and proposes to replace it with a more complex framework of analysis where diversity and multiple power locations play a central role” (Braidotti 2003). The understanding is that embodied accounts are transformative of our ideas of knowledge, ourselves and our relation to the world. The feminist political standpoint to be ‘accountable’ for the knowledge production guides this principle.

structuralism and post-structuralism. The real as destination of language, or literature for that matter, is abandoned in favor of a more 'autonomous' text that is generative without being subjugated to the real, or what counts as the real.

This 'real' that is worked towards in realism is the object of scrutiny in structuralist' and poststructuralist' theories. For example, Jacques Derrida's 'deconstruction' (Derrida 1976) disrupted the self-evident and normative nature of terms such as truth, reality, meaning and knowledge. The diffuse nature of meaning, truth and reality is addressed by many literary movements after and/or during post-structuralism. Instead of being reflexive or representing, the alternative conception of literature implies a dissolving of the self evidence of terms such as meaning and reality. In Deleuzian thought, these notions are to be freed from the hegemony of 'common sense' that prescribes and presupposes their inherent, fixed meaning. In order to move beyond this hegemony and work towards a conception of literature that distorts common sense I will now turn to Michel Foucault.

In *The Order of Things* (1970) Foucault writes that literature discloses "the living being of language" (1970: 48). Throughout the nineteenth century literature became independent, no longer subjugated to language in general "by finding its way back from the representative or signifying function of language to this raw being that had been forgotten since the sixteenth century (48)". This 'raw being' Foucault refers to is connected to an emancipatory movement away from signification as main end. The idea of literature as merely referring to something 'outside' of itself is rejected. Language and literature enter into a relation in terms of alliance, one is no longer valued over the other. Foucault writes on this interaction that

Through literature, the being of language shines once more on the frontiers of Western culture – and at its centre – for it is what has been most foreign to that culture since the sixteenth century; but it has also, since the same century, been at the very centre of what Western culture has overlain. This is why literature is appearing more and more as *that which must be thought*; but equally, and for the same reason, as that which can never, in any circumstance, be thought in accordance with a theory of signification. (49 emphasis: mine)

To 'think' literature is in Foucault's thought a move beyond a 'theory of signification'. This implies among others that literature is not something which' significance is self-evident or

obvious but instead demands an active engagement. Literature as potential mode of thought does not obey common sense interpretations of what thought is, but proposes a mode of thinking that is fundamentally different. This different mode of thinking connects to what in Deleuzian terms is a leap beyond recognition, causing a radically different way of relating to not only the new (which will be discussed later) but also to the seemingly familiar, that is diffused and confused in a manner that is highly provocative. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes his reaction to a story written by Luis Borges.<sup>16</sup> His reaction is intriguing:

This book [*The Order of Things* - SH] first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (xvi)

The shattering and breaking up of all that seemed familiar that related dualistically to what is other confuses Foucault, forcing him to reassemble and reconfigure his thought and even more radical: deconstruct the *planes* on which this thought is founded. The reason for Foucault's laughter converges with Cixous' affirmation of the potential of writing to be subversive. It can shatter cultural and social structures. The completely different system of thought generated by Borges' story, points us to the restrictions of thought; it thus demands an immediate and compelling reassessment of what structures this normative mode of thinking. This moment of instantaneous reconfiguration is a productive moment for the literary thinking envisioned in this chapter. For Foucault, this text demonstrates "what is impossible to think" (xvi) and does so by not only gathering unlikely terms but by taking it a step further and destroying the 'site' or the 'common ground' on which these unlikely gatherings are thought. The element of space is addressed here, for where else, asks Foucault, could the meeting of 'inappropriate things' be than in

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<sup>16</sup> Foucault does not refer to a specific work by Borges in his text. He only states that this passage "quotes a 'certain Chinese Encyclopedia'" (Foucault 1970: xvi). The work he refers to however is Borges' essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins", in which he discusses John Wilkins' 17<sup>th</sup> century invention of a 'universal language' in which "each word is defined by itself". Borges' text narrates about the human efforts to classify the Universe and was published in English in 1942. The Chinese Encyclopedia Foucault mentions is the encyclopedia 'Celestial Empire of benevolent Knowledge' described by Franz Kuhn, whom has translated many Chinese novels into German from 1920's to 1960's.



the non-place of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space (xviii).

An effect of this is the uneasiness that evokes laughter with Foucault; a laughter that made him aware of the disturbing quality of disorder, not only the disorder of the ‘incongruous’, the bizarre but moreover the disorder of multiplicity “in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry (xix)”.<sup>17</sup> This disorder undermines, disturbs and even shatters our conventional frames of reference by which we place and name things. The kind of thinking that provokes Foucault’s laughter and indicates also a more general distress about this disorder is profoundly literary, precisely because of this disturbance of the familiar. It addresses and scrutinizes the self evidence the hierarchical relation between same and other and accordingly demands another kind of relating than in terms of recognition. Instead, it elicits a generosity towards the new, or the unknown. In the next part we will turn towards this new, and more precisely towards Maurice Blanchot’s ideas on potential approaches towards the new.<sup>18</sup>

### **‘Keeping it open’**

In *The Space of Literature* (1955) Maurice Blanchot connects literature to the notion of the new. He turns to the ‘question’ as such and states that the relation between the question and the answer is not a hierarchical one. In contrast to phallogocentric and scientific appropriations of questions, in Blanchot’s view the answer should not suffocate the question, but rather sustain it “by keeping it open” (1955: 211). The question as such is important in this thesis since to close it down means dismissing the new. In order to generate an openness to the new, the question should not disappear in its answer(s). In this sense, the question as such serves its own end and is not a means to arrive somewhere else. The new takes on the same shape as the question; it does not ask for an appropriation in terms of the familiar (that

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<sup>17</sup>The notion of heterotopias is productive in this light because it provokes a space in which other modes of thinking are invited. In Foucault’s text “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias” (1967) he describes how this notion facilitates difference and safeguards a more generous dynamic between same and other, familiar and new. The heterotopia is characterized by its relationality to “all the space that remains” (8). This means that, opposite to the utopia, it does not cut itself off to provide a whole other non-existent place, but instead engages in a close affinity with what is familiar.

<sup>18</sup> In discussing Blanchot and Foucault, I have turned to *Foucault/Blanchot* (1987) that consists of two essays. “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside” is written by Foucault and deals with Blanchot’s thinking and writing. “Micheal Foucault as I Imagine Him” is a dedication to Foucault written by Blanchot. It is not coincidentally therefore that these two writers are discussed in alliance in this thesis.

is, by recognition) that dismisses its relevance and closes it down, but is allowed to exist (and become) as such. This is a means to establish a generative conception of the new and to unhinge it, as in the question-answer dynamic, from it being merely a means, instead of an end.

The 'new' in art, more specifically in the literary work, is situated in the different logic it constitutes. It does not obey the desire for stability in truths for example or the obedience of staying in familiar territories. It does not provide us with certainties, is not consolidating and does not grant us stability of ideas on which to found ourselves. What the literary work does, or how it thinks is radically different:

Just as every strong work abducts us from ourselves, from our accustomed strength, makes us weak and as if annihilated, so the work is not strong with respect to what it is. It has no power, it is impotent: not because it is simply the obverse of possibility's various forms, but rather because it designates a region where impossibility is no longer deprivation, but affirmation (1955: 223).

Blanchot sophisticatedly formulates the way in which literature works. For him, it creates a space in which a different logic is allowed to come into being: a logic in which impossibility is not seen as negative, as regression but is welcomed instead. This is a crucial point within this project: literature is a space in which we are stimulated to think differently about the new and the familiar. It connects to the idea of the new in the sense that it potentially disrupts standards and expectations and consequently can lead to change. Or, as Blanchot writes: "Never it [the work] is affirmed on the basis of familiar, present reality. It takes away what is most familiar to us (228)". Resemblance with the familiar is not what the literary work adheres to. Consequently, it stays 'new'; it calls forth the inaccessibility of the future. What to do with this inaccessibility at the present time? What can we do with this idea in this context? Blanchot hovers around these questions by stating that the literary work "is new 'now', it renews this 'now' which it seems to initiate, to render more immediate (229)". The dynamic between the literary work and the present does not consist in offering a future image or figuration. Instead, it is about a commitment and consequently a radical alteration of this now by means of the new. This now is not something situated far away in some indistinct future but is 'rendered more immediate' through the new. We can thus never access it as such, but are enabled to hover towards it. This effort consists in Blanchot's in "the approach of the unreachable (233)". Blanchot, but also Foucault and Irigaray offer grips with which to think

about this. These grips do not serve the norm of mastery of neither the literary work nor the ‘now’, the ‘new’ or the inaccessible future. On the contrary, as Blanchot formulates compellingly

The work of art is by no means mastered by mastery that it has to do no less with failure than with success that it is not a thing one can achieve by perseverance, that effort is not honored in it, even when it demands effort, but profoundly denatured. In the work man speaks, but the work gives voice in man to what does not speak: to the *unnamable*, the inhuman, to what is devoid of truth, bereft of justice, without rights. Here man does not recognize himself; he does not feel justified. No longer is he present, either as man for himself, or before God, or as a god before himself (232, emphasis mine).

What is most important about the realm of literature is that it provides a space in which notions such as the unnamed and the impossible are called forth without being subjugated or mastered yet again but rather demand an entirely different approach that is not dominated by a desire for definite truth, immediate access and comprehensibility. The new is not to be rendered familiar by means of recognition; the unnamed is not existent in order to be named; and the impossible is not called forth in order to be conflated with the possible. Instead, and we return here to Blanchot’s initial statements about the question, the new and the unnamed are to be consolidated in a space in which they need not to be ‘fulfilled’ or replaced by more distinct, definite ‘answers’ or solutions. In the next part, I will return again to Foucault and in particular the literary thinking he traces in Blanchot’s exemplary work.

### **Thinking through fiction**

By now, it seems obvious that the ways in which we are accustomed to think are subverted in the realm of literary thinking. There is a need for a different way of approaching literature. This need for a different approach, or different mode of thought is discussed by Foucault in his treatise on Blanchot’s work titled “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside” (1990). In this intriguing text Foucault works through Blanchot’s ideas on literature. Foucault discusses the relation between language and literature. He states that

Literature is not language approaching itself until it reaches the point of its fiery manifestation; it is rather language getting as far away from itself as possible. And if, in this setting “outside itself”, it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a

folding back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion. The “subject” of literature (what speaks in it and what it speaks about) is less language in its positivity than the void language takes as its space when it articulates itself in the nakedness of “I speak”. (Foucault 1990: 12)

What we can detect in Foucault’s statement is again a resistance to thinking in terms of ‘arriving’ at some ultimate destination. Whenever we approach language in its ‘own being’ it slips away and disperses.

Literature breaks open the space for language to be(come) without being fixed. In literature, language can dwell in its ungraspable nature. The “I speak” Foucault refers to is explained in relation to “I think”. The latter points to a certitude of the I uttering the statement, whereas “I speak” is loyal to a distancing, a dispersing, a fading away of this undisputed subject, and shows only the empty space that is left for/by this I. The notion of truth is made obsolete by this shift and this is, according to Foucault “the reason it is now so necessary to think through fiction (1990: 12, 13)”. In other words, now that we can no longer think a subject of speech that is indisputable, the idea(l) of truth fades and grants space for different modes of thinking to come into existence among which is the mode of ‘thinking through fiction’. What Foucault is after here is the possibility of detaching (a) thought from ‘subjectivity’ in the fixed sense. Thought is not to be *limited* by subjectivity. This is the kind of thought that moves beyond the boundaries of certainty and immediacy into something that Foucault calls ‘the thought from the outside’. This subverts the tendency to humanize the world, or to ‘interiorize’ it. What Foucault problematizes is the mode of thought that determines the limits and significance of the world. This mode ‘erases alienation’ (1990: 17). Here a connection to the diagnosis of western thought discussed in the first chapter of this thesis is fruitful, and in particular to the Deleuzian critique of the image of thought that was structured by axes of recognition and a discarding of difference in order to reproduce the image of the Same. Foucault’s proposition to ‘think through fiction’ is a strategic means to move beyond this image of thought.

Thinking through fiction is essentially a stretching of thought – beyond subjectivity, beyond interiority and beyond the human frame of reference. This exercise of thought is subversive because it explicitly distances itself from the urge to determine, define and set new limits to this ‘thought from the outside’. On the one hand, the strategy of this radically different mode of thought asks for imagination, an active disturbance of conventional thought. On the other hand it perpetually escapes determination in terms of projections or anticipations

on beforehand. This mode of thinking relates to Irigaray's 'warnings' not to project an image of the present into the future. We cannot yet imagine the future, without codifying or programming and thus restricting it. In literary thinking the move beyond codification resonates. In this context, what is considered 'impossible' on beforehand is far more interesting and provocative than what is considered possible or imaginable, something that will be discussed in the next part. According to Foucault, the virtue of fiction or the fictitious is the turn the impossible without rendering it possible. This means that fiction enables a relation of proximity to the impossible, or the unimaginable without reducing it to the possible or imaginable. Foucault states that

The fictitious is never in things or in people, but in the impossible verisimilitude of what lies between them: encounters, the proximity of what is most distant, the absolute dissimulation in our very midst. Therefore, fiction consists not in showing the invisible, but in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible (1990: 24).<sup>19</sup>

Foucault emphasizes how fiction does not disclose the invisible, which would mean a mere revealing of what is already present 'somewhere'. Rather, fiction tells us something about the intensity of the invisibility, it dwells in this invisibility without trying to explicate it or grasp it in familiar imagery. In this sense, it provides us with a means to move to the limitations of thought, its 'black holes' or the 'unthought of thought'.

The 'unthought of thought' is not a location or something one can arrive at. Instead, it is a mode of thinking that forces us to move beyond the familiar. It stretches thought. The openness towards this unthought implies an openness towards what is radically different and to what is radically new without restricting it to be a mere opposition to what is familiar. To adhere to the 'familiar' is not what fiction is about. The mode of fiction Foucault aims at is not a safeguarding of the boundaries of individual characters or objects but rather addresses

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<sup>19</sup> Foucault connects this to the way in which, in Blanchot's work, the notion of 'space' is addressed. In particular, he describes how "houses, hallways, doors, and rooms play in almost all of Blanchot's narratives: placeless places, beckoning thresholds, closed, forbidden spaces that are nevertheless exposed to the winds, hallways fanned by doors that open rooms for unbearable encounters and create gulfs between them across which voices cannot carry and that even muffle cries; corridors leading to more corridors where the night resounds, beyond sleep, with the smothered voices of those who speak, with the cough of the sick, with the wails of the dying, with the suspended breath of those who ceaselessly cease living; a long and narrow room, like a tunnel, in which approach and distance – the approach of forgetting, the distance of the wait – draw near to one another and unendingly move apart" (Foucault 1990: 24).

the relationary dimension that constantly shifts and cannot be pinned down. Calling forth ‘the absolute dissimulation in our midst’ prepares the road for the demonstration of the invisibility of the visible’s invisibility. A dissimulation refers to a concealment. However, to speak of an absolute dissimulation does not imply we can undo this and ‘reveal’ what is underneath or behind it. The dissimulation is not merely covering up. Instead, we can say it is showing, disclosing the limits of thought *without* attempting to install new boundaries and fixed shapes.<sup>20</sup>

### **Departing from the familiar...**

How can we make the move to the outside of thought in relation to ‘thinking through fiction’ productive? How does a literary thinking as proposed in this chapter connect to the questions asked in the first chapter? In other words, what does this mode of thought offer us in the light of relating differently towards the other? In this part, the argument will be developed that literary thinking stretches our thought and develops our thought alongside different axes in order to adopt a more open attitude towards the new and difference. In order to avoid the stigmatization of the new in terms of merely deviant from the known, the literary thinking that is envisioned in alliance with the *écriture féminine* moves away from dualistic thought and tries to think a relationality that is structured differently than in terms of the One or the Other as the only positions. In the tradition of feminist thinkers such as Ettinger, literary thinking privileges the ‘several’ and enables us to think outside of the categories in which the one is the norm and the other is ‘only’ deviant. Feminist theory affirms the potential of this other, but not just in its being the opposite of the familiar but in its *differing* force. This generative force and productivity of thinking through this other cannot be thought in terms that are ‘available’ now but can only be approximated by reconsidering the planes of thought altogether, as the text written by Borges provoked.

Literary thinking offers an ‘alternative spaces of becoming’ in which the new can be welcomed in a different relation than merely dualist. I will now (re-)turn to Deleuze’s writings on literature that echo this conviction.<sup>21</sup> For Deleuze, the literary work is not productive when

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<sup>20</sup> What is a red thread throughout Foucault’s thought on fiction and language is that the model of representation can never suffice for a thinking of the ‘outside’. As he states repeatedly, it is not about revealing hidden meanings that flow underneath discourses. Rather, we should look for other ways to relate to ideas, discourse and fiction that do not yield to the hegemony of meaning.

<sup>21</sup> For example in: *Essays: Critical and Clinical* (1993) and *Dialogues II* (1987)

it presents merely the familiar. On the contrary, it needs to present what is not known *yet*. A literary work should rather be an effort to move away from the familiar into the direction of the new. In Deleuze's *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (1989) he states that "there is no other truth than the creation of the New" (1989: 142). This creation of the new and the way in which literature relates to this is precisely a move away from the self-evident nature of the notion of truth. Deleuze's work is important in this context because he aims at rewriting and rethinking terms such as truth and meaning. A significant parallel between Deleuzian philosophy and feminist politics is the need for change. For both Deleuze and for example *écriture féminine*, literature is not to describe the familiar, but carries the potential to subvert the familiar and accommodates difference instead of sameness. Instead of the desire for recognition, a generosity towards what is not recognized prevails in (literary) thinking. This is again not a means to discard the familiar altogether, which would mean literary thinking is essentially escapist, but is a way to envision alternative spaces of becoming beyond it. Both Deleuze and the feminist writings I have discussed so far emphasize that escapism is not what literature or literary thinking is about. Literature does not provide a space in which we can escape from the familiar, or the present. In Deleuze's essay "The superiority of Anglo-American Literature" (1987) he refers to the writings by authors such as Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe and Jack Kerouac as examples of literary thinking that does not aim for escaping the status quo, but engaging with it:

In them everything is departure, becoming, passage, leap, daemon, relationship with the outside. They create a new Earth. (1987: 27)

The departure Deleuze is after is not a departure in which one's point of arrival *disappears* but rather a passage that connects and creates an intense dynamic between 'inside' and 'outside'. Achieving a 'clean break' by means of escaping through literature is not something we should pursue according to Deleuze. This is because clean breaks imply an irreversibility that is undesirable, "it makes the past cease to exist" (1987: 29). In leaving the past behind we reconstitute, without alterations, the things we departed from and thus reinstate the familiar, or common sense. Deleuze illustrates this by discussing the beginnings of Anglo-American novels on the one hand and French novels on the other. He states that French novels' beginnings are those of the *tabula rasa* that indicate "the search for primary certainty as point of origins, always the point of anchor" (29). Anglo-American beginnings, on the contrary, are always in the middle; it is this middle Deleuze is most interested in. In the last chapter we will

see in what ways Octavia Butler's beginning shapes the lines of flight that are provoked throughout her narrative.

In the last chapter of this thesis I will demonstrate how Octavia Butler's science-fiction novel *Dawn* performs a literary thinking that does not discard the familiar altogether but departs from it towards the new.

Before we delve into the specific analysis of Butler's novel, I will concisely summarize what we take from this chapter to the next one. Foucault and Blanchot argue that the space of literature is connected to the outside of thought as that which we cannot arrive at in itself but can only be approached. The unthinkable, the unnamable, the impossible and the unimaginable have in common the way in which they have been restrained and determined by dualist ties to respectively the thinkable, the namable, the possible and the imaginable. What literary thinking manifests, is a space in which these former notions can exist without being subjugated to their dualist 'other'. In this line of thought, literary thinking is a move towards the new; it accommodates it without restricting it. The 'real' or the familiar is no longer the destination of the literary, as we have seen in the tradition of realism. The diffusion and confusion of the notions of truth and meaning establish a different kind of knowing that can be approximated by thinking through fiction. What is important here is that the axes or pillars on which the idea of knowledge is seated dramatically change. What cannot be overemphasized though is the fact that literary thinking is not an escapist move. Literary thinking is not 'safe' or consolidating. It asks for an intense engaging with one's point of departure. The value of thought does not reside in terms of resemblance or similitude with what the 'status quo'. Thought starts to matter as soon as it becomes departure, which is among others instigated by literature and a literary mode of thinking.



## Chapter III

### *Dawn: Difference ‘in action’*

“In difference is the irretrievable loss of the illusion of the one” (Donna Haraway, 1991)

“Could anyone who had lived through the war forget it? A handful of people tried to commit humanicide” (Octavia Butler, 1987)

#### **Introduction**

The unforgettable war that is referred to in Octavia Butler’s novel *Dawn* is the point of departure of this third and last chapter of the thesis. In the novel, the readers ‘awaken’ together with the protagonist Lilith Iyapo in a world that is not familiar, or does not seem to be.<sup>22</sup> We come to know this world via the explanations of one of the ‘extraterrestrials’ (later known as ‘oankali’) by name of Jdahya. Via this figure we learn how the humans have started a war on earth that almost led to total destruction of humankind. The novel was published in the 1980’s (in 1987 to be specific). In this era, the question of total extinction of the human race, or ‘humanicide’ was not a novelty. The ‘war’ that is recalled in *Dawn* is a reference to the Cold War that evoked the question of total extinction to arise in the eighties. Nuclear threat embodied the greatest threat to the survival of the human race. In the first chapter of *Dawn* we learn more about this war which Lilith, apparently, has survived. She tries to get more answers on how exactly she has survived, who her captors are and most importantly: why they have saved her. The extraterrestrials have saved a number of humans and intend to restore earth in order to send them back. The question why these extraterrestrials have chosen to do this, often posed by Lilith, is not answered right away. The answers to it need to be assembled by the reader as well as Lilith, bit by bit throughout the novel.

*Dawn* is part of the trilogy *Lilith’s Brood* (1989) written by Octavia Estelle Butler.<sup>23</sup> It consists of three parts, respectively titled “Dawn”, “Adulthood Rites” and “Imago”. These parts constitute the inauguration in a world in which (what we know as) is no longer the self-

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<sup>22</sup> The name ‘Lilith’ is a reference to the rejected wife of Adam.

<sup>23</sup> In my reading I will focus only on the first part of the trilogy, which was published as *Dawn* separately in 1987.

evident, authoritative species. Butler (1947- 2006) was an American writer of science fiction, who besides *Lilith's Brood* has written several other internationally successful novels such as *Kindred* (1979) and *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Throughout her work we can find parallel themes such as slavery, religion, time-travel and post-war or post-apocalyptic states of civilization. *Lilith's Brood* was formerly titled 'Xenogenesis', which refers in biological discourse to the generation of offspring that is completely deviant to the former generation and the parent(s).<sup>24</sup> The insistence on a different reproduction, or reproduction in difference, of this title is suggestive in the context of this project because it provides an alternative to recalling the image of the One/the Same.<sup>25</sup> This is one of the main reasons for concentrating on *Dawn* in this final chapter. I will argue throughout this chapter that the novel addresses the question of how to relate differently to the new, the other and difference in an exemplary way.

Butler's works are very rich and cover a wide range of issues that have been taken up by academics. Her works have inspired scholars from a wide range of disciplines. We can find many articles and essays dealing with Butler's novels in the context of political themes such as slavery, the posthuman, the Other, the Cyborg and genetic manipulation. These publications are written in the discourses of literary studies, biology, sociology, philosophy and feminist studies. Cathy Pepper and Joan Slonczewski are but a few names of scholars that have published their findings on Butler's work (1995, 2000). Donna Haraway has also written extensively on Butler's work (1989, 1991). The writings by Cathy Pepper and Donna Haraway are especially interesting because they concentrate on similar issues as I have done so far in this thesis. Haraway addresses the potential of Butler's works to envision other futures, in which another kind of ethical relating to the world and non-human species is developed. Her interest lies mainly in Butler's rewriting of the hierarchy of the species. Besides, she emphasizes the way in which the science fiction novels rethink what terms such as 'knowledge' and 'love' can mean. Pepper concentrates on the insistent biblical references in Butler's work and discusses how the *Xenogenesis* trilogy can be read as a rewriting of our

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<sup>24</sup> The reason why the title was changed from 'Xenogenesis' into 'Lilith's Brood' in 2000 by Warner books is unclear.

<sup>25</sup> In essay on Butler's *Xenogenesis* written by Cathy Pepper (1995) a reference is made to the etymology of this word. She writes that 'xeno' comes from the Greek word 'xenos' that means significantly means both guest or friend and alien or stranger. Especially in *Dawn* the tension between friend/stranger is a consequent struggle for Lilith in getting used to the oankali and ooloi alike. In the other parts of *Lilith's Brood*, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago* the question whether the other or the different is friend or foe is persistent in the encounters between the different species: human/oankali-constructs, humans, ooloi etc.

western origin story (1995). Both writers thus focus on the rewriting and rethinking impulses of Butler's work and ascribe a crucial role to fiction, and science fiction in particular in the feminist endeavor to think differently and imagine different futures. My reading of *Dawn* echoes this potential of literary thinking in the project of rewriting and rethinking what it means to relate differently to the new and the other.

*Dawn* starts *in medias res*, in the middle of things. The function of this point of departure reminds of what Deleuze is critical of in his discussion of French literature, which' beginnings are those of the tabula rasa and embody "the search for primary certainty as point of origins, always the point of anchor" (Deleuze 1987: 29). This reassuring point of anchor is absent in *Dawn*. It is not clear where Lilith is, what her situation is and who the other is that awaits her at first. This anticipates the fact that the encounter with the other, the new or the different cannot be prepared for as such but needs to be configured in due course. In the upcoming parts I will analyze how Lilith is confronted with difference, how she copes (or does not cope) with this difference and accordingly how this changes her way of relating towards the other. Difference is encountered not only in the relations among humans, but explicitly and continuously permeates every relation in the novel. Initially the focus lies on the problematic nature and effects of relating in difference, and relating to difference. Relating to what is different or new is characterized generally (in the novel) by 'awkwardness', difficulty and even fundamental anxiety. This anxiety is incited by a failure of recognition or rendering familiar of the new and the others that are encountered in the novel. *Dawn* demonstrates compellingly how the first encounters with others are cultivated by a fear of what is other or different. This fear, as I will analyze in this chapter, is caused by the threat of losing control, losing one's firm and reliable frame of reference and losing the idea of the individual or the self as autonomous. The ethical demand implies a deliberate move away from thinking about the other and the new merely in terms of its alarming differences. The alternative of a generosity towards difference, that has been referred to throughout this thesis, is demonstrated and personified in *Dawn*, among others by the figures of the oankali and the ooloi.

In the first part of the analysis I will focus on the novel itself, implementing theoretical discussions from the previous chapters. The specific axes that structure the first part of the analysis are in the first place the disturbance of the hierarchical organization of the senses and in the second place the confrontation and encounter with the other. These two axes are

intricately connected for the different approach of the sensorial capacities shapes the encounter with what is other. Likewise, the encounter with the other is decisive for the rewriting of the values-system ascribed to the senses.

In the second part I will situate the analysis within the general project of this thesis. This means I will explicate the value of *Dawn* within the feminist context of thinking differently and relating differently towards the new and the other. The argument that will be made in this last part is about *Dawn* and its exemplariness of an ethics of the unimaginable. In this part I will analyze how we can read *Dawn* as expressing desire for other futures; and how these desires fit into the feminist project of searching for alternatives that do not discard status quo but rather depart from it. In this sense, the undercurrent of this second part is how the unimaginable can be imagined in *Dawn*'s specific literary thinking. The elsewhere, or alternative imaginary the novel proposes is not a means to escape this status quo, it does not serve merely escapist' desires but implies instead, as we will see when we move to the posthuman, a critical reconfiguration of the image of thought that determines anthropocentrism, individualism and xenophobia.

The title of this last chapter of the thesis – 'difference in action' - is a means to stress the fact that relating differently towards difference, the new and the other is a process.<sup>26</sup> This process-orientation is connected to the conviction that the confrontation with difference is always already an ethical moment to which one needs to adjust continuously. The question of autonomy of the subject and accordingly the idea of individualism is challenged in the reading of *Dawn* in alliance and contrast with theoretical works from different discourses and disciplines, such as biology and psychoanalysis.

In *Dawn*, Lilith is our point of orientation. She structures the reader's experience of the different world that is encountered. Her development in terms of relating to the other

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<sup>26</sup>As title of this chapter I chose 'difference in action', which is a direct reference to Bruno Latour's work *Science in Action* (1987). I wanted to emphasize this reference because there is a parallel between Butler's literary work and Latour's science studies' work. Both make a strong statement in not taking for granted what *is* but turn towards the way in which it *becomes*. Science does not just 'happen' but is constructed and cannot be seen as distinct from society. Likewise, difference does not just happen, but needs to be constructed in relation to status quo. Besides, a shared focus is on the structure of inside(rs) and outside(rs) and the way in which what is other or new is welcomed or shunned. *Science in Action* and *Dawn* might form an odd looking couple but I argue they share an interest in criticizing normative structures of relating to what is new and the process of accepting this new or other.

serves as an important model in this analysis. In the novel this development is gradual and not immediate, which enables us to analyze the extent to which Lilith changes. It emphasizes the contrast and discerns especially the difference *within* Lilith and the extent to which her approach towards the other changes in the course of the novel; making Lilith the exemplary figure from which we start.

### **Rewriting the hierarchy of the senses**

“Could a being with sensory tentacles instead of eyes watch?” (Butler, 1987)

In the novel, there is a vast concentration on sense and the senses. Beside the senses Lilith is familiar with, hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, tasting, she is now confronted with other ways of ‘perceiving’. The common structure of the sensory system, with vision as the primary signifier, is radically disturbed. In this section I will argue that by disturbing this conventional ‘order’, *Dawn* performs a rewriting of the hierarchy of the senses. The senses are not only used differently but also have a different organizational structure. Also, the way in which they are valued differs. For example, the oankali have a more sensible hearing faculty, we notice among others when Lilith is told that her heartbeat is so loud they can hear her approaching before she has even noticed them.

Another sensory faculty, scent, is highly valued in the oankali world. It is one of the most important ways with which to interact with others and the environment. Identification and recognition evolve through scent.<sup>27</sup> The contrast to Lilith’s sensory system is most striking when Lilith admits that the oankali to her have no odor at all. This lack of scent is a crucial indication of difference that distinguishes the oankali way of relating to the world from Lilith’s or the ‘human’ way of relating that seems inadequate when contrasted with the sensorial sensitivity of the oankali.

The novel incites a general diffusion of the senses we value most. This diffusion is caused by the extra sensual capacities the oankali possess. They are equipped with, what Lilith calls, ‘tentacles’ that have a wide range of possibilities and embody another signpost of difference. These tentacles ‘replace’, according to the oankali, the capacity of the eyes. The oankali ‘see by touching’. Some of them do not even have what we call eyes, whereas some of them seem to have eyes but they turn out to be merely ‘cosmetic’.

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<sup>27</sup> Besides, the oankali have the ability to change scent strategically, when they go mating for example.

The restrictions and insufficiency of vision are delineated in *Dawn*, which adds to the expression of a strong critique of the way in which in Western thought knowledge and superiority are permeated by the hegemony of vision.<sup>28</sup> I will place this literary critique in the context of feminist science studies' general problematization of the hegemony of vision, which we encountered in the first chapter of this project.

Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" questions the primacy of vision in the process of understanding and the production of knowledge. Because the oankali *look like* 'seamonsters' Lilith feels repulsion towards them.<sup>29</sup> As soon as these visual differences are less dominant, by means of other ways of interaction, Lilith experiences that these encounters are not threatening. She learns that vision has in fact an embodied nature, as Haraway proposes in "Situated Knowledges". Vision in *Dawn* is not to "signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (1988: 188). Instead, Lilith is confronted with the necessity to be present *in* an embodied state; she cannot conquer what is unknown to her with merely vision. She is not to transcend her situatedness to adopt a gaze from nowhere and be 'safe' in a state of perpetual invincibility.<sup>30</sup> According to Haraway

The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity – honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy – to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power (188).

The distancing capacity of the eyes that is referred to is dismantled in *Dawn*, especially in the first encounter with an oankali. In the encounter with Jdahya, Lilith learns immediately that vision cannot help her to overcome her fear for 'him'. An alternative way in which Lilith tries to approach Jdahya is by touching. In trying to overcome her initial fear of the creature she asks it if she can touch it:

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<sup>28</sup> Braidotti addresses the primacy of vision as 'scopophilia', that is "a vision-centered approach to thought, knowledge and science" (Braidotti 2006: 204).

<sup>29</sup> This is another example of the way in which visual rendering occurs through recognition. Even though a 'sea monster' as such is not a common phenomena per se, to give something new this name or status implies an appropriation of it in a more or less 'familiar' shape or at least an existent category, in this case of the monster as essentially deviant.

<sup>30</sup> In the beginning of the novel, Lilith tends to feel intensely uncomfortable and wishes to be 'put back to sleep', or even to be killed to be freed of this state of uncertainty and anxiety that is due to the disability to relate 'properly' with the sensory economy she possesses.

She was able to approach him hesitantly. Even viewed from only a couple of feet away, the tentacles looked like a smooth second skin. “Do you mind if...” She stopped and began again. “I mean...may I touch you?”

“Yes”. It was easier to do than she had expected. His skin was cool and almost too smooth to be real flesh – smooth the way her fingernails were and perhaps as tough as a fingernail (25)

It is the first part of this quote that I chose to begin this thesis with. I have emphasized in the introduction to the project that this passage is specifically significant because it demonstrates in what way Lilith tries to overcome what is an intense fear of difference, by turning to bodily understanding and sensory knowledge. This embodied relating to the other is however still problematized or obstructed by Lilith’s urge to render familiar what is visually different. Throughout the story, we are confronted with the insufficiency of vision as primary sensory signifier. Vision is important in relating to what is different, especially since in *Dawn* visual differences seem to increase fear of what is other. The fear for what is new, different and other that permeates the entire novel is constituted by a lack of visual recognition. This is a remarkable contrast to oankali way of relating, that is not visually determined. The novel does not discard vision altogether but instead, it calls for a reconsideration of vision, a move away from vision as the hegemonic sensory capacity *per se* and a rethinking of the partial feature of seeing. This is a means to regain attention for the other senses and the way in which they produce knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

In *Dawn* an exceptional supplement to the ‘common’ sensory system is presented: the ability to intervene in the chemical organization of the body. The oankali and ooloi show an extreme sensitivity to chemical processes and stimulations of the nervous system. They are in constant nervous and chemical interaction with other oankali, ooloi, humans and also the environment.

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<sup>31</sup> What is interesting in this context is Haraway’s description of her growing awareness of the value of the other senses in an interspecies becoming. While walking her dogs, she starts “wondering how the world looks without a fovea and very few retinal cells for color vision, but with a huge neural processing and sensory areas for smells” (Haraway 1988: 190). In this way, she attributes to an inter-species relating which is a recurrent theme in her work but also in Butler’s *Dawn*. In Barbara Noske’s *Humans and other Animals: Beyond the Boundaries of Anthropology* (1989) we find a similar curiosity or fascination to the dog’s and other animals’ sensory capacities: “Not many people have seriously tried to imagine what it must be like to perceive and conceive the world in terms of ‘olfactory images’ (such as dogs must do) or ‘tactile images’ (as horses do to a large extent), or ‘acoustic pictures’ (as dolphins and whales must do) .. We humans are heavily biased towards the visual... But for a dog scenting is believing” (158).

Their environment, that they call a ‘ship’, is alive and is reacting constantly on the chemical stimuli it receives from its inhabitants.

The oankali have the possibility to relate to each other in an entirely different way than what Lilith considers to be ‘normal’. It is another way of relating, through senses humans do not (seem to) possess. ‘Controlled multisensory stimulation’ is the term used for the communication between oankali. ‘Control’ in this context does not converge with the urge for control by appropriation of the other as sketched in the first chapter of this thesis. Instead, in the oankali world control means an intense *awareness* of their situatedness, including their knowledge of our and their own nervous and chemical organizations. Control is a fundamental embodied awareness in which one’s capacities are strategically addressed.<sup>32</sup> This mode of relating is performed in Lilith’s perception “almost at the speed of thought” (107). She calls it “the closest thing to telepathy she would ever see practiced” (107). The way in which Lilith relates to the radically different, to the thing she cannot see, is in terms of resemblance and of proximity to what she does know.

In *Dawn*, the presumed capacities of bodies both stretched and altered. Lilith learns to intensify and extend the reach of her own ‘common’ senses but also is provided with new capacities that alter the structure of her body altogether. The notion of difference reaches beyond what we can see, beyond what we can perceive. In this way, *Dawn* causes an awareness of the fact that difference goes beyond vision and also beyond the skin. Difference is a productive, generative force, a point to which we will return in the last part of this chapter. The subversion of the hierarchy of the senses is a first step in scrutinizing the primary axes of relating to the other and the new. The difference the other embodies transcends vision. The awareness of this embodied difference and the resistance to appropriation in terms of the visual and the existent imaginaries frightens Lilith. This is due to the intricate connection between vision and control. In regard to the unimaginable, vision is less and less powerful. This is because the unimaginable escapes what can be imagined visually and is always inaccessible. The reason for turning to the senses and the way in which they are addressed in

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<sup>32</sup> This embodied control is taught to Lilith by Nikanj at some point in the novel. She will never possess all the oankali capacities but is changed to a large extent. She acquires more and more sensory capacities when she grows used to the oankali and when she advances in her ‘training’. As soon as her training is completed and she is to perform the task of awakening other humans in order to establish a group that is to return and survive on earth, Nikanj provides her with an extra possibility. She is given the power to communicate with walls in order to open and adapt them. This function is given to her via Nikanj’s intervention into her nervous and chemical system.



the novel is to demonstrate the need for a different sensorial awareness, in order to relate to what is not imaginable. Imagining has a strong connection to vision and is also restrained by it. The unimaginable is not sensitive to vision because it always escapes common shapes and familiar features. What is different cannot be grasped since it continuously escapes appropriation in terms of these familiar features. In the case of *Dawn*, the extent to which difference is mobilized is unimaginable to Lilith; she cannot relate to it in terms of recognition and has to turn to a different mode of relating, beyond categorization and classification towards approximation. Lilith is taught this non-grasping way of relating to what is different by the oankali and learns that being generous towards this difference is vital not only in surviving but also in adapting and transforming; she changes significantly in facing her other. We will turn to the figure of this other and the potentiality of the encounter for transformation in the next section.

### **‘Significant Others’**

“The unknown frightened her” (Butler, 1987)

In *Dawn* the encounter with what is other is a prominent, recurrent problematic. The choice to call this dynamic ‘problematic’ is a deliberate one: the novel specifically deals with the disturbance the encounter with an-other effects. To structure this analysis I will return to Bracha Ettinger’s theoretical work which provides us with crucial insights and points of departure in thinking about relating to the other. Besides, Donna Haraway’s ideas on interspecies encounters will be discussed. The point of departure of this part is the ‘Great Divide’ proposed by Bruno Latour and elaborated by Haraway in *When Species Meet* (2008), as “what counts as nature and as society, as nonhuman and as human” (2008: 9).<sup>33</sup> This divide causes for the non-human to automatically be stigmatized as ‘other’ and induce anxiety. In the upcoming parts I will concentrate on specific moments in which others (of many kinds) are encountered. I am particularly interested in those moments that stir a change and energize a development, for example in Lilith’s attitude towards the other. The emphasis is on relating differently to the other with all its differences as a process. The change in Lilith is gradual, it is a slow (and painful) reconfiguration of her attitude towards a figure like Jdahya. In this reconfiguration she cannot but scrutinize her own standards and anthropocentric worldview.

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<sup>33</sup> The great divide coined by Latour can be found in the volume *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005) that he coedited with Peter Weibel.

The first encounter with the oankali Jdahya is a significant moment in the novel. In the second chapter a voice that is described as “the usual, quiet, androgynous voice” (11) calls out for Lilith.<sup>34</sup> The stranger that is suddenly present in the same space asks her to look at ‘it’, which Lilith cannot do at first because of the light, which according to the creature will change as soon as Lilith is ready to be confronted with it. Jdahya anticipates the fact that Lilith’s fear of what she *sees* will determine her reaction and thus chooses to gradually expose to her. Lilith, at first, cannot make herself approach the one in the room with her.<sup>35</sup> She asks *who* the stranger is and it responds “And *what* am I?” (12). Jdahya could have given Lilith its name immediately, but instead chooses to ask her a question in return, a rhetorical move that reflects on Lilith’s urge to categorize this other in terms of its subjectivity and the category of species it ‘belongs’ to. In her descriptions of Jdahya Lilith focuses on difference, not in terms of productive, potential difference but only on the way in which it differs *from* her, from what is human and thus familiar to her. In the first instance, she concentrates on the other in terms of its deviation from what she considers ‘normal’, for example: she notices it has no nose and a gray skin. To determine in detail what constitutes the differences from what is familiar, safe and ‘humanlike’ is her first concern:

Lilith glanced at the humanoid body, wondering how humanlike it really was. “I don’t mean any offense,” she said, “but are you male or female?” “It’s wrong to assume that I must be a sex you’re familiar with,” it said, “but as it happens, I’m male.” Good. “It” could become “he” again. Less awkward. (13).

This is a moment of reflection on Lilith’s identification of ‘it’ by means of recognition. The question whether this ‘thing’ is either male or female is typical; it demonstrates the tenacious nature of the specifically human urge to categorize and guarantee a certain order and classification of the other. Lilith’s preoccupation with positioning this other in her own frame of reference prevents her from being curious towards its difference. After the first reassuring categorization (Jdahya yields to), Lilith detects something that she cannot classify in any way other than monstrous and thus threatening: in observing Jdahya’s features what she thought to

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<sup>34</sup> She has heard this voice before, which explains why Lilith calls it ‘usual’, she recognizes it. However, this time the voice comes from within the room, instead of outside of it.

<sup>35</sup> – which, she characterizes immediately as ‘him’.

be ‘just’ hair is actually not hair, it is moving.<sup>36</sup> Jdahya tells her that these are its sensory organs. These sensory organs, as discussed in the previous section, embody one of the most striking differences. As soon as Jdahya exposes these organs, Lilith’s fear grows to such an extent she cannot even look at him. The difference this other embodies causes Lilith’s inclination to avoid proximity with it. In Haraway’s *When Species Meet* (2008) this tendency is related to the need for power and control.

Outside the security checkpoint of bright reason, outside the apparatuses of reproduction of the sacred image of the same, these ‘others’ have a remarkable capacity to induce panic in the centers of power and self-certainty (2008: 10)

What characterizes ‘the other’ in Haraway’s thought is that it does not obey a category per se, but designates what does not yield to the reproduction of the image of the same. In *Dawn* Jdahya is initially a threatening other to Lilith because of *her* incapacity to reduce it to what she knows already or recognizes. There is no category that covers its otherness or difference and thus it remains ungraspable to her. This unfitting other forces Lilith to make amends to her frame of reference and to question her own means of classification and value-judgment. The way in which this other in *Dawn* forces both Lilith and the reader to adjust and reconfigure their terms of normativity and the planes on which these are founded, converges with the effect Borges’ text described by Foucault in the second chapter of this thesis. To recapitulate, Foucault has described this effect as a shattering of the way in which he was accustomed to make ‘sense’ out of ‘the wild profusion of existing things’ (Foucault 1970: xvi). In *Dawn* we are witnessing a similar process that indicates, in Deleuzian terms, a ‘leap beyond recognition’. The other in *Dawn* cannot be *recognized*, ‘it’ embodies something ‘new’, something that is entirely different to what she has ever encountered before.

What influences Lilith’s reaction is that she is depending on this other. The space she awakens in is the realm of this other. Therefore, the oankali Jdahya simply has more knowledge about this space. Because Lilith is ‘stuck’ in this place – she cannot ‘escape’ – she needs to turn to the other for orientation and gaining knowledge about the space she inhabits from then on. Ironically, this dependence is what triggers Lilith’s development in relating differently to what is new to her. The other symbolizes the only means for her to ‘make sense’

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<sup>36</sup> In the novel Lilith associates this with the mythical figure Medusa, which adds to Lilith’s anxiety towards Jdahya.

out of what she sees, hears and feels. While at first, Lilith is inclined to move away from the other in order to survive, eventually she has to move *towards* the other to survive.

The unavoidable dependence on the oankali evokes an uncomfortable tension in Lilith. On the one hand she wants to trust this figure – she does not really have a choice - but on the other hand her fear and paranoia overwhelm her. Jdahya has an admirable way of dealing with Lilith’s anxiety. He understands her fear but does ask her to pay her respect to him: whenever they talk it demands she looks at him, even though he does not have eyes like humans do.<sup>37</sup> Slowly, Lilith’s fear transforms into a deep curiosity in the creature, which ultimately develops into a warm and confidential friendship. I would argue that it is precisely the ‘obligatory’ reliance on this other that changes Lilith’s attitude towards it. The awareness that she cannot relate to her surroundings without relating to the oankali, causes Lilith to become more open towards what they are. This process of relating to a different world by being ‘open’ towards an-other connects to what Kathrin Thiele argues in the case of Michel Tournier’s *Friday* (1967). In this novel “encountering the other does not imply imperialist domination of that other, but instead can lead to a process of *learning* an-other world” (Thiele 2012: 61). Especially the process of learning is important here for it demands a certain dependence and openness to what is other and implies a move beyond from the self as normative and authoritative.

In this chapter I want to concentrate, as mentioned before, on relating differently to the new and the other *as process*. It is not a stage Lilith arrives *at*, but can only be thought of in terms of becoming, indicating a perpetual inaccessibility, a constant moving, shifting and readjusting. Lilith’s change towards the other is a process, without a concrete itinerary. The different relating towards the oankali is gradual. As soon as Lilith’s trust in Jdahya increases and she does not fight his otherness anymore but becomes more open to it, he takes her outside of the ‘cubicle’ she awakened in. Jdahya is her guide in this world that is unknown to her and helps her to relate to what is the culmination of difference in the novel: the ooloi. In the next section, we will turn to this figure.

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<sup>37</sup> From now on, I will use ‘he’ or ‘him’ to refer to Jdahya, as is done in the novel as well. However, I am aware of the fact that this is a rather ambiguous choice, in regard to the discussion of rendering familiar what is unknown.

### **A culmination of difference: the ooloi.**

As we have seen in the previous section, sexual difference is a pivotal issue in Lilith's relating to the other. In the first encounter with the oankali Lilith expresses the desire to 'know' whether this other is either male or female. As we have seen in the passage quoted above, Jdahya does not refuse to answer but does scrutinize Lilith's urge to classify this other by means of only two categories (male and female). Whereas Jdahya does yield to this question but criticizes Lilith for her rigid means of understanding, the figure of the ooloi effaces the self-evidence of this question. Lilith's urge to think of in terms of sexual difference as *either* male *or* female is disturbed. Ooloi is neither male nor female and immobilizes this question in itself. It is not *as* relevant anymore to categorize this specific species.

When Lilith first encounters the ooloi she finds 'it', as it will be referred to continuously throughout the novel, has four arms, of which two are 'elephant-like tentacles'.<sup>38</sup> This specific feature of the ooloi – the two big tentacles – is described as 'elephant-like', which is a means for Lilith to orientate in this otherness, again in terms of similitude with the known, with the familiar. She emphasizes what she recognizes in the features of the ooloi. Ooloi is a conspicuous figure in the novel. Not only because it is responsible for the general reproduction of the hybrid species but also because it demands a different relating to it. Lilith has to go beyond the familiar means to identify the other in terms of either male or female. She is made, in Evelyn Fox Keller's words "to count past two in our thinking about gender" (1987: 275) that was discussed in the first chapter of this project. The feminist gesture, to discard counting in terms of one, two or even three categories of gender and sex resonates in *Dawn*. Categorization as such is not discarded, but its self-evident and normative nature is criticized. In other words, Lilith does think in terms of the categories but learns not to rely on them as much anymore and even move beyond them. What returns again is the fact that relating differently towards the new is a process, in which Lilith gradually changes. When meeting the ooloi, Lilith has already adopted a different, more open attitude towards the other. This is explicated in contrast with other humans, for example when Lilith encounters Paul Titus (the first human being she has seen in a long time) and is confronted with his obstinate behavior when they speak about sexual difference and ooloi:

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<sup>38</sup> The two 'extra' arms are called sensory arms and have specific qualities.

“When they woke me up, I thought the ooloi acted like men and women while the males and females acted like eunuchs. I never really lost the habit of thinking of ooloi as male or female.” That, Lilith thought, was a foolish way for someone who had decided to spend his life among the Oankali to think – a kind of deliberate, persistent ignorance. (89)

‘Foolish’ is the term Lilith uses in order to describe Paul Titus’ attitude. This indicates that she is becoming more and more ‘open’ towards the differences the oankali and ooloi embody. This different attitude was incited by Jdahya, whom has stimulated Lilith to relate to the new in other ways than by recognition and appropriation. Jdahya’s preparation enabled Lilith to adjust slowly to the figure of the ooloi that challenges Lilith’s normative, standardized means of identifying in terms of sexual difference. Lilith desires to classify the other as either male or female at first but the encounter with the ooloi changes this drastically. This change implies that instead of the other, Lilith herself turns out to be the object of uncertainty and doubt. This is a significant moment in which Lilith realizes that her situatedness is decisive for the fear the other induces in her. She turns to herself and her initial anxiety slowly transforms into a curiosity and openness towards difference. After these confrontations with maximal difference in the encounter with oankali and ooloi, Lilith awaits the challenge to relate to what used to be ‘normal’ to her, namely other humans. This is something Lilith has desired ever since she awakened. However, as soon as she actually meets other humans (that were also ‘saved’ by the oankali) she is not at all relieved. The encounter with maximal difference has changed what used to be normal, familiar and safe to her. By then, it seems as though what used to be normal –human beings- is what she fears.

### **Humankind as unexpected others**

As we have seen, it is only when Lilith has learned to relate differently to oankali and ooloi, that she encounters other humans again. By then, it seems interspecies relating is no longer exceptional to Lilith, she has grown used to being among other species. In the third part of *Dawn*’ the re-entrance of other humans than Lilith is central.<sup>39</sup> The oankali and ooloi ask

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, other humans have been encountered in the first part, Sharad and Paul Titus. But their function in the story was more or less indicative and strategic. Sharad is a little boy that was placed in the same room with Lilith after she has awakened. Initially, he mirrored Lilith’s fear of the other and made her carry the burden of being an ‘other’, to him. After a short period of adjustment Sharad learns to trust Lilith and she starts caring for him. Lilith grows fond of him which explains her distress when Sharad disappears overnight. Paul Titus was mentioned briefly already. Lilith is introduced to him by Jdahya, who wants her to meet someone of her ‘own kind’. However, Paul Titus is not able to control himself and is completely overwhelmed by his

Lilith to ‘select’ the people she wants to awaken from a large amount of files and documents assembled by the oankali. Her choice is influenced by the fear that she will not be accepted and will be regarded as threatening other instead of cooperative partner. Lilith decides to awaken a woman first, in order to reduce the risk of violence. This choice is determined by presuppositions and common sense idea of male characters as essentially violent. Lilith’s expectations of these normative classifications are disturbed when she is confronted with violent women as much as violent men in the end. Remarkably, in the interactions between human beings existential threat is experienced for the first time in the story. The oankali *seemed* threatening but turned out not to be. It is ironic that the interaction between the humans turns out to be fatal in some cases. Some of the humans Lilith awakens are dominated by such an intense fear of what they see as threatening others, that they get extremely violent toward the oankali and start plotting against them. The extreme reaction to the ‘unknowns’ (the oankali and ooloi) is caused by the other’s difference. However, it is not the ‘initial other’ that is inherently dangerous but rather what is considered the ‘same’: the humans. Once the group of humans has been trained and prepared by several ooloi (who have not been welcomed very gently), and go into the forest where they are trained to find and generate their own food, provide shelter and orient, a true carnage begins, not only in the interaction between human and oankali, but mainly *among* humans.

As soon as this group of people is introduced in the novel, what the oankali and ooloi have stated about humankind proves to be right: the human as species is inherently a threat to itself and to others because they are intelligent and hierarchical at the same time. The hierarchical attitude of human beings is illustrated among others by the figure Paul Titus. He expresses a most defiant, sometimes even aggressive attitude against the interventions of the extraterrestrials. In contrast to his distrusting attitude towards the oankali, Lilith seems rather mild and open. The confrontation between Lilith and Paul Titus causes a shift in her behavior and in our image of Lilith’s cooperation and confidence. The encounter between them indicates the extent to which Lilith has learned to relate differently to what is initially the unknown, or the other. The initial relief of meeting another human being changes into a pressing urge to be away from the man: “The first human being she had seen in years and all she could do was long to be away from him” (95). Being there with another human in the

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sexual desire for Lilith. Especially this encounter caused an awareness of the potential danger of same species’ encounters in contrast to interspecies’ encounters.

same space does not reassure her as she expected. Instead, she feels intimidated by his powers and intuitively anticipates the threat he poses to her

“Sure. They changed my body chemistry a little when I decided to stay. Now the walls open for me just like they do for them”

“Oh.” She wasn’t sure she liked being left with the man this way – especially if he was telling the truth. If he could open walls and she could not, she was his prisoner. (89)

Remarkably, it is the absence of the oankali that makes Lilith firstly aware and secondly also scared of this other human being. Besides, his general regression to what Lilith recognizes is his ‘human nature’ manifests when Paul Titus tries to force Lilith to have sexual intercourse with him.<sup>40</sup>

The sensitivity to hierarchical relating has increased in Lilith. What is particularly interesting in the interaction with Paul Titus is that, since he is the first human being we encounter, he confronts us with the differences that by then have evolved between Lilith and this man. Being with the oankali with all their differences has changed Lilith to a great extent. While in the beginning of *Dawn* it was Lilith that was ignorant and even resistant to the radical differences the oankali embodied, towards the end we find her changed. The desire for being in touch with her ‘own kind’ after a long period of separation is a delusion when she finds her own kind and they turn out to be the threatening others in the story. This makes her aware of the fact that she has indeed learned a new kind of relating that is no longer oppositional.

In this sense, I would argue *Dawn* converges with Ettinger’s argument that the other is ‘an occasion for transformation’ (Ettinger 2006: 221). Lilith changes as soon as she has accepted the fact that it is her fear of difference as such that determines her relation to what is new, in this case the ooloi and oankali. As soon as this fear diminishes, she is more open to the other and receptive of its otherness as not threatening per se. On the contrary, the other becomes an opportunity for change. In the next section this potentiality will be elaborated.

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<sup>40</sup> During their ‘fight’ Lilith tries to convince Paul to fight his urges and be aware of what he is doing. Eventually she is saved by oankali that apologize to her for not having anticipated this.



## **The encounter with the other as occasion for transformation**

The transformation of Lilith is, as argued before, not an immediate event. It is a process characterized by painful adjustment and thorough reconfiguration of standards. One of the standards Lilith has to reconsider in her relation is what family is. Lilith ‘officially’ has no family anymore, her husband and child were killed before the war. The relation between Lilith and ‘her’ ooloi Nikanj indicates the possibility of another kind of family.<sup>41</sup> Initially, she has a rather normative conception of what family is; one can only be related in terms of blood. To be related means to be of the same species. Interspecies kinship has no value for Lilith in the beginning. Eventually, however Lilith grows more and more attached to Nikanj. For Nikanj, family is conceptualized in terms of an ultimate *acceptance*. The different economy of kinship and relating that is proposed here converges with Haraway’s sense of kinship with for example her dog Ms. Cayenne Pepper, who is, even though she ‘belongs’ to another species, a significant ‘relative’ because of their embodied interaction. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway writes on this:

Ms. Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells – a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis. I bet if you were to check our DNA, you’d find some potent transfections between us. Her saliva must have the viral vectors. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible. Even though we share placement in the phylum of vertebrates, we inhabit not just different genera and divergent families but altogether different orders. (2008: 15)

Despite of their differences, the interaction between Haraway and Ms. Cayenne Pepper is one characterized by Haraway as ‘symbiogenesis’. To elaborate on this term, we will turn to Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan. In their work symbiogenesis refers to the idea of the organism as a product of encounters with others and strangers in a manner that is most striking (Margulis & Sagan 2007). The organism as such is always already a result of intense collaborations with others or ‘strangers’, such as bacteria. The idea of the human as ‘purely’ human and superior to other living beings is made obsolete through this. To return to *Dawn*, what makes Lilith to reconsider the terms of kinship is that she grows aware of the strong embodied connection existing between her and Nikanj. The relation between them is characterized by Nikanj’s exclusive capacity to make significant alterations in Lilith’s systems. The rigid separation

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<sup>41</sup> Each human is ‘assigned’ an ooloi to which they will be connected during their training.

between species that dominates ‘traditional’ ideas of kinship no longer suffices. What Haraway expresses and *Dawn* affirms is that the dualism between human and non-human needs to be reconsidered, in order to get what Braidotti describes as “a more dynamic notion of relation or relationality” (Braidotti 2006: 102).

The alterations made in Lilith by Nikanj leave their marks in her body. These marks cause for her to feel resistance to the touch of other ooloi and even humans.<sup>42</sup> She is transformed by Nikanj to such an extent that her sensitivity has changed; not only her scent and touch but also the way in which her nervous system accepts Nikanj’s interventions and even enjoys them. We can connect this to the way in which Ettinger envisions the matrixial borderspace (as discussed in chapter one) to work. In the context of the affected economy of this space, she writes:

The matrixial borderspace is a sphere of encounter-events where intensities and vibrations as well as their imprints and ‘memory’ traces are exchanged and experienced by fragmented and assembled experiencing partial subjects who are reattuning their affective frequencies. (Ettinger 2006: 219)

This kind of encounter-event that does not distinguish between object and subject of the encounter is one that indeed leaves its marks in both ‘partial subjects’, which accordingly have to reconfigure, or ‘reattune’ as Ettinger poses it, themselves. The process of perpetual adaptation and hence reconfiguration by means of the affected nature of the encounter is highly prominent and influential in *Dawn*. Especially because the ooloi have the means to directly intervene in the system of the other subject in the encounter. However, this does not mean that the ooloi do remain the ‘same’ after the encounter. Their means of intense relating is reciprocal, which means in this case that there is not a distinct separation between acting and reacting in the process of encountering. We can speak of an initiator however; most of the times the oankali and ooloi initiate the encounter-event. Among other, because they simply possess more knowledge about how to have the nervous system connect with another and have the means – the sensory arms and tentacles – to initiate this encounter. The ooloi are the experts on human and other species’ biology that are in principle invisible to the human eyes, such as nervous and chemical processes.

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<sup>42</sup> Their bond is especially intensified during the ‘maturing process’ of Nikanj, in which he is to acquire the sensory arms and hands and develop the capacities that come with this. Lilith and it become indebted to one another during the process in which he alters because he is depending on her care.

The fact that humankind does not have a monopoly of knowledge manifests most clearly in the oankali's and oloi's conception of cancer. What in an anthropocentric discourse is the most looming biological threat becomes a potential savior of life forms in the oankali philosophy of life.<sup>43</sup> Cancer for the oankali is a vital source of knowledge in the maintaining of a species. It has taught the oankali essential things about human life and biological processes. Nikanj tells Lilith that she has a 'talent' for cancer, which means she possesses the physical potentiality to develop cancer. The oankali see this as a talent and exploit this, not only serving the process of learning and understanding humans but also to improve their own physical conditions. For example, in one of the fights between humans and oankali that was instigated by the humans Nikanj is seriously hurt. Its sensory arm is almost severed from its body. After having healed successfully, Lilith learns that it was her talent for cancer that has saved Nikanj:

“You can't control it,” Nikanj said, “but we can. Your body knows how to cause some of its cells to revert to an embryonic stage. It can awaken genes that most humans never use after birth. We have comparable genes that go dormant after metamorphosis. Your body showed mine how to awaken them, how to stimulate growth of cells that would not normally regenerate. The lesson was complex and painful, but very much worth learning. (237)

The function of this in the novel is not only to offer new ways of relating to what is considered initially as threatening but also asks for a deep generosity towards it. To engage with cancer in a more 'positive' way is painful, it is a politically and symbolically charged investment, which is especially in contemporary medical discourse highly provocative. Since cancer is often referred to as one of the fundamental threats to the human race the 'potentiality' of this is not self-evident. In the novel the different conception of cancer indicates another attitude to what knowledge can be conceived from the body and which opportunities this offers. The attention for the specific biological processes of the body is prominent in *Dawn*. The oankali and oloi ascribe a determining role to biology, this gesture causes a certain modesty of living and adds a dimension to the notion of situatedness. For them, bodily processes (including chemical processes) are decisive for the way in which one lives, not despite of one's specific biological organization but because of it. Moreover, for

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<sup>43</sup> The word oankali designates among others 'gene trader'.

them intelligence is not a means to control one's body. There is no separation between body and mind for the oankali. Lilith's tendency to separate these is criticized by Jdahya in the first part of the novel where he tells her that

Intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike. But your denial doesn't matter. A cancer growing in someone's body will go on growing in spite of denial. And a complex combination of genes that work together to make you intelligent as well as hierarchical will still handicap you whether you acknowledge it or not (39).

The ethical implication of this is that the way in which humans value their intelligence over their bodies will not 'protect' them in the end. Jdahya ascribes a certain inevitability to biology, which challenges also the superior position of the human. The oankali and ooloi - whose aim is not to subvert the status of the human in favour of their own - opt for a radically interrelated way of living and reproducing. They can manipulate this process because they possess the ability to genetic engineering naturally. This means that they have the power to select and breed in a way that is to produce new kinds of life that are more likely to combine with other ways of life. The ethics of life that permeates the oankali and ooloi way of relating is thus an ethics that moves beyond a persistent anthropocentrism. This gesture is in Braidotti's words a choice "in favour of the recognition of the entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces in the making of the subject" (Braidotti 2006: 37). This leads to what she calls a politics of 'bio-centred egalitarianism', expressing that

[no] animal is more equal than any other, because they are all equally inscribed in a logic of exchange that makes them disposable and hence negotiable. (2006: 100)<sup>44</sup>

With Braidotti's bio-centred egalitarianism we move to the second part of this analysis, in which I will explicate the implications of this analysis, in order to move towards an ethics of the unimaginable in relating to the new, the different and/or the other.

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<sup>44</sup> In another reference to this bio-centred egalitarianism Braidotti mentions 'the relation' as central to this discussion: "Relations and interactions within philosophical nomadism are posited along the more materialist lines of becoming as deep transformations of self and society" (2006: 109). The relation in this sense is the crucial axe along which becoming and accordingly transformation can evolve.

## **Towards an interspecies-becoming – a celebration of difference**

“You’ll begin again. We’ll put you in areas that are clean of radioactivity and history. You will become something other than you were.”

“And you think destroying what was left of our cultures will make us better?”  
“No. Only different” (Butler, 1987)

After this close reading of Octavia Butler’s *Dawn*, it is now time to reconsider the findings in the light of the project of the unimaginable, and draw together its connection to an ethics of relating differently. In this part I will conclusively explicate how *Dawn* can be read as arguing for a different relating to what is new and what is other. What is important here is that the novel, nonetheless, does not discard the familiar altogether. The fact that Lilith’s change is presented as gradual process leads to a continuing reconsideration and reconfiguration of the self in relation to the other. Lilith’s encounter with the other indeed transforms her. In the first section we will recapitulate in what sense Lilith’s transformation is exemplary of a move towards a celebration of difference by means of interspecies becoming.

Before delving into the details how exactly *Dawn* can be read as critique of anthropocentrism, I will once again emphasize and explicate how the novel is affirmative of difference as productive force and how this leads to an argument for interspecies becoming.

The ambiguous relating towards the new, particularly in the shape of the other (oankali or ooloi), is the central topic in *Dawn*. We are guided by Lilith’s experience and development in this relating. Lilith moves from strong irritation and aversion towards curiosity and finally an affirmative, embracing attitude towards this other and its ways of relating. The encounter with the other human beings, as we have seen, is indicative of the contrast between the first stages of Lilith’s learning process and the latter stages. The awareness of Lilith that she is depending on the goodwill of the oankali – that are her ‘significant others’ raises not only despair but also humility.<sup>45</sup> The approach of the oankali, which implies a deep respect to nature on the one hand but also an intense intelligibility of the virtue and advantage of working *together* with nature, is an essentially different one than the humans are accustomed

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<sup>45</sup> The term ‘significant others’ is used by Haraway frequently, for example in the article “Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons, Philosophers, and Biologists” (2006). In this article the term is used explicitly and continuously but it is a general motive throughout her work and ethics that implies the necessity and urgency of regarding the other as significant in the context of encounters and general thought about relating to what is not, initially, familiar.

to. It is exactly the encounter with this maximal difference that causes the ambivalent attitude towards the oankali and ooloi.

The fact that the human beings in some sense *have* to rely on their significant others in order to survive is insistent throughout the novel. Since the oankali simply possess a different knowledge of human biology, at some point the humans have to ‘surrender’ to this other and its way of relating. The other initially is approached with fear, which is mainly due to the fact that the idea of human control of its own ‘destiny’ is obsolete. This control is thoroughly immobilized in *Dawn*. At first, we can indeed detect a general urge for control, causing despair when it is not achieved. However, some humans (of which Lilith is exemplary) do learn to adapt and accordingly ensure their own survival. The survival is not the survival that was desired initially by the humans that were awakened. Some persons articulated their need for sexual reproduction in the ‘conventional’ way and moreover expressed their dogmatic conviction in the supremacy of the pure, human race. Lilith also went through this phase of wondering what kind of children would evolve from the kind of reproduction proposed by oankali and ooloi. In this context, the perspective of difference as such was disturbing.

Reproduction is an important issue in the novel. What the oankali want and need is to merge with humankind. To ‘crossbreed’ as Lilith calls it is their main motive for gaining all the insights and knowledge of humankind. The ooloi is the only kind that is able to influence (interspecies-) reproduction and decide which DNA-compositions are to evolve. In this sense, the ooloi functions as an agent of reproduction that mediates the process of interspecies-reproduction. They call themselves ‘traders’, which distinguishes their aim to engage in an entanglement of species and genetic information. The result is a wide variety of *different* types of ‘people’ to come into existence. The term ‘people’ is no longer exclusively referring to humankind but comes to signify many (hybrid) life forms beyond it. Reproduction in the oankali and ooloi method does not serve, in Harawayan terms, a reproduction of the sacred image of the same. Instead, it is a means to differentiate, to precisely move away from thinking of reproduction in terms of desirable sameness or similitude.

What is so interesting about this, is that the way in which oankali relate to this ‘new’ species is not determinative or fixing in any sense. When Lilith asks for the prospect of the

nature of this offspring, she is simply responded to with the word ‘different’.<sup>46</sup> The rejection of imagining ‘what they would look like’ indicates a pivotal issue. That is, when relating to the new in terms of common logic and familiar imagery, the result (in Lilith’s case) is a tremendous fear, exactly because of the mere deviation from what is commonly and visually recognizable. Lilith imagines these children to be little ‘Medusa’s: “snakes for hair. Nests of night crawlers for eyes and ears” (43). These are exactly the images that make her so fearful of what is to come, while what is really to (be)come cannot be imagined and also not be feared because it does not appeal to anything she *can* know just yet. This is most significantly explicated by contrasting human thought to oankali thought. The oankali do not try to grasp the new or determine it on beforehand but rather facilitate it and give it time and space to become. Imagination for the oankali is a way of thinking and living and is fundamentally different because of their non-hierarchical way of relating; they do not intend to acquire sovereignty over nature or humankind and therefore do not ‘use’ imagination to grasp or master images but rather facilitate in a radical way the new without restricting it to existent images.

As we have seen among others in Irigaray’s theories in the first chapter, feminist theory also tries to move away from reproducing the image of the same. Irigaray argues that we need to move beyond phallogocentric logic that restricts and structures us by means of thinking of a feminine imaginary instead. What *Dawn* does is exactly offering an-other imaginary in which people, oankali etc. are not determined and fixed on beforehand but rather are in a process of becoming that

is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing”, “being”, “equaling”, or “producing”. (Deleuze 1987: 263)

The becoming-other and becoming-with-the other demonstrated in *Dawn* addresses the new and the different as ultimate disturbance to thinking and relating in terms of recognition. It asks for an-other kind of relating to the new and a different kind getting to know this new, or

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<sup>46</sup> In anticipating to the general celebration of difference in *Dawn* we could state that the oankali attain, in Elizabeth Grosz’ words a “conception of life as the mobilization of maximal difference” (2004: 18).

other. The different relating to the other is not only decisive in ensuring the survival of the human beings that cooperate but also leads to a distortion of anthropocentrism. In the next part we will turn to the discussion of the other as part of the self, elaborating on the way in which *Dawn* demonstrates in what way relating to the other is inevitably relating to the self. Nikanj and Lilith, even though they are ‘of’ different species have become parts of each other. Their relationship sets the example for the discussion we will now turn to.

### **‘We were never individuals’ – beyond anthropocentrism and the autonomy of the self**

“Living beings continually construct, adjust, and reconstruct their dynamic structures by which they are bounded” (Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, 2007)

*Dawn* can be read as a general critique of anthropocentrism. It is however a critique that offers another perspective, another virtuality; it offers an alternative. The move beyond anthropocentrism takes us to the discourse of the posthuman that is such a compelling issue in contemporary theory and philosophy. The link between the posthumanist discourse and anthropocentrism is adequately formulated by Cary Wolfe. In *What is Posthumanism* (2010) he delineates what posthumanism for him (and others) entails. In elaborating R.L. Rutsky’s work on the posthuman he states:

What is needed here, as Rutsky rightly points out, is the recognition that “any notion of the posthuman that is to be more than merely an extension of the human, that is to move beyond the dialectic of control and lack of control, superhuman and inhuman, must be premised upon a mutation that is ongoing and immanent,” and this means that to become posthuman means to participate in – and find a mode of thought adequate to – “processes which can never be entirely reduced to patterns or standards, codes or information.” (Wolfe 2010: xviii)

In *Dawn* this kind of posthuman tendency can be found as well, since in lessons taught by oankali it is exactly the move away from thinking in terms of control that is most disturbing. There is no possibility to reestablish the notion of control, that is, not in dialectic terms. It is not as simple as stating that the humans have only ‘lost’ their control. What *Dawn* exemplifies is exactly a reconsideration of the notion itself in terms of its illusory nature. Neither the oankali or ooloi, nor the human beings ‘possess’ this control in the story. Instead, *Dawn* invokes a worldview in which the element of control is rewritten. In the oankali way of relating control is neither a means nor an end. Besides, their way of relating does not have an



‘end’ in itself, it does not move for the sake of its destination but rather presents lines of flight that are not determinative. The oankali and ooloi ethics of relating is one of openness, perpetual change, and it is a celebration of difference as vital and potential mode of living.<sup>47</sup>

The persistent anthropocentrism of Western civilization is radically disturbed in *Dawn*, not only because of the fact that human beings are no longer the central species but moreover because Lilith and the other human beings are taught an ‘ethics of inclusivity’ by the oankali. I mean that their way of relating to what Lilith considers to be the ‘external’ world is not based on a separation between subject and object. The oankali are not a species distinct from their environment. Rather, they manifest an intense relating to the world in terms of entanglement. What is important is that *Dawn* does not, in my opinion, discard the human race altogether. This is something the human beings Lilith awakens are scared of. However, what the oankali and ooloi pursue is a move away from thinking of species as ‘purely’ human, oankali, etc. They wish for a crossbreeding in the future that produces difference instead of sameness. The oankali and ooloi have saved some humans in order to learn from them. The stage they are working towards is not persistently anti-human(ism) but rather posthuman. In Wolfe’s formulation, this posthuman -

far from surpassing or rejecting the human – actually enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reason, reflection, and so on. It forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of “bringing forth a world” – ways that are, since we ourselves are human *animals*, part of the evolutionary history and behavioral and psychological repertoire of the human itself. (2010: xxv)

This quote formulates what is a red thread in Butler’s novel. *Dawn* echoes the posthuman, indeed, not in rejecting humankind or the species itself but in reworking this species in a deep relationality with ‘other living beings’. These other living beings are not only animals, but

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<sup>47</sup> An interesting parallel here is the approach of the oankali towards the body and Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the ‘body without organs’, in which the body is seen as an open system. The body as open system, as pure potential is a conception that is supported in the oankali philosophy.

include the entire spectrum of species, plants, bacteria and so forth. The human experience as such is questioned in the novel, not in itself but again in relation to what Wolfe effectively describes as the 'entire sensorium' of the others, in this case oankali, ooloi and the environment.

The notion of autopoietic, 'bringing forth a world', is highly significant in this context. In Humbert Maturana and Francisco Varela's *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (1980), we can read that autopoiesis is a notion coined by Maturana<sup>48</sup> and describes the basic 'self-referentiality of systems' and circular organization of these systems. In thinking about these terms, according to Maturana and Varela: "Notions of purpose, function or goal are unnecessary and misleading (1980: xix)". The biological and philosophical implications of this concept are that specific systems are self-producing.<sup>49</sup> It designates systems that are organizationally 'closed'; not in opposition to openness, but self-regulatory in a relational, dynamic interaction. Niklas Luhmann, the famous German philosopher of system theory, elaborates on Maturana and Varela's concept of autopoiesis. He states that we must regard the openness and closure in terms of 'conditioning' (Luhmann, 1995). There is a mutual dependency that does not preclude the option of change and difference but does safeguard the so called 'autonomy' of systems undergoing change. Autopoiesis guarantees the *specificity* of a system or phenomenon. The interaction between autopoietic systems (whether they be humans, environments, animals etc.) is determined by Luhmann in terms of interpenetration. Especially in the context of *Dawn* and the specific interaction between humans and ooloi the concept of autopoiesis is fruitful for it, to some extent that is, describes how the specific 'units' of human and ooloi remain 'autonomous' beings even though changing fundamentally. This connects to the discussion of a posthuman mode of thinking in Wolfe's terms: it does not discard the human species altogether but reworks it. We could say that in looking with the lens of autopoiesis to *Dawn*'s characteristic interaction between (to keep it specific) Lilith and the ooloi Nikanj happens on the same premise: the ooloi do not

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<sup>48</sup> In Katherine Hayles *How we became Posthuman* (1999) an illuminating account is given of the context in which Maturana developed his concepts and ideas. Hayles writes on the Macy Conferences (1946-1953) in which many scholars and scientists struggled with the notion of 'reflexivity' and the role of the observer as part of the system. Maturana formulated a new kind of epistemology, which's 'maxim' (according to Hayles) was that "Everything is said by an observer", a statement uttered by Maturana and Varela in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (1980)

<sup>49</sup> The writings by Maturana and Varela can be quite obscure and technical. Helpful guides through their work and the philosophical implications are John Mingers' *Self Producing Systems: Implications and Applications of Autopoiesis* (1995) and Niklas Luhmann's *Social Systems* (1995)

want to discard the human race but rather enlarge its specificity and let it flourish through significant adaptations from ooloi and oankali.

However, autopoiesis' condition of autonomy of the subject or system and the modus of 'interpenetration' do not seem satisfactory in the context of *Dawn* and the feminist politics it appeals to. In *Dawn*, we can speculate upon the autonomy of protagonist Lilith and find out that this autonomy is relative. The notion of (relative) autonomy does not accommodate the feminist enterprise of thinking and relating differently. It hinders the move towards a different relating towards the other in terms of generosity that I would argue, is proposed in Butler's novel. What is more satisfactory in this context is a theory of co-relating that implies reciprocal affectedness. Neither Lilith nor Nikanj remain the same. Especially, Lilith's nervous system and chemical system have changed to such an extent in the interaction with the ooloi, that her purely 'human' structure or autonomy becomes questionable, or relative.

The oankali way of relating is not based on the principle of a sterile distinction between inside and outside, but rather in terms of intense entanglement. Their means to intervene actively in this entanglement is through chemical exchanges. A significant detail of this is that intervening in chemical organizations leaves marks.<sup>50</sup> For example, when Lilith's nervous system is altered by Nikanj so that she is able to intervene in spaces, adjust walls and 'ask' for cooperation of the environment, she learns that it has left marks in her. These marks cannot be perceived by means of vision but 'show' in particular through the sense of scent. After having been 'touched' by Nikanj in this way, other ooloi smell repellently to her.

These marks that are left in one's system after having interacted with someone- or something else's system are crucial for they show that this relating is deeply embodied and continual. It proves that relating to something other is not merely temporary but leaves its traces in both 'bodies'. The notion of 'body' is more inclusive and not exclusively human anymore, but can include any-body. The idea of reciprocal affection and modification resonates in Haraway's writings. In "Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons, Philosophers and Biologists" (2006) she writes on the mutual affection and 'infection' taking place in the physical interaction between dog and human. She insists on the far reaching influence of touching bodies, whether they are human or animal, especially focusing on the question:

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<sup>50</sup> By now, the term 'people' has become far more inclusive, designating oankali, ooloi, humans, human-constructs and all kinds of hybrids.

Who knows where my chemical receptors carried her messages, or what she took from my cellular system for distinguishing self from other and binding outside to inside? (2006: 98)<sup>51</sup>

This is a vital question in the context of *Dawn*. Particularly the impossibility of knowing ‘what is taken where’ in the interaction between bodies is provocative. In Lilith’s interaction with oankali and ooloi this question could be posed continuously.<sup>52</sup> The distinction between self and other, or respectively inside and outside takes us back to the problematic notion of autopoiesis. I wish to return to it once again because the problematization of this term converges with significant shifts that can be traced in *Dawn*.

The problematics of inside and outside in the context of autopoiesis and relating to others is elaborated on by Margulis and Sagan. In *Dazzle Gradually: Reflections on the Nature of Nature* (2007) autopoiesis is discussed in terms of “a completely self-making, self-referring, tautologically delimited entity at the various levels of cells, organism, and cognition” (2007: 16). The discussion of this self-making is intricately connected to the question of the self and the subject according to Margulis and Sagan. It refers to the openness of this subject and the argument that this self or this subject is in itself a potential to become other, or simply: a potential to change, to become *different*. This is illustrated by the image and structure of the membrane. They call forth this membrane in a testimony of their position in discussing the organism:

In this sense our view of the organism is less ontological and more biological; the order of metaphysics and physics, the primacy of philosophy over biology, undergoes a reversal more in keeping with the academic notions of self and the anthological effort to enclose in a coherent, comprehensive, rectilinear manner. Membrane-bounded indeed. (2007: 17)

The move from philosophy to biology implies a change in the ethics of relating that is important in the context of *Dawn*. Relating to others is inherently a relating of bodies in which

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<sup>51</sup> This quote I took from *Configurations* (2006) for which Haraway adapted a chapter of *When Species Meet* (2008)

<sup>52</sup> A significant point is that the latter interaction is not completely obscure to the ooloi. They know more about this specific exchange than both oankali and humans do. In the novel, humankind is no longer the species that has a symbolic monopoly on knowledge. To say that ooloi occupy this position now would be a mistake however, since the mode of relating of both oankali and ooloi is essentially unhierarchical.

leaves no-body unaffected. In order to elaborate on this other kind of ethics, we need to concentrate again the description (and implications) of the membrane as characterized by Margulis and Sagan.

But the membrane is no concrete, literal, self-possessed wall; it is a self-maintained and constantly changing semipermeable barrier. The idea of the semipermeable membrane permits us to jump organizational levels, from intraorganismic cell to cellular organism to organismic ecosystem and biosphere. Whether we are discussing the disappearing membranes of endosymbiotic bacteria on their way to becoming organelles or the breakdown within the global human socius of the Berlin Wall, we must revise this rectilinear notion of the self, of the bounded I. (2007: 17)

This description is highly provocative, for it does not only evoke the methodological implications of the figure of the membrane (to jump organizational levels) but moreover distorts the notion of the self as *closed* system. The membrane helps us to distinguish between outside and inside without making them separate entities. There is, in other words, a moment of crossing between outside and inside but this does not guarantee the ‘autonomy’ of the subject, it immobilizes this notion altogether. In *Dawn* a similar movement can be traced; Lilith is, in the beginning, keen on remaining altogether independent from the oankali and tries to retreat from them as much as she can. As soon as she realizes that this resistant relating does not help her, she becomes not only open to the oankali but engages in an active relating in which her need for autonomy seems to have dissolved. The urge for autonomy, we have seen, is initially present in all the humans that are awakened throughout the story. Some humans reconsider and change, while others refuse and grow violent in order to protect the idea of their autonomy.

The oankali way of relating is essentially unhierarchical, which implies that maintaining their so called autonomy is of little interest to them. Rather, they propose a relating that is founded on an intense, embodied relating that transgresses the notion of self, or rewrites the notion of the self. The self for oankali and oloi is not a ‘bounded I’, as Margulis and Sagan would define it. This ‘I’, which seems to be a word that is borrowed from human ‘jargon’, is inherently and always already engaging with others. There is no oppositional structure of the self versus the other in the oankali ethics. Instead, for them the entanglement of what we would name self and other is vital. The quality of their lives is bound up with the quality of the entanglements with the world and its inhabitants.

Even though Margulis and Sagan rewrite the concept of autopoiesis significantly in terms of self-maintaining rather than self-producing *per se*, at this point we will move towards an alternative to this term: A rewriting of autopoiesis by calling forth the notion of copoiesis as coined by Bracha Ettinger.<sup>53</sup> Ettinger's writings approximate the question of relating differently in a manner that helps us to think in what ways *Dawn* provokes different relating to the other.

As we have seen in the first chapter of the thesis, the rewriting of the other (for example: 'woman') or the new beyond the constraints of phallogocentrism enforces a mode of relating that is not oppositional or hierarchical but defined (by Ettinger) as co-emergence. This kind of relating converges with the mode suggested by the novel and enables a *generous* relating in which hierarchical structures are continuously avoided. Co-emergence is connected to Ettinger's concept 'copoiesis'. In the context of the formulation of 'an-other' kind of knowledge as we have seen in chapter one, the concept of copoiesis is a specific 'transformational potentiality', as Ettinger writes in "Copoiesis" (2005). What this term does is not only rewriting the axes of knowledge but also radically changing what the concept 'subjectivity' entails. Subjectivity, in Ettinger's thought, is the

transgressive encounter between 'I' (as partial-subject) and uncognized yet intimate 'non-I' (as partial subject or partial-object). (2005: 703)

Subjectivity is thus not a stage *before* this encounter but is shaped by this encounter. This is an important difference with what 'autopoiesis' implies: an a priori closed-and-open system that interacts with other systems and environments. In *Dawn* there is a significant contrast between autopoiesis and copoiesis. Lilith's initial behavior and thought show remarkable parallels with an autopoiesis' mode, whereas the oankali and ooloi way of relating is founded in a copoiesis' mode. Their subjectivity is not thinkable without the perpetual, intense becoming (with) another. This connects to a general critique of individualism as obstruction to a becoming-(with-) other that is for example formulated by Braidotti in her plea for nomadic philosophy as essentially relational and non-anthropocentric.<sup>54</sup> In *Dawn* it is indeed

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<sup>53</sup> Haraway also formulates a critique on the notion of autopoiesis in *When Species Meet*. She proposes to rethink this term (as used by Margulis) with Deleuze and Guattari and refers to Scott Gilbert's (2002) critique. The latter comments on Margulis' understanding in stating that the co-construction of physical bodies causes for the idea that "we were never individuals" (which I have chosen as title for this subsection). This resembles the way in which Ettinger's term 'copoiesis' reworks the implications for our ideas of subjectivity.

<sup>54</sup> In among others *Transpositions*, in a paragraph that is called 'becoming-world' (Braidotti 2006: 135).

the pervasiveness of individualism that prevents some humans from relating to others that is not hierarchical.

The way in which the I and the non-I relate to each other is according to Ettinger, structured by for example “erotic borderlinking, affective, empathic, intuitive and even quasi-telepathic knowledge” (Ettinger 2005: 704). Furthermore, these axes by which we know, yet do not ‘cognize’ this non-I, are “not perceivable by senses but transmissible and translatable by the mind, thus sharing via virtual, traumatic and phantasmatic strings to create coeventings or encounter-events” (2005: 704). This is exactly what characterizes the oankali and ooloi mode of relating, that is frustrating to Lilith in the beginning because of its ‘invisibility’ in terms of her sensorial ‘limitations’. At a later stage in the novel, Lilith learns that this relating is not invisible *per se* but is determined by her insensitivity towards it. In this way, what is demonstrated again, is that one’s situatedness, in this case Lilith’s reliance on vision, scent etc. determines what one is sensitive to perceiving. The kind of ‘knowledge-production’ performed by the oankali and ooloi is not a cognitive one par excellence but is rather structured by other axes than those familiar to us, the readers, as well. In this way, the different epistemologies presented in *Dawn* converge with feminist science studies’ affirmation of ‘situated knowledges’ and resonate the intellectual and philosophical gesture by Maturana and Varela, in which the observer changes into a central figure in the process of knowledge production.

The transformation Lilith experiences corresponds to what Ettinger defines as a ‘co-transformation-in-difference’ (2005: 705). What this can mean, in the context of *Dawn*, is that Lilith becomes-other precisely in the reciprocal differentiating between oankali and herself. The ‘metramorphosis’ she performs is

the ensemble of joint eventing of transmission and reattunement in encounters where I and non-I coemerge, co-change and co-fade in borderlinking to each other with-in virtual and real strings. (Ettinger 2005: 705)

It is only to a certain extent that the changes in Lilith and her ‘non-I’ are rendered ‘perceivable’ throughout the story. The virtual strings Ettinger refers to are those effects that cannot be theorized, perceived *yet* and are thus unimaginable. It is now that we can see that the unimaginable does have an effect even though it is not to be imagined. The virtual, which I do not conflate with the unimaginable but they converge to some extent, shapes the

borderlinking as much as the 'real'. Thus, the extent to which Lilith changes cannot be imagined in total, it remains virtual until parts of it manifest. The virtual and the unimaginable in this sense constitute a perpetual potential change or difference that slips away as soon as it is realized as such. The relation to the other or the new in this case is not informed by a need to appropriate (because it is impossible), but is instead approximated by for example the ooloi. *Dawn* is exemplary of learning how to approximate this new instead of reducing it to what is known, imaginable or probable.

The novel thus not only invites a different kind of relating, but it contrasts also with a 'common sense' relation to the new and the other that is appropriating and predominant. It shows the inadequacy of this kind of relating in confrontation with what is different.



## Conclusion

### The new, the future and the future of the new

“Through the unknown, we plunge into the new, walking backwards into a future whose promises of solace may not match the pain or the relief of unfamiliarity” (Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, 1996)

As I have argued throughout the third chapter, *Dawn* is an exemplary novel. Not only because of the wide variety of issues addressed or the provocative confrontation with another world but moreover it is insistent in proposing another kind of relating towards the new and the other. Relating differently to what is yet unfamiliar is not a comfortable, painless experience. In the analysis of the novel I have highlighted the distress and despair that characterized the encounter with the other and the different relating this demanded. This strategic emphasis served to move beyond escapism in discussing literary thinking and *Dawn*. The effect and affect of a literary mode of thinking as demonstrated in *Dawn* do not attribute to the escape from reality, the familiar and the image of the Same but ignite a ‘departure’, in Deleuzian terms. The novel does not constitute a pleasurable experience *per se*, it does not offer a romantic image of a future-yet-to-come. The literary thinking in *Dawn* departs from an engagement with the norm (as Irigaray would define it) and disturbance of the familiar.

In the first chapter this line of thought was anticipated by providing a context to the question of relating differently towards the other and the new. Feminist theory, Deleuzian philosophy and psychoanalysis (Ettinger) were the main pillars supporting this project. In order to delineate how the new or the other is envisioned, we turned to the western image of thought, the phallogocentric image of thought that pervades connects to Deleuze calls ‘common sense’. A different imaginary or alternative space of becoming is not about presenting a romantic, utopian image of the new as deviating dualistically from what is familiar. Instead, it is about the engagement with the familiar (the western image of thought) and a reconfiguration of it. The first chapter discussed various calls for different modes of thinking, different modes of relating and different imaginaries. In the second chapter, we turned to Foucault whom, in my opinion, answered to these calls by formulating another call, namely to think *through* fiction. After having traced what it could imply to ‘imagine the

unimaginable' in feminist theory and Deleuzian theory alike, we moved to the realm of literature in order to anticipate the argument for a radically different relating to the new performed in *Dawn*.

Literary thinking offers an alternative to the image of thought that is criticized by Deleuze and is founded on the axes of recognition, resemblance, identities and fixation. Discussing Blanchot, Foucault and the *écriture féminine* inspired other ways of relating to the new, the other and/or the different, in which suffocation of these notions is avoided and space for the new to become is 'provided'. The alternative space of becoming embodied by literary thinking moves beyond the production of the 'sacred image of the Same', in Harawayan terms. It does not reproduce the familiar, but departs from it and rewrites it. In other words, it offers a different imaginary for us to think with and through.

In the analysis of *Dawn* in the third chapter, this process is put into action. The novel's structure adds to a continuing 'departure': It starts from the familiar, presenting to us common axes of thought such as rationality, logic and immediate intelligibility; common axes of the sensorial economy such as the visible and the audible; and common axes of relating to what differs from this such as appropriating and rendering through the familiar. The way in which *Dawn* structures the encounter with the other and a different relating to it - by first contextualizing, then describing and subsequently proposing an alternative - resonates in the three chapters that constitute this thesis.

Lilith was our point of orientation, her experience of the encounter with the new and the other exemplify what in the first and second chapter was described as a phallogocentric image of thought, which was expressed by the need to recognize and then categorize what is new and other. Lilith realizes she does not 'succeed' in this, meaning she cannot appropriate the other or render it 'intelligible' by means of common sense and this is a vital moment. The moment at which Lilith realizes the way in which she relates to this other needs to change is an ethical moment, because of the awareness that what Lilith considered to be an 'adequate' and 'effective' relating to the other is in fact a limiting, suffocating appropriation to what is familiar to *her*. As I have emphasized throughout the third chapter is that Lilith's change does not occur on one particular instant, it cannot be pinned down but instead slowly unfolds, it is a process of which specific moments were chosen in the third chapter. These moments marked shifts, contrasts, indications of movement in Lilith's awareness and adjustment.

The confrontation with the other and the new in *Dawn* is not ‘immediate’ but is worked towards gradually, the reader as well as Lilith is given *time* to adjust. The encounter with what is other (oankali & ooloi) is not condensed in one moment but is perpetual and covers the entire novel (and the other parts constituting the trilogy *Lilith’s Brood*). This is exemplary of Ettinger’s thoughts on the formation of subjectivity as always already in encounter and constantly differentiating. There is no pause in the novel after the encounter with the other is initiated. From this moment on, a constant relating in difference between different actors takes place. These different actors are not self-evidently human anymore. Anthropocentrism is gradually diverged from. An interspecies-relating embodies the alternative to the human as centre of the world and director of the world. This interspecies-becoming transgresses the common sense thinking in terms of the One with the other as mere opposite. The other is released from these oppositional chains. The other cannot be recognized since it *embodies* difference. Recognition, according to Deleuze, is not a means to relate to what is different because it is figured in terms of what we already know, or have seen. The Deleuzian ‘leap beyond recognition’ has been a red thread throughout this thesis, in order to get a clear image of what it means to relate differently to what is other or new.

Ironically, it is not difference but sameness, or the ‘sacred image of the same’ that eventually induces the most fear and embodies the most fundamental threat in *Dawn*. As we have seen in the analysis, it is not the encounter with difference, or with the new that jeopardizes survival, but the encounter with what is familiar, namely the human(ist) frame of reference. The novel insists continuously on the dangers of the urge to reproduce the same. The humans that fight against (their idea) of extinction of the ‘pure’ human race are the most violent, most aggressive actors in the novel that constantly endanger themselves and their surroundings – whether this be oankali, ooloi or other humans. Besides, we learn throughout the novel that the anthropocentrism and the hierarchical relating that is typical to human ‘nature’ has caused the almost total destruction of the Earth as potential place to live. What the ooloi and oankali have done, besides reconstructing the Earth, is changing the species to such an extent that a different kind of life and relating can be envisioned. In this sense, *Dawn* is a compelling plea for a more open relating towards the new or the different as alternative to sameness, which has in case of human beings resulted in an extremely imperiling situation.

Change is a generative force and embodies the foundation of every living thing. As we have seen in the writings by Maturana and Varela and Ettinger, the subject (which in *Dawn* is

a more inclusive term) exists by virtue of change. The idea of ‘stability’ and ‘autonomy’ of the organism is abolished. Throughout the novel the necessity of an interspecies-becoming in which the ‘several’ (Ettinger’s terms) is prevalent over thinking in terms of the One, which is elaborated in for example Keller’s delineation of the need to ‘count past two’ in our thinking (about gender and science in particular). This resonates in the ethics of living of the oankali and ooloi. The value of their lives is ‘measured’ not in terms of their ‘autonomy’, as seems to be the case with Lilith initially, but rather in terms of their entanglements with the world and their fellow-inhabitants.

The imperative of change in *Dawn* implies a different relating in which recognition and identification are not sufficient or adequate. Because we are constantly confronted with the new, we need to move beyond this mode of relating. The kind of relating *Dawn* moves towards is permeated by generosity and openness towards the new and difference. In the novel this mode of relating is anticipated by a different sensorial economy that does not privilege vision over the other senses and supplements the ‘common’, ‘human’ sensorial organization with other sensitivities. Another way in which another relating to difference is worked towards is the problematization of the conditions for ‘being related’. The notion of kinship is rewritten, including rather than excluding relations in terms that differ from being blood-related. The ethical stance of being related is imagined in terms of acceptance not despite of one’s difference but *because* of it.

Enlightening was *Dawn*’s parallel with the arguments elaborated by Maturana & Varela, Ettinger and Haraway, that subjectivity is always already bound to the confrontation with the other, in autopoiesis and copoiesis. Copoiesis in particular is crucial in addressing the vital role of the other. The turn to the other, as *Dawn* demonstrated, implies a turn to the self. In relating to the other or the different, Lilith has to criticize her own standards, her own conventions that determine what is different from it. This moment of scrutiny of one’s own image of thought is established by the fact that the other and the new cannot be rendered familiar in terms of recognition. The leap beyond recognition, in Deleuzian terms, is what Lilith’s change is exemplary of.

The new, the other, or the different is not related to by means of appropriation but is rather approached by approximation as I have argued throughout this thesis. This ensures the becoming of this new, beyond the scope of rendering it familiar through ‘common sense’. This approximation goes hand in hand with transgressing the boundaries of the imaginable.

*Dawn* transgresses the mode of recognition and encourages us to ‘imagine the unimaginable’, thus to think in terms that are (entirely) unfamiliar to us. Imagining in this sense and in the context of literary thinking becomes a means to move beyond the common sense image of thought and generates or invites the new as that which cannot be imagined on beforehand. For example, in *Dawn* vision as such is no longer ‘sufficient’, it is immobilized as primary signifier. The way in which the oankali and ooloi relate to what is new and different is in terms of deep curiosity and a desire to learn from it. Their means of relating is not controlled by vision but rather exceeds vision; their tentacles and extra-sensory arms enact an interaction that is simply not ‘visible’ but only approximated in terms of its affect. Lilith testifies that she cannot describe this dynamic in other ways than by calling forth associations such as telepathy, which also goes beyond vision. At first, Lilith tries to describe or relate to this chemical interactions and interventions in the nervous system by means of association, she tries to grasp what she experiences in terms that are familiar to her. She cannot possibly describe what happens and the oankali and ooloi cannot help her to render familiar what she experiences. As soon as she grows aware of this, she moves away from relating to the new by means of similarities with the familiar and mentions only the affect these interventions have on her. What happens in these interventions is simply unimaginable to her, something that she acknowledges. Lilith surrenders to the fact that the maximal difference cannot be understood by her common sense.

The unimaginable becomes a way in which this relating to the new is open and generous and crosses the boundaries of what we can think and imagine. This is a significant means through which the mode of relating in terms of recognition is abolished. The unimaginable is always already different and besides constantly differing. The unimaginable in this sense functions as a horizon, constantly shifting and providing a direction rather than a destination. In itself the figure of the horizon is productive in this context because of its perpetual inaccessibility. It does not want to be reached. The horizon cannot be grasped or appropriated but can only be approximated. The new, the different and/or the other in *Dawn* ask for a relating that converges with the nature of the horizon: it is a process of reciprocal change and movement, with non-arriving as the only condition.

At this point we could ask again why a different relating towards the new with an ethics of the unimaginable is desirable in the context of feminist theory and politics. This question invokes the elements of change and future that are essential in feminist theory. In

order to change the image of thought and affirm the becoming of difference in the future, we need to relate to the new in a manner that is open, not only in terms of deviant from what we know, or what is familiar, but in terms that are altogether different. In order not to codify the future, or program it, as Irigaray has warned us in the first chapter, we need to move away from anticipation and projection, we need to construct this future, bring it into existence by means other than those familiar to us. The turn to literary thinking serves this ‘other’ means, in a particular way because instead of pursuing ‘clean breaks’ (as Deleuze pointed out) it ‘starts’ from within *now*, it engages with the present to envision potential future(s).

Literary thinking hovers close together with the virtual, which is according to Grosz “the condition of being otherwise than what something is at this moment” (2004: 252). In this sense, it is the potentiality of becoming-other that is intricately connected to the virtual. The new is not simply given, but needs to be formed and is not bound to the chains of the past. To affirm the possibility of becoming-other, or the new, in other words: the potentiality of change is a crucial point in feminist politics. In Grosz’ words feminist politics is about “the production of futures for women that are uncontained by any of the models provided in the present” (Grosz 2004: 255). In other words, what is new, other, or simply different is what we need in order to imagine and create the future. In this thesis what I have worked towards is a different relating towards this new or other, by means of literary thinking. *Dawn* has been exemplary in demonstrating a feminist, different relating without losing grip of the present. What has been emphasized throughout this project is the necessity of engaging with the norm in order to subvert it, in Irigarayan terms. The new is not a means to escape the dominant – phallogocentric- order. Instead, the new embodies the promise of change; but it needs to be related to in a different mode. *Dawn* approximates the unimaginable and provokes a different mode of relating. It points us to the limits of what we can imagine – which is shaped by the western image of thought – and tries to stretch these limits in order to provoke the new. It is not about what we *can* imagine, but it is an imperative for a departure towards what we cannot imagine in order to envision different futures and affirm the possibility of change.

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