

THINGS-IN-MOTION: NATURE AND ARTIFACT IN ATWOOD, ROBINSON, ISHIGURO,

AND BUTLER

By

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Abstract

In this paper, I consider the role of subject-object relationships in defining the artifact and nature in contemporary literature. The illusion of the artifact as a manmade object with an anthropocentric function separate from nature appears in the fluidity of agency present in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, and Octavia Butler's *Dawn*. Drawing on the critical frameworks of Bill Brown and Eric Katz, my readings focus on how the artifacts in these novels signal a breakdown between the natural and the manmade, subject and object, and human and nonhuman forms of agency. In my first section, I examine how genetically engineered animal artifacts of *2312* and *The Year of the Flood* shed their human purposes to become more natural. I then move to consider how *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn* position the human body itself as an artifact in order to collapse the distinction between what humans perceive as natural or manmade. These novels, whether they focus their exploration on the nonhuman or the human body, question the stability of the artifact to reveal larger, intertwined networks of the natural and artificial processes that comprise environments.

Introduction

The literary artifact appears in works where human-created objects exist to perform a specific human function. While sometimes these artifacts appear as replicated nature, other times they manifest in the products of genetic engineering. However, this emphasis on the artifact as an anthropocentric object centers on the conception of its function as defined by the human subject. The artifact exists for the purpose of its human manufacturers; therefore, the artifact acquires its definition from the significance imparted to it by the agent or creator. This concept of the artifact and its role as an object plays a crucial role in contemporary literature that explores the implications of technological progress. For example, Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* depicts artifacts in the genetically-spliced animals of "bobkittens," "green rabbits," "pigeons," and "rakunks"; Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* describes a restoration project where scientists engage in a "stocking up of animals in the terraria" for the purpose of returning these animal-artifacts to Earth; Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* contains human clones, or artifacts, in the "donors" who provide organ donations to the "normals"; and Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* features alien "gene traders" creating artifacts out of humans through genetic manipulation for the purpose of the former's procreation. Each of these novels challenges the subject-object relationship between humans and their artifacts by revealing how artifacts may shed their human-related purposes to become actors and subjects in their own right.

The Year of the Flood and *2312* introduce such revelations of agency and subjectivity with their presentation of futures dependent on genetic manipulations and cloned animals. Manmade objects have become subjects that blend the natural and artificial to create new wildernesses originating from humanity, though humanity no longer has control over their function. As a result, these novels force a reexamination of the artifact and artificial creations,

such as restored wildernesses and genetically spliced animals, as more than simply human-contrived things. *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn* add another level of complication to the perception of the artifact and objects by imposing them and artificiality onto the body. Humans become artifacts of themselves, which demonstrates the complexity that underlies actor and object relationships. These novels reveal the fluidity of the subject and object relationship in order to question how the natural and artificial may combine in one body. Furthermore, they illustrate that the artifact, humanity, and nature are dynamic parts of larger, more integrated networks. Consequently, the appearance of the artifact in literature becomes more than just a sign of an ultimate distinction between the natural and the manmade; rather, their presence deconstructs assumptions about what it means to be a human or an object.

Philosopher Eric Katz introduces the characteristics of an artifact in “The Big Lie: The Human Restoration of Wilderness.” He states, “Natural individuals were not designed for a purpose. They lack intrinsic functions, making them different from human-created artifacts” (Katz 392). According to this interpretation, “natural individuals” originate without an “intrinsic” human function – an intrinsic function being the basic, internal role with which humans made the object. Therefore, anything created with a human purpose remains an artifact and not a true representation of nature. They exist as an object of humanity, instead of an actor of nature. He explains that artifacts are “created for human use.... they serve a function for human life,” which “is completely different from the way natural entities and species evolve to fill ecological niches” (Katz 392). Katz positions “natural entities and species” directly across from artifacts by explaining the differences in their creations, positing that the latter are anthropocentric and unnatural in their focus on “human life.” Both *2312* and *The Year of the Flood* contain beings and projects with human-created purposes, which seemingly labels them as artifacts. The

commoditized genetically spliced beings of Atwood's novel illustrate the extent to which humans can objectify their creations as artifacts. Similarly, Robinson's work features cloned animals completely dependent on their ability to satisfy human desires. Additionally, *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn* contain humans created or altered for "intrinsic functions," therefore implying they too are artifacts according to Katz's definition. In Ishiguro's novel, humans create other humans for the intrinsic function of providing organ donations until the clone dies. *Dawn* develops upon this idea of a human artifact when alien species become the subjects and creators of the artifact – the human. This role of people as artifacts implies a natural level of humanity, which seems to contradict the idea of nature as pure from human involvement. However, these beings are very distinct combinations of natural and artificial processes in that they integrate natural instincts and agency with artificially imposed purposes. Katz's perception of the artifact suggests that "natural entities" must be separate from human association and purposes, yet each of the four novels demonstrates a blurring of the lines between manmade functions and uncontrolled natural desires or tendencies. They contain worlds where artificial entities gain agency outside of their intrinsic function in order to become more natural, while people become both subjects and objects and both artifacts and the natural through the manipulation of this agency.

In addition to Eric Katz's definition of the artifact, cultural critic Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" provides a further discussion on subjects and objects integral to the examination of humanity and the natural. Brown builds onto the concept of Katz's artifact when he states, "As they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture...), but we only catch a glimpse of things" (Brown 4). Humanity looks through artifacts "to see what they disclose," especially in relation to nature. Artifacts often

attempt to replicate nature or the animal, yet, as emphasized by Katz, they only allow a “glimpse of things” due to their inherent anthropocentric function. This function reveals the nature of the artifact in its role as an object and its ability only to catch “a glimpse” of abstract notions in the world like the concept of the natural. Brown also introduces Arjun Appadurai’s idea of “methodological fetishism,” saying, “Even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Brown 6). At first inspection, artifacts are encoded “with significance” from their “human actors” or subjects. In *2312* and *The Year of the Flood*, the cloned and genetically spliced manmade creations receive their functions from the scientists. Pigs become human organ farms and sheep provide hair for people. Cloned animals become the new wave of restoration, reshaping Earth to fit the desires of humanity. They are the objects of the human subjects and created purely with their assigned purpose. In *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn*, the human body becomes an object as others manipulate it and these actors assign the body its significance or function. In Ishiguro’s novel, the actors are other humans, or normals, who receive the organ donations from the clones. Such donations define the clones from birth to death, as the actors imparted significance to them through their creation. In Butler’s work, the actors appear as a new alien species set to use humanity’s genetics and evolutionary capabilities. In this instance, the significance comes from the aliens in that they assign humans the purpose of procreating with this new species. The actors in each of these works imposed a role or function onto their objects, or artifacts. However, a more in depth look at these artifacts reveals the illusion behind the theoretical framework and actor significance. By viewing the artifacts through a methodological point of view, they become actors in their own desires and actions. Genetically engineered beings form wilderness outside of human control and people, as

artifacts, act on emotions. The artifacts had to become “things in motion” and their own subjects in order to “illuminate” their “human and social context.” When the genetically altered or cloned beings portrayed agency in each of these novels, they revealed their separation from their human functions. They no longer depend on significance from the human subject, but rather inserted themselves as subjects in the human and social context. By acting outside of their human significance, the illusory artifacts in these novels incorporate subjectivity and the natural into their beings.

Drawing on the critical frameworks set forth by Bill Brown and Eric Katz, my readings focus on how the artifacts in these novels signal a breakdown between the natural and the manmade, subject and object, and human and nonhuman forms of agency. In the first section, I examine the artifacts, or the cloned and genetically engineered animals, of *2312* and *The Year of the Flood*. Although humans ostensibly created these creatures, Margaret Atwood’s pigeons and Kim Stanley Robinson’s restored species eventually demonstrate functions and agency outside of their original creators’ intentions. Their intrinsic functions of serving as organ commodities or wilderness restoration projects fall away to expose nonhuman, natural, and unpredictable drives. Subsequently, these novels illustrate how manmade objects such as these animals may shed their anthropocentric functions to become agents and subjects in their own right. In doing so, they become indefinable in terms of human-subject terms and embrace both the natural and the artificial. I then move to consider texts that position the human body itself as an artifact in order to collapse the distinction between what humans perceive as natural or manmade. The imagined technologies and social systems in *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn* deprive human bodies of their agency as the aforementioned novels center around societies with agendas of organ development or gene trading for evolution. Humans, supposed to be the sole creators of artifacts, become

artifacts themselves with intrinsic functions to serve society or the alien population. However, despite their removal of agency, these controlled human beings illustrate subjectivity in their perceptions. They become a strange combination of a subject and object, subsequently expanding beyond their assigned purposes to grow into the natural and beyond the artifact. The presence of agency in artifacts, from the human body to engineered animals, deconstructs the boundaries between manmade and natural entities. These novels, whether they focus their exploration on the nonhuman or the human body, all question the stability of the artifact to reveal larger, intertwined networks of the natural and artificial processes that comprise environments.

Section I: Revealing the Animal within the Artifact

In Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312*, anthropocentric creations shed their object relationship with their creators to form a new wilderness and nature. They become creatures of both artificial and manmade processes as they develop agency outside of their original intrinsic functions. While they appear to clearly fit the criteria of the artifact, the genetically engineered and cloned species form desires and actions beyond their original intentions to shape a new wilderness separate from human control. In other words, they become engineers of their own fates and cloud the border between human creations and a completely separate nature. Kim Stanley Robinson illustrates the complications behind the subject and object relationship of the artifact by introducing a world where humans clone animals to restore wilderness to Earth. Initially, the restored animals appear to be objects; they are manmade and their return to Earth emphasizes their complete dependency on humanity and lack of agency. On closer examination, however, Kim Stanley Robinson allows these animals to become individual subjects, highlighting their wild, uncontrollable nature. The restored animals may appear to be artifacts, but they have the ability to be a part of nature in their development of

subjectivity. Atwood's novel also illustrates the importance and complexity behind the definition of the artifact by integrating the artificial with the natural. *The Year of the Flood* depicts a future where gene splicing in order to create a commodity, such as a pig carrying human organs, is the norm. While she emphasizes the artificiality of her genetically engineered creations by giving them very strict human-related purposes – serving as a religious icon, being an item of leisure, or producing a product – her setting depicts a hostile environment composed entirely of said artifacts. In this new wilderness, the artifacts hunt humans regardless of their original anthropocentric purposes. They have their own desires and subjectivities, therefore complicating the distinction between the human subject and its artificial object. They may be manmade, but in these narratives, the animals develop a sense of agency and place that demonstrates the illusory nature of the artifact.

Atwood highlights the artificiality of her novel's artifacts by explaining their origin in the way scientists use genetic splicing technology to blend animal DNA with human DNA. An example of such an animal is the Mo'Hair. Atwood states, "On screen, in advertisements, their hair had been shiny – you'd see a sheep tossing its hair, then a beautiful girl tossing a mane of the same hair. More hair with Mo'Hair!" (Atwood 238). The stress on the "advertisement" of Mo'Hairs illustrates their role as a commodity and object in the economy of *The Year of the Flood*. Their creation centers on the human-oriented aim of better hair, as shown with the parallel of a "sheep tossing its hair" and "a beautiful girl tossing a mane of the same hair." They serve a very specific anthropocentric function, which aligns with Katz's idea of the artifact as having "an existence centered on human life" (Katz 392). Subsequently, it emphasizes "the fetishization of the subject" discussed by Brown in the way it portrays "a beautiful girl tossing a mane of the same hair" (Brown 7). The term "beautiful" highlights the fetish-like relationship of

the subject with the object, in that the subject becomes a higher, powerful entity with the right to control and use the artifacts. Artifacts serve as a means to further the power and beauty of their human subjects. As a result, their entire existence as an object depends on their ability to satisfy human wants.

Favoring human constructs of beauty is a key feature of a culture that designates other beings with anthropocentric purposes, consequently developing a clear distinction between the human as the powerful subject and the artifact as a weak object. The weakness of the object appears in the way scientists in *The Year of the Flood* engineered the life of the Mo’Hair specifically to satisfy a superficial market in their society. This world promotes artificial, gene-spliced life as a product, as underscored by the jingle “More hair with Mo’Hair.” The purpose of the Mo’Hair depends entirely on its role as a commodity and its ability to provide hair for people. It does not demonstrate individual agency or subjectivity, and is a purely human creation, or artifact, dependent on the whims of the idealized subjects of humanity. However, despite the Mo’Hairs origin as a clearly human commodity, the waterless flood that wipes out humanity initiates a new era beyond anthropocentric goals. Human creations evolve outside of their originally engineered function to have agency within this new environment and become subjects acting on humans. The liobam, a religious icon, turns to the wild to feed himself, and the pigeons, human organ farms, form their own communities. *The Year of the Flood* initially depicts a world of technology and commodification consisting only of artifacts, but the plague triggers an amalgamation of wild and human-engineered life in the environment that casts doubt on the artifact as an object – and therefore the strict boundary separating it from nature.

The hostile atmosphere after the waterless flood, or plague, depicts a wilderness of genetically modified creatures that develop agency and discard their human-centered roles. Such

a wilderness exhibits how artifacts may blend together with nature by shedding their original anthropocentric functions. Amanda, a character of *The Year of the Flood*, describes the dangers of this wilderness when she says, “Best to be above ground level because there’d been some strange animals around. Huge pigs, those lion/lamb species, packs of wild dogs on the prowl” (Atwood 323). By signaling that it is “best to be above ground level,” Amanda implies that the “strange animals” are dangerous. The use of the word “strange” entails a fear of the unknown and therefore the unpredictable. The animals as objects have become unintelligible to humans, who attempt to understand and define the object through the subject. Genetically engineered animals, like the Mo’Hairs, are no longer readily available to humanity for use. The character Toby pays similarly close attention to her environment, as she describes scanning the fields to make sure there are “No pigs, no Mo’Hairs, no liobams” (Atwood 366). Atwood explains Toby’s fear of the unknown when she states, “How little I’ve ever been able to see, she [Toby] thinks...She’d like to avoid going in there, among the trees. Nature may be dumb as a sack of hammers, Zeb used to say, but it’s smarter than you” (Atwood 366). Toby’s inability “to see” the forest means she would like to “avoid going in there.” She respects “nature” as “smarter” than her, and consequently seeks to stay away from its dangers of “hidden pigs and liobams” (Atwood 366). By describing the unknown forest as “nature,” Atwood indicates that this new frontier of engineered life has created a wilderness of its own. Such a view contradicts the perception of true nature as completely separate from human involvement. While the genetic manipulation of *The Year of the Flood* created unnatural and artificial human products, the wilderness resulting from the plague consists of seemingly unnatural entities, or artifacts, that turned natural. These artifacts become subjects in their domination of the wilderness, and the fear they invoke as they “prowl” and hunt humans. Where before they lacked agency in their purpose-imposed object

form, these animals adapted to their environment and are now subjects of this new nature. The artifact as an object “has been intelligible only as the alienated... part of the subject,” yet Atwood’s artifacts remove themselves from the human subject completely to be defined by their own actions (Brown 8). In other words, they become unintelligible to the human subject by removing themselves from the typical human-subject controlling artifact-object relationship. As a result, *The Year of the Flood* does not subscribe to the existence of a “pure” nature, but rather breaks down the distinction between natural and artificial in its wild through giving agency to commoditized creatures. The plague caused the artifacts, the animals, to grow from their human-oriented functions and blend into the wilderness.

Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312* also introduces a future where genetically cloned artifacts eventually integrate themselves into the wilderness and manmade objects defy human expectations to become their own actors. Earth in its current state of unrest and barren ecosystems requires a restoration. The character Wahram states, “Reform inside the paradigm of the current system on Earth is never going to be enough. That there is still, in other words, the necessity of revolution” (Robinson 393). A “resupply” of animals on Earth is the trigger for that revolution (Robinson 393). In the process of returning animal species to Earth that had been gone for centuries, they fall to the land from the sky, lacking agency and demonstrating Brown’s view of objects as part of the subject in the way human technology completely controls their reintroduction. It also emphasizes the role of technology in creating artifacts, as discussed by Katz. The animals are objects defined by humanity’s intention and desire to repopulate the animal species in the world and consequently completely artificial in their intrinsic function. According to Katz, having this function illustrates these beings in their roles of artifacts. Human subjects determine the characteristics and introduction of their creations and artifacts, controlling

completely the animals' processes. At the same time, Robinson draws attention to the animal individuals in order to demonstrate a level of agency unpredicted by the fetishized human subjects. Animals follow their own instincts, despite their original intentions, and demonstrate a level of self-preservation foreign to the human subject. Humans lose their power as their artifacts develop desires and actions beyond expectations. The restored species are examples of the artificial processes of the artifact blending with the unpredictable natural so that one is no longer distinguishable above the other.

Consequently, *2312* illustrates the key features that comprise Katz's interpretation of the artifact while also demonstrating how an artifact may discard its anthropocentric function. Initially, the reanimation of Earth through the restoration of animal and plant species appears artificial in its elaborate human involvement and clear role of human subjects. Following Katz's ideology, such a restoration cannot be natural in that it derives from the human-centric goal of improving the Earth's condition for the enjoyment of humanity. The obvious technological presence in the reanimation reveals the intricate role of people in the restoration. For instance, Robinson describes the world-changing event: "They all came down together, first in big landers protected by heat shields, then in smaller landers popping parachutes, then in exfoliating balloon bags" (Robinson 395). The encasement of the animals in "big landers," "heat shields," "popping parachutes," and "exfoliating balloon bags" exposes the artificiality of the animals' return to Earth, underscoring the technological labor necessary in order to complete the reanimation of the world. In his study of artifacts, Katz states that "the creation of artifacts" is what "technology does" and consequently "the re-created natural environment that is the end result of a restoration project is nothing more than an artifact created for human use" (Katz 392). In its essence, *2312*'s reanimation of Earth is a "re-created natural environment" that relies on technology for its

completion. The way the main characters, Swan and Wahram, began the restoration project, as well as technology's integral role in it, follows Katz's definition of the artifact. The return of animals to Earth originated from a human-oriented plan, which therefore means, according to Katz, that the project is unnatural. Additionally, the technological dependence animals have on their return to Earth emphasizes humans as actors and subjects acting upon their artifacts or objects. The animals, as objects, are at the mercy of the subjects in fulfilling their subject-imposed restoration function. Brown states, "we have always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object" (Brown 8). The technological presence demonstrates human prowess and "splendor" as the animals fall to Earth, while the animals' lack of individual motion and control in this fall illustrates the object's "poverty." The subject maintains the power as humans govern the existence of the seemingly weak animals.

However, the components of the restoration project, the animals, revolt against their human conception through their individual instincts of adaptation and preservation. Despite the use of technology, the unpredictability of the project uncovers how a human-created artifact may evolve outside of its anthropocentric goal to develop its own agency and role as a subject. The natural instincts of the animal combine with manmade development to blur the artifact and the object into new entities. By shifting from his depiction of the broader, scientific reanimation to an analysis of the specifics of animal adaptation, Kim Stanley Robinson introduces a level of unpredictability to the subject-object relationship of the restoration project. This unpredictability casts doubt on the initial human purpose of restoration and its role as an artifact. It also reveals a "splendor" found in the object, rather than the subject. If artifacts, like the animals of the restoration, may grow beyond man's intended purpose, then there may not be a clear line of division between them as human objects and the natural. When describing the main character

Swan's interactions with the wolves, Robinson highlights the volatile and wild characteristic of the wolf she faces. He states, "He [the wolf] fell back as the wet overhanging mud gave under his forepaws.... Swan reached out instinctively to help, but of course he was perfectly capable of twisting around and swimming back to the band of clay" (Robinson 405). The phrase "Swan reached out instinctively" contains two implications – one that Swan relies on a certain level of instinctual awareness herself, and two, that those instincts conflict with the instincts of the wolf. Swan is animalistic in the way she acts on her instincts, yet ignorant to the wolf's possible actions and mental and physical states. The phrase "of course" suggests Swan should have known that the wolf was "perfectly capable," yet her natural instincts told her the wolf needs her help. It conveys Swan's underestimation of the wolf's ability and her belief that the wolf requires human support to survive. Swan assumed the wolf, as an object, was in the state of "poverty" mentioned by Brown. By viewing the wolf as an object that is part of the subject, Swan removed the wolf of its agency. However, the wolf shirks Swans helping hand, "twisting around and swimming back." The action terms of "twisting" and "swimming" contradict the earlier ignorance by emphasizing the physical ability of the wolf. In this situation, the animal, though put there by humans, moves beyond his human expectations to save himself and demonstrate a sense of self-preservation. Additionally, Robinson states, "When he felt her touch he whipped around and bit her right hand, then swam desperately away. She shouted in pain and surprise" (Robinson 405). Despite Swan's intentions, the wolf "desperately" wanted to swim away from her. He showed agency when he lashed out and bit her, which Swan reacts to in "pain and surprise." The "surprise" indicates the unpredictability of the wolf's behavior, while the wolf's desperation to get away from Swan implies a sense of conflict between the animals as artifacts and their human functions. A splendor formerly reserved for the subject appears in the wolf's

ability to act and define the relationship between himself and the human. The wild quality associated with the wolf in this passage proposes that he has characteristics and agency outside of his anthropocentric function. He was a subject in his own survival, saving himself rather than relying on human-conceived notions. Katz explains, “We will construct so-called natural objects on the model of human desires, interests, and satisfactions” (Katz 392). The wolf did not act according to Swan’s “interests” and “desires,” instead seeking to handle his own existence and act in a way impossible for her to predict. Though the engineered reestablishment of life on Earth contained technological aspects and human-oriented goals, the wolf’s struggle with Swan signifies the ability for an artifact to act outside of its anthropocentric origin and reverse the subject-object relationship. Suddenly, the “splendor” of the subject appears in the animal’s ability to fend for itself, and even harm the human. It contains desires to live outside of Swan’s expectations. Scientists may have engineered the wolf and reintroduced him to Earth, but the wolf followed his own path of self-preservation. Therefore, the human-oriented intrinsic function that distinguishes engineered life from natural life may not always define a clear border between the two. The wolf may have originated as an artifact, but did not meet Katz’s requirement of modeling “human desires.” Through its portrayal of the animals, the reanimation project of *2312* demonstrates how natural processes and instincts can blend into artificial and manmade processes as the artifact forms its own sense of agency.

Each of these novels depicts a fluidity of boundaries between the subject and the object, as well as the natural and the artificial. Though initially highlighting the splendor and fetishization of the subject in order to indicate the weak and impoverished nature of the object, both authors eventually reverse the power dynamic of the human and the nonhuman. Human subjects, whether through the wilderness from the flood in *The Year of the Flood* or the innate

natural instincts of the restored wolf in *2312*, lose their power as the object gains agency and desire. Their creations become unpredictable, embracing the natural and wild outside of their original purpose to satisfy a commodity or an actor's desire. As a result, the novels question the existence of a true artifact as an object of humanity, separate from nature. Both humans and their artifacts are a part of a larger, unpredictable network of processes and actions that ignores the simple understanding of a subject and object relationship. Without the ability to define the artifact as an object through its position with the subject, humanity no longer has an intelligible understanding of what it means to be an actor or an object. The actions of both humans and their creations define their role in the larger context of humanity, society, and the environment. When the wolf defied Swan's expectations, it portrayed an instinct beyond the simplified nature of the artifact. Similarly, the way Atwood's creatures form communities and adapt to a new wilderness, one in which humans become the hunted, frees the artifact of human constraints. The inability to label something as purely natural, artificial, a subject, or an object introduces a level of fear into humanity's ability to define itself as the controlling creator and subject separate from natural processes or instincts.

Section II: Merging the Human with the Artifact

Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* further complicate the concept of the artifact by unveiling a world where humans become artifacts and embody both the subject and the object. These novels defy humanity's ability to define itself as a subject or an actor in relation to objects and nature. In doing so, humans have natural and artificial processes, as portrayed by their assigned function combined with their internal desires and agency. For instance, Ishiguro's novel depicts a world where a separation exists between normal people and cloned people. The normal people, as subjects, govern the existence and purpose of the cloned

people, as objects. Humans created artifacts out of other humans as the clones serve the intrinsic function of providing organs for their normal counterparts. At the same time, these clones demonstrate agency in their perspectives and desires outside of the reasons for their creations. As a result, the human becomes the subject and the object, the artifact and the creator. Natural instincts and artificial purposes combine in Ishiguro's clones. *Dawn* takes Ishiguro's concept a step further by demonstrating how an artifact may not even be manmade, but rather a part of a larger network of living entities. When the aliens, or Oankali, begin to inhabit the Earth, they take over the roles of subject and actor. They alter the remaining humans to fit a higher evolutionary purpose for their species, therefore removing humanity of its agency. If the aliens become the creators and perpetuators of artificiality, also known as the subject, then humans become the objective lens through which the natural appears. As artifacts, humans poorly replicate a means of existence that is now extinct due to the alien subjects. Consequently, the portrayal of the human body as an artifact and object in each of these novels questions the role of the subject in defining the natural and the artificial. Instead, the resulting environment suggests a larger, more complicated network of biological process beyond the created and the creator.

The created and creators in *Never Let Me Go* exist as determined by the assigned purposes of groups of humanity. In this novel, Ishiguro reveals children of the boarding school Hailsham to be clones. They are artifacts in that they serve as replications of people designated with the intrinsic function of providing organs. As Katz defined the artifact, they are "created for human use.... they serve a function for human life" which "is completely different from the way natural entities and species evolve to fill ecological niches" (Katz 392). According to this definition, the clones are artifacts as they "serve a function for human life." As a result, the human body "is completely different from natural entities." The function of the clones, and their

resulting separation from nature, appears in the subject and object relationship between them and their makers. The clones do not hold agency over their body or their fates, and instead become objects for the use of the normal human. In fact, the cloned children trigger fear in others, as one of the clones says of her teacher, “Madame never liked us. She’s always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things” (Ishiguro 268). First, the mention of “spiders and things” compares the cloned children to entities lacking much agency or a particularly notable standing on the hierarchy of living things. Secondly, it emphasizes Brown’s description of objects as an “alienated, accursed part of the subject” (Brown 8). The clones, as objects, appear as part of the subject in that their entire existence depends on their donations to the subject. However, they are still “alienated” and “accursed” as something to fear, such as a lowly spider. Though the artifacts in this novel are humans, their presentation as objects complicates the basic view of humans as having agency over themselves and their creations. Also, if artifacts juxtapose against the natural as Katz suggests, then there must be a distinction between the natural and the artificial human, or the altered and unaltered human. By drawing attention to the various human-contrived purposes of the human body in his novel, Kazuo Ishiguro ultimately presents a setting where artifacts do not seem to exist at all, and the natural and artificial culminate within the individuals of humanity.

Ishiguro demonstrates such a culmination, as well as the illusion of the artifact, through his narrator. Kathy, a clone, narrates her story, and in doing so adds a sense of individualism and subject perspective to the artifact. She states, “What I’m not sure about is if our lives have been so different from the lives of the people we save. We all complete. Maybe none of us really understand what we’ve lived through, or feel we’ve had enough time.” In Kathy’s environment, she and her friends are clones whose purpose in life is to reach “completion,” meaning they have

donated all of their organs and consequently died. In other words, the donors have completed their mission in life. Such a concept commoditizes the body into marketable pieces. However, Kathy doubts the reality of this divided relationship between the donors, who are the objects, and the normals, who are the subjects. Despite the good and buyer interaction between these two parties, Kathy wonders, “If our lives have been so different from the lives of the people we save.” By stating, “we save,” Kathy gives the donors agency in the act of saving the normal people. Secondly, she joins the natural, or unaltered, humans with the artificial humans in that both eventually have lives that end. The donors have no control over their purpose and become more and more unstable as they undergo continued operations. In spite of this grotesque and dystopian reality, though, Ishiguro makes sure to paint an intricate picture of the donors’ lives. They make love, they form friendships, and they even fantasize, as shown when Kathy imagines and longs for what she lost in her childhood. When her friend Tommy dies, she states, “The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was... when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to” (Ishiguro 287). This act was “indulgent” in that it demonstrated a sense of agency and desire within the clone. She wanted to drive and leave after her friend died, even though she had no assigned “real need to.” After she indulges in her sense of loss, she “turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be” (Ishiguro 288). The phrase “I was supposed to be” serves as a reminder of Kathy’s intrinsic function as a clone. It also draws attention to the agency behind her first action of driving to honor her friend. The donors live beyond the career and duties assigned to them, meaning they have functions outside of their designated ones. This implication of growing beyond societal perceptions points back to Kathy’s statement concerning the breaking down of boundaries between donors and normals. She says, “We all complete,” which is equivalent to the statement “everybody dies.” The donors may not have “enough time,”

but they live and die just like the people that they save. By equating the donors to the normals, Ishiguro removes the subject and object relationship to reexamine what determines someone or something's purpose. As with the normals, the donors have individual, natural processes in addition to their assigned, artificial ones. Kathy, as a clone and object, may not be an artifact at all, while the normal, as subjects, could be artifacts. Each human body, clone or not, may have a purpose outside of its definition as an artifact or an object. Subjects and objects blur as both contain artificial and natural processes, as well as experience removals and developments of agency.

While *Never Let Me Go* imposes a subject and object or artifact relationship between humans, *Dawn* adds another facet to the complicated artifact and architect relationship by having humans serve as objects to their alien subjects. The alien subjects alter the human body, integrating natural and artificial processes, to serve a specific function. As masters of genetic engineering, the Oankali aliens depend on genetic modification to survive. It has become a natural part of their evolution, though it remains an artificial process for the humans they now control and alter. The humans lose agency of their own bodies as the Oankali make adjustments to their physiology while they sleep. In fact, the subject and object relationship portrayed in this novel mirrors the relationships of humans and engineered animals in *2312* and *The Year of the Flood*. By turning the human into the object that is subservient to the subject instead of the embodiment of it, *Dawn* adds another layer of complexity to the subject and object relationship. As in *Never Let Me Go*, humans may take on the role of an artifact through their imposed intrinsic function, yet retain levels of subjectivity and desire outside of the subject's intentions. Additionally, it questions the distinction between the natural and artificial through the deeply ingrained methods of the new alien subjects. Humanity loses its ability to define itself and its

artifacts as separate from nature. The dynamic nature of subjectivity and agency moves from subject, the aliens, to object, the humans, in order to demonstrate the illusion behind a true artificially controlled artifact.

In her novel, Octavia Butler depicts a world where an alien race merges natural and artificial processes. When the Oankali save the almost-extinct human population for their own evolutionary gain, they explain to Lilith, a human and the main character, that, “We trade the essence of ourselves... we do what you would call genetic engineering...we do it naturally. We must do it. It renews us, enables us to survive as an evolving species” (Butler 40). According to the Oankali, their genes and genetic engineering are “the essence of ourselves.” They incorporate something seemingly artificial, such as genetic engineering, into a natural process, such as “evolving.” Such a concept disregards Katz’s perception of the artifact and the natural, as he says, “Natural individuals were not designed for a purpose” and explains that the artifact “is completely different from the way natural entities and species evolve to fill ecological niches” (Katz 392). In Butler’s setting, the aliens use engineering and partnership with other species to plan their futures and purposes. In that way, the Oankali become unnatural since they do design themselves “for a purpose” and seem to be artifacts through their juxtaposition against how “natural entities... evolve to fill ecological niches.” However, Jdahya, an alien, explains, “We must do it. It renews us.” He also uses the term “naturally,” a concept that directly contradicts Katz’s perception of evolution since it is often placed opposite the science of genetic engineering. Even though the Oankali appear to be artifacts and objects due to their seemingly artificial evolutionary practices, they remain the subjects of their own fate and determine the necessity of such practices to be natural. Their power and dependency on biological technology harken back to the “splendor” of subjects in Brown’s theory. They are not only actors of their

own fates, but also the actors and subjects of the fate of humanity. Katz's concept of the artifact becomes fluid as it appears in part through the subjects and objects.

The Oankali, as subjects, use their version of evolutionary "gene-trade" engineering at a molecular level to both change the body and the environment of humanity, as an object. In doing so, they not only incorporate natural and artificial processes, but also remove humanity of its agency and subjectivity. First, the Oankali take control of Lilith's body, saying, "You are slightly changed. It was done while you slept" (Butler 98). Humanity had no choice concerning the alterations to their own genes, as illustrated by "it was done while you slept." As a result, the aliens have changed humanity's sense of being by having power over people's basic bodily functions. Lilith's own cells have become foreign to her – they are not her own and she has no agency or control over her body's new purpose. The Oankali are designing her for their needs of genetic integration with the human species. Lilith expresses a fear of losing agency when she tells Jdahya that the idea of people doing things to her body that she does not understand scares her, which includes the various gene manipulations the Oankali performed to make humans healthier. Bill Brown states, "We look through objects to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture – above all, what they disclose about us, but we only catch a glimpse of things" (Brown 4). Lilith, as now the object, feels a separation from her understanding of "history, society, nature, or culture" and most of all herself. While before humans used artifacts to see "what they disclose," Lilith has become a limited window on a society for new subjects. While genetic manipulation seems artificial and repulsive to Lilith, her role as an object indicates how evolution and betterment through genetic manipulation serves as the natural order for the Oankali. In fact, it is even necessary for the Oankali's survival. Additionally, the Oankali as the subject uses Lilith as an object to develop a new perception of history, society, nature, etc. They

interpret the purpose and existence of Earth in a different way, using their roles as subjects to alter it to fit their perceptions. Even though Jdahya says, “Your Earth is still your Earth,” he also explains that, “Between the efforts of your people to destroy it and ours to restore it, it has changed” (Butler 33-34). Their restoration of Earth positions the Oankali as the new interpreters and perpetuators of their belief on the natural. They only achieve a glimpse of the old environment through their adjustments and objects, instead focusing on tailoring the new restorations to Oankali needs. Katz explains, “We will construct so-called natural objects on the model of human desires, interests, and satisfactions” (Katz 392). In Butler’s world, the “so-called natural objects” or artifacts model the “desires, interests, and satisfactions” of the Oankali. Humans and their Earth have become the new “so-called natural objects,” also known as artifacts, dependent on the perceptions of the subject.

Despite the Oankali’s attempts to reduce human lives to objects, Lilith asserts her agency in resistance. Lilith does not agree with the Oankali and questions their desires and perceptions for her. For instance, Lilith responds to the aliens’ restoration of the Earth by thinking, “The world she had known was dead,” and telling Jdahya, “You destroyed what wasn’t yours” (Butler 34). While Jdahya uses the term “restore” to define how his species altered humanity’s environment, Lilith views what they did as destructive. On one hand, her removal from subjectivity manifests in the statement “you destroyed what wasn’t yours.” It implies first that Earth was hers when she was the subject and that now it no longer exists. She lost her sense of agency over the matter. On the other hand, by retaining a sense of ownership over “the world she had known,” Lilith does not mold completely into her role as an artifact. She still has individual thoughts and feelings of subjectivity outside of her function with the Oankali. Bill Brown explains that in “a theoretical point of view, human actors encode things with significance”

(Brown 6). In this case, the actors are not human, but rather the Oankali that “encode things with significance.” Theoretically, they determine the significance of objects through the intrinsic function they assign to them. At the same time, Brown also states, “from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Brown 6).

Despite the Oankali’s intentions, Lilith is a “thing-in-motion” in that her actions and thoughts might not necessarily line up with the overall evolutionary goals of the alien species. For example, even when impregnated with the alien species, Lilith holds out hope for the overall future of humankind. She says, “Perhaps the Oankali were not perfect. A few fertile people might slip through and find one another. Perhaps. Learn and run! If she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be” (Butler 248). Through her hopes, Lilith positions humanity as still having agency and the ability to become more than lost. “People might slip through” the careful constraints of the Oankali and show subjectivity in their desire to preserve the species. Lilith may feel that “she is lost,” but she demonstrates agency in her want to “learn and run” and help humanity survive. The alien species do not completely define humanity’s existence, as Lilith still has motive beyond the procreation of the Oankali species. The intrinsic function imparted to her by the aliens does not remove another internal function – the function to preserve humanity. She serves a role beyond that of the alien’s artifact, and instead encompasses a sense of agency combining natural instincts with artificial purposes. Butler’s novel substitutes the alien “Oankali” for the “human,” placing the human Lilith in the position occupied in our own culture by animals and other artifacts.

Through their development of the human artifact, *Never Let Me Go* and *Dawn* portray the illusion behind labeling artifacts, subjects, the artificial, and the natural. Humans may just as easily slip into the role of the artifact as they will remain the subject. Kathy represents the

essence of the artifact in that the origin of her creation depends on her ability to provide organs for the normal people. Her role as a narrator where she feels remorse and loss, though, indicates that she has subjectivity beyond fulfilling an intrinsic function. She has both natural urges and artificial purposes. The normal people attempt to emphasize the splendor of the subject, them, and the poverty of the object, Kathy. However, Kathy serves as an equalizer, comparing her destiny to the destinies of all people. Subjects and objects, artifacts and architects, are all a part of the same network and fluctuate depending on agency and action. They integrate natural and artificial process as artifacts, humans, shed their intrinsic functions to act on their own desires. Lilith appears in a similar role as Kathy, except that all humans in this world have lost any sense of splendor as the subject. The fetishization belongs to the alien species as they determine the future of their human artifacts. This does not change Lilith's desires to preserve humanity as a species, though, which suggests a natural state of being human. Additionally, she defies the intended functions of the subject with her hopes and attempt to act by helping the human colonies. She does have an agency of her own, despite the now artificiality of her body as a human. The artifact, whether human or human-created, does not discriminate between objects and subjects. Instead, the dynamic nature of the object and subject relationship within the human body and outside of it depicts an interflow of processes beyond simplistic labels of natural and artificial.

Conclusion

Each of these novels depicts an artifact, an object with a human or subject oriented purpose, in futures determined by genetic engineering and cloning. Whether human, animal, manmade, or alien-created, the object begins with an intrinsic function and purpose set forth to it by the subject. *Never Let Me Go* explains, "If you're to live decent lives, you have to know who

you are and what lies ahead of you” (Ishiguro 81). Identity and contentment with said identity depends on the ability to label one’s purpose in life. This defines the nature of the subject and object relationship according to Bill Brown, as the actor uses its own power to emphasize the poverty of the other. When these roles blend together, the object loses its intelligibility and comprehension according to the subject. It becomes a new entity, a “pig-ridden forest” for instance (Atwood 165). In this way, the artifacts in the four novels developed agency in order to form a new entity integrating artificial and natural process. Animals formed wildernesses and showed action, clones portrayed emotions and desires, and genetically modified humans planned for a future of their own. The ability of the artifact to shed its original intrinsic purpose calls into question the definition of the artifact as opposite of nature and a being defined by the creator’s intentions. The significance imparted to the object by the actor does not truly reveal the artifact’s role in a larger context. Instead, that role appears when the artifact undergoes a transformation of agency and desires on its own as a thing-in-motion, such as Lilith’s actions as a teacher and potential leader for humanity. She states, “She would have more information for them this time... Perhaps they could find an answer to what the Oankali had done to them.” It may be the case that all of the subjects and objects are artifacts in that they fulfill some deep, intrinsic purpose, or it could also be that nothing is truly an artifact as everything sheds their original intentions. None of the artifacts in these futuristic novels remains an entity either separate from the natural or separate from the artificial. The interflow and integration of subjectivity and objectivity in natural and artificial beings indicates a larger network and system of existence, in other words, “a shift in the spinning of the great merry-go-round” as power continually rotates (Robinson 552). The exploitation of labels to identify the actor and the agent, humanity and the natural stems from the delusion of separation. Through the fluidity of their subject and object

relationships with the artifact, these novels unveil the complexity behind the artificial and natural within the artifact and its role in humanity and the environment.

“All Creatures know that some must die

That all the rest may take and eat;

Sooner or later, all transform

Their blood to wine, their flesh to meat.”

(Atwood 427)

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