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RESONATING OTHERNESS: RETHINKING THE BODY THROUGH OCTAVIA

BUTLER'S *DAWN*

By

Tristan DeWitt Carr

B.A., University of Louisville, 2018

M.A., University of Louisville, 2021

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

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A Thesis Approved on

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on the intersection between sound and bodies as a way of re-envision the concept of human, using Octavia Butler's *Dawn* as a case study. Specifically, this study contends that Butler's re-envisioning is sonic, imagining the concept of self as it is understood by Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the "resonant subject," in that sound embroils us within our environment. This sonic, resonant body is revealed in *Dawn* through Butler's adaption of Roland Barthes' concept of "grain," which is not merely embodied sound, but the result of *artifice* – a carefully crafted "slip" that allows for a way of thinking outside of culture. By rethinking the place of artifice within our understanding of sound and the voice, Butler is able to exceed simple symbolic signification, revealing sound as a crease in perception that allows for an entangled way of being.

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LISTENING AS AN ENTANGLED WAY OF BEING:
AN INTRODUCTION

Crucial to ecofeminist writing is the rescripting of the interrelationships between humans, non-human species, and the environment. To counteract hierarchical categorizations that reinforce the idea that nature is passive and mute, prominent ecofeminist scholars propose the practice of listening as an active recognition of the different ways in which nature can speak to us. Greta Gaard, a scholar and proponent of the ecofeminist practice of listening, argues that listening is “a way of knowing” that recognizes the how rationalist ideologies centered on power and knowledge work to reinforce binaries that place speaking over listening, ultimately making us oblivious to the ways that non-human earthothers can communicate to us “through images of feelings rather than words” (*Critical Ecofeminism* xviii, xxi). Gaard suggests that this non-verbal communication between humans and non-humans can take many forms, such as in the ways “earthothers continue to send messages about their experiences through the air and through their behaviors, their flourishing or languishing, and their toxicity and demise” (*Critical Ecofeminism* xx). As Gaard indicates, actively listening to the environment has little to do with words or knowing—instead, listening is about being receptive and recognizing the value of sound beyond language.

To inform her practice of listening, Gaard draws from ecofeminists Val Plumwood and Deborah Rose Bird, who both propose listening as a transformative,

collaborative experience. In advocating for a dialogue between humans and the environment, Bird explores how pervading Western notions of the self-contained and individualized body attempt to conceal its permeability, which renders us separate and distinct from the environment (312-313). To challenge these notions, Bird suggests that a recognition of our permeability can place us in conversation with the environment, as permeability “reconfigures dialogue to include place,” giving a voice to the wordless, yet sounded qualities of nature. Furthermore, in advocating for a recognition of the innate intelligence of nature, Plumwood contends that writing help us think differently about the environment by fighting these passive characterizations. In challenging these notions, Plumwood asserts that understanding nature as intelligent is “a matter of being open to experiences of nature as powerful, agentic and creative, making space in our culture for an animating sensibility and vocabulary” (10). Similar to Bird, Plumwood advocate for an expansion of what constitutes voice and meaning, drawing attention to the limitations of our language to express the vitality of nature. As these ecofeminist scholars indicate, listening subverts the power associated with voice, instead finding potential in the communicative potential of sound within the environment. By calling attention to this non-verbal, sonorous form of communication between humans and non-humans, ecofeminist scholars challenge us to listen beyond words and language and instead become attuned to sounds and resonances.

This move towards listening, focused on the vocality of the voice and the resonance of sounds, is also a key idea in sound studies. Instead of focusing on what is being said, scholars of sound studies propose listening to the materiality or reverberations of sounds as producers and conveyors of meaning. As French philosopher Jean Luc

Nancy claims in his work on listening, “when one truly listens” they are attempting to “capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message,” bringing prominence to the qualities of sound itself as it works to exceed or expand the message (5). Sound studies, then, promotes listening as way to challenge binaries that prioritizes knowing over perceiving, bringing attention to what is often tuned out or overheard when we are only focused on the meaning of sounds. Furthermore, this type of listening can enable sounds to disrupt relationships between humans and our surroundings. Brandon LaBelle, a prominent theorist of sound and performance studies, suggests that the “flow and force of particular tonalities and musics, silences and noises may transgress certain partitions and borders, expanding the agentic possibilities of the uncounted and the underheard” (*Sonic Agency* 2). Thus, by focusing on frequently unnoticed features of sound, LaBelle gives agency to noises that are often regarded as impassive or meaningless, providing a way to listening to the environment as a site of meaning and communication.

However, very little scholarly work has examined how these different ideas of “listening” speak to one another. This thesis picks up on the intersection between sound studies and ecofeminism within Octavia Butler’s canonical science fiction novel, *Dawn*, to examine how sound structures our relationship to our self and others, as well as how sound functions as a subversive force that disrupts binaries between the heard and the unheard. By placing ecofeminism, sound studies, and the science fiction genre in conversation with one another, sound becomes a central force with which we can begin to envision an entangled way of being that promotes interspecies communication.

Butler’s use of sound works to refigure not only the relationship of the body to the self, but the relationship of the body to the environment. The concept of a discrete body

that is separate from the surrounding environment is based in Cartesian dualism. This binary opposition has been challenged by both feminists and environmentalists alike, who instead push for a model of radical entanglement. As a prominent author of environmental speculative fiction, Octavia Butler's work attempts to re-envision the concept of the human by estranging the idea of a discrete body in favor of a permeable, trans-human body. This paper argues that her re-envisioning is sonic, and that her novel reimagines the concept of self as it is understood by Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the "resonant subject." Sound, Nancy suggests, embroils us within our environment. This sonic, resonant body is revealed in *Dawn* through Butler's adaption of Roland Barthes' concept of "grain," which is not merely embodied sound, but the result of *artifice* – a carefully crafted "slip" that allows for a way of thinking outside of culture. By rethinking the place of artifice within our understanding of sound and the body, Butler is able to exceed simple symbolic signification, revealing sound as a crease in perception that allows for an entangled way of being.

Ecofeminism and the Ecological Body

The climate crisis of today has become a central focus for many feminist scholars, as they challenge the cultural values that have led to the extreme degradation of the planet. Primary among these cultural values is the mind/body split, which prioritizes human logic and reasoning, disregarding the body as a site of knowledge. This opposition has produced a series of hierarchical binaries in which women, nature, and the sensorial are relegated to the same inferior position as the body, resulting in damaging impacts on the treatment of both women and the environment. In response to these binaries, French feminist Hélène Cixous reasserted the woman/nature comparison, encouraging women to

reclaim their connection with their bodies, “Women haven’t gone exploring in their house. Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven’t dared enjoy, have been colonized” (68). Cixous’ concept of a non-binary mode of being is tied to the body in a way that Cartesian dualism does not allow; the body does not simply house the soul but is entangled with it. Cixous’ recentering of the body rejects patriarchal hierarchies, thus allowing for new, feminist ways of communication and representation.

Similarly, ecofeminists identify the distancing between minds, bodies, and the environment as one of the primary causes of sexism and environmental degradation. One of the forerunners of the ecofeminist movement, Françoise d'Eaubonne, suggests that “these two discoveries, the mastering on fertility and impregnation . . . are nowadays *directly* connected with the origin of the two ecological disasters threatening our species: *overcrowding* and *exhaustion of the resources*” (176). Significantly, d’Eaubonne is not merely connecting the female body with nature but suggesting that alienation and control over the female body correlates with the way we conceptualize the environment. Ecofeminists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva further suggest that increasing technology and machinery not only serve as a “distancing weapon” that promotes mastery over nature and female bodies, but it results in even further distancing between men and their own material bodies (137). As d’Eaubonne, Mies, and Shiva suggest, our faith in Cartesian dualism is actually strengthening with the growth of technology. The continual incline in technological advances and environmental degradation situate the science fiction genre as a particularly viable site for ecofeminist activism, while also providing a unique angle to examine the interactions between bodies, technology, and the environment.

One means with which ecofeminists and environmentalists have sought to challenge the increasing distance between bodies and the environment is through a theory of radical entanglement. Feminist theorist Karen Barad defines entanglement as “intra-actions” within phenomena that reveal the inherent inseparability between human and non-human forms (125). Intra-actions, Barad proposes, challenge our conception of individual entities by revealing how we come into being through relationships with our environment (125). Thus, intra-active entanglements do not simply challenge the mind/body binary but suggest an “agential cut” that reconsiders the relationship between subject and object. Instead of considering subjects and objects as individual parts of a dualistic relationship, Barad proposes them as just temporary separations within an unfolding phenomenon (125). This distinction reveals traditional notions of agency as a form of boundary making, often prioritizing humans as the creators and definers of human and non-human boundaries. Barad challenges this assumption, insisting that agency always resides within both the subject and the object, reinforcing the idea that cuts are temporary and continually changing. Entanglement therefore displaces the role of the subject as actor, revealing the subject as part of an ongoing process, not a distinct, separable entity. Barad’s concept of entanglement not only makes room for human and non-human exchanges but allows us to reconceptualize the boundaries we place around sound. Within intra-actions, sound becomes an agentic force of its own, refiguring and creating relationships between actors. Sound, then, doesn’t displace the body, but allows it to reverberate with the environment.

As a science fiction writer invested in environmentalism, Octavia Butler’s work is rooted in ecofeminist themes, focusing on the relationships between bodies, technology,

and the environment. However, Butler's work is more than just ecopolitical commentary; it also attempts to re-envision the body as a site of sonic agency. To do this, Butler picks up on Cixous' call for a feminine practice of writing. In her famous 1986 essay, "Sorties," Cixous claims, "Woman must write her body," which is her entreaty to regain the interconnectivity that has been lost between our bodies and our minds (94). Cixous ties this interconnectivity to voice, as she insists that feminine writing and speaking is always "slashing the exchange value" of discourse through the corporeal excess of voice (93). By resisting exchange value, Cixous is advocating for a feminist writing that does not merely replicate patriarchal modes of communication but recognizes the instrumentality of sound. For Cixous, voice reverberates – it is affecting and effusing, it bursts and exclaims (93-94). Within ecofeminism, the act of listening allows voice and sound to escape patriarchal hierarchies, as the focus shifts from domination to collaboration. Listening allows us to "take a longer look view and to recognize the animacy of our earth companions" (Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* xxi). This listening relationship is based in both understanding our own materiality and recognizing what is conveyed through sound apart from just words.

Sound and Rethinking the Subject

Though sound features heavily in ecofeminist scholarship, two important theorists of sound studies have not been taken up specifically within an environmentalist framework – Jean-Luc Nancy and Roland Barthes. Both Nancy and Barthes see sound as transgressive in the sense that it displaces and moves beyond cultural boundaries of meaning. To listen beyond meaning is to act against domination; entanglements are able to emerge once distinctions between human and non-human no longer "assume some

prior notion of the ‘human,’” meaning that humans no longer figure at the center of boundary making (Barad 124). Rather, boundaries are continually evolving without human involvement and continue to act upon us. What is at stake here is a matter of perception – when humans place themselves at the center of boundary making, they lose the ability to sense how the environment is working upon them. Nancy challenges this lack of perception through his focus on sound and listening. Nancy claims, “To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity” (7). Hence, when we listen to “what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of instrument, even from the wind in the branches” we are recognizing how we, as humans, reverberate within the environment and how the environment reverberates within us (Nancy 22.)

Barthes’ concept of sound similarly challenges us to think beyond meaning and culture, locating significance where the “voice bears along *directly* the symbolic, over the intelligible, the expressive” (182). For Barthes, the significance of voice and sound cannot be found in pre-established meaning, but through the materiality of sound and how this materiality alters perception and communication. Crucially, the materiality of sound causes a reaction within the listener, conveying meaning through the body that is not systematized through language. Considering both Nancy and Barthes within an ecofeminist framework provides a way to envisage the intra-active agency of sound as it moves through bodies and environments in literary texts.

In *Listening*, Nancy displaces sound from signification by challenging dualistic conceptions that position meaning as fixed and assert the subject as an objective enforcer of significance. Instead, Nancy posits the subject as enmeshed within in a network of

meaning, continually sending, receiving, and changing. As Nancy suggests “sound is what places its subject, which has not preceded it with intention . . . in tension, or under tension” (20). As with Barad’s intra-activity, Nancy’s theory of listening does not place the subject at the center of meaning but suggests that it receives meaning through the resonance between subject and object, human and non-human. A subject is also not fixed, but continually transforming through sound – “When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something (itself) that identifies *itself* by resonating from self to self, in itself and for itself, hence outside of itself, at once the same as and other than itself, one in the echo of the other (9). In other words: a subject receives meaning through its resonance with others, showing how sound works to establish a subjectivity that is tied to both the body and the surrounding environment.

This project identifies sonic resonance as the center of the intra-actions of *Dawn*. At the novel’s beginning, Lilith’s perception of the word ‘subject’ has a conventional Cartesian connotation—something or someone that has a static, fixed meaning—as Lilith understands her humanity in opposition to the Oankali. However, once Lilith has been genetically altered by the Oankali, her use of the word becomes more collaborative. When Lilith is tasked to awaken fellow humans, she is given an image, or more accurately an impression, of what she refers to as “subjects” (Butler 125). It is understood that these impressions are created first by listening to the subjects and then by transmitting these observations into a painting. In this sense, the paintings are a collaboration between the humans and Oankali, refracting and changing shape as it echoes from subject to subject, ultimately positioning Lilith within the ongoing evolution of the subject. Thus, the subject is never static; instead, the resonant subject is “an

intensive spacing of a rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self” (Nancy 21). For Nancy, subjectivity is tied to the sonorous, and through listening humans become more attuned to the multiplicity of identity as it is established through sound.

In its treatment of *Dawn*, this thesis is not simply making sense of Butler’s use of sound, but, as Nancy denotes, examining how “sound, resonance, is also looked for in sense” (7). One way to think through this is by way of Roland Barthes’ concept of the “grain of the voice.” For Barthes, the grain of the voice is material and embodied, it is “the space where significations germinate from within language and in its very materiality; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feeling), expression” (182). Since it is outside of communication, the grain has the capacity to subvert cultural, economic, and aesthetic functions. When we are listening for the grain, we are searching for a fissure or crease between what was intended and “where melody explores how the language works” (Barthes 182). Listening for the grain is going beyond sense to explore what sound itself is doing within language and perception. Both Nancy and Barthes are separating sound from simple signification and it is through the materiality of the voice that sound is able to defy signification. This is due to the way sound reverberates both inside and outside the self and between bodies – it causes us to recognize our own material and sonorous excess.

Within *Dawn*, the resonant body is distinctly tied to Lilith—through listening, she is able to reverberate with her surroundings and forge a collaboration between the sensorial, Oankali body and the material, resonant human body. We see the potential of this collaborative type of communication when Lilith asks Nikanj to share its emotions

with her, noticing how the Oankali “could give each other whole experiences, then discuss the experience in nonverbal conversation” (Butler 237). Lilith remarks how this type of communication cannot be put into words as it is a “totally alien, unique, nameless thing, half seen, half felt or . . . tasted. A blaze of something frightening, yet overwhelmingly, compelling” (Butler 225). Therefore, the resonant body is not only a body attuned to the communicative potential of the senses but is frightening in that it defies the limitations of experience as understood through language. Instead, the senses speak to and through one another, making the body more attuned to itself and the surrounding environment.

Through her communication with Nikanj, Lilith exposes how logocentric, language focused communication delimits our experiences by disregarding perceptions that cannot be put into words. This tension between language and perception is closely tied Barthes’ concept of the ‘grain.’ For Barthes, the grain is a carefully crafted “slip” that allows for a way of thinking outside of culture. The artifice, or craftsmanship of language, is what allows it to transcend meaning - one must understand what language is capable of in order to create “slips” in meaning. From this understanding of artifice, it becomes evident that listening is not simply locating where sound and sense collide, but where sound reveals something about sense; this is located in artifice, which opens up the potentiality of meaning by deflecting closed signification. Lilith’s ability to communicate with both humans and the Oankali allows her to make slips between what is heard and unheard, and what is human and non-human, revealing fractures within communication. By examining and comparing the different bodies represented within *Dawn* - the human body, the Oankali body, and Lilith’s hybrid body - this project argues that it is the hybrid

body that coincides best with Nancy's concept of the "resonant body" and Barthes' concept of "artifice," which allows us to conceptualize how sound can be used to foster entanglement between humans and the environment.

Science Fiction and Ecofeminism

Science fiction writing, in particular, makes the ecofeminist method of listening more impactful because it forces readers into a situation where the environment is unfamiliar and unknown. These types of environments demand listening by making strange what we think we know. This technique, which science fiction scholar Darko Suvin calls cognitive estrangement, is one of the potentially transformational aspects of science fiction writing, as it allows us to explore uncertainties and tensions regarding the future and work through potential possibilities and outcomes. Environmentalist scholar Eric C. Otto further explores the potential of estrangement in science fiction, claiming, "When estrangement and cognition interact, however, we are encouraged to assess the *novum* and consider its origins or conditions of existence. What it is? Why is it there? How did it come to be?" (8). As Otto suggests, estrangement does more than create a futuristic, fantasy world, but forces readers to question the potential actions that led to this strange environment, which often promotes critical reflection on the present, as well.

In ecofeminist science fiction, what is "estranged" is the patriarchal thinking that works through binaries that subjugate both women and the environment (Otto 74). By disrupting this cognitive system, ecofeminist science fiction writing can speculate on alternative, non-binary ways of being that in turn enables us to question the ways that the human is defined. For Butler, this different way of being involves inter-species communication and reproduction that fundamentally alter the notion of a discrete human

being. Yet, Butler resists declaring any definitive solution. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine the interconnected relationship between bodies and the environment that is illustrated in *Dawn* and what this means for current notions of what it means to be human.

Science fiction writing estranges, but it also *activates* the reader through its ability to promote identification and engagement. Ecofeminist scholars find that environmentalist literature can speak to broader audiences than theory or research alone, calling for an expansion of what counts as meaningful sites of information. In calling for an expansion of what constitutes environmentalist data, Gaard suggests that “the omission of poetry and literature as data constitutes a kind of elitism that may be classist or racist” and instead suggests that literature can promote, “communication across the boundaries of difference within ecofeminism—differences that include disciplinary and theoretical approaches, as well as race, class, nationality, or other differences of identity” (*Literary Criticism* 2, 5). Thus, environmental and science fiction literature can promote conversations about the environment and between species that logocentric, data-driven studies cannot. Furthermore, literature can inspire and motivate, as well as provoke or calm fears about the future, maintaining an ambiguous position that Butler uses to explore what it means to be human.

In his article focusing on the role of literature in promoting environmental awareness in students, scholar Richard Beach finds that environmental literature is exceptionally powerful in that it can provoke “emotions of anxiety, fear, and despair associated with imagining the adverse effects of climate change, along with alternative emotions of love of nature and optimism associated with potential efforts of mitigation

and adaption for life in the future” (9). Through this ambiguity, literature does not just simply convey information but allows readers to experience their own feelings of uncertainty along with the transformative nature of listening outside of the self and connecting with the environment and non-human species. Because science fiction often addresses obscure or frightening concepts about the future of our planet and the future of humanity, Butler is able to use the genre to influence readers to confront their own uncertainties towards humanity and the boundaries we place around what constitutes a human, revealing how tenuous these boundaries can become when confronted with a new, sensorial way of thinking.

Chapter Overviews

This project attempts to take the ecofeminist concept of listening, as an embodied experience that can help us reconnect with the environment and incorporate into it the ideas of resonance and sound as they are theorized by Nancy and Barthes. By examining the ways sound breaks down boundaries and binaries, this study will promote a new understanding of subjectivity as it is created through sound, in which subjectivity is corporeal, rebounding, and inseparable from the surrounding environment. Furthermore, it will examine where sound and culture intersect in order to identify places where artifice, or craftsmanship, exists as a form of meaning making within language. Once we are able to recognize this artifice, it becomes possible to listen beyond cultural value and recognize sounds themselves as sources of meaning, giving voices to the often unheard yet essential presence of the environment. Ultimately, this project will reveal the concept of resonant sound as central to understanding Butler’s entangled way of being.

The first chapter identifies the motif of listening within *Dawn*, revealing how Lilith is able to relate to her environment sonically, making her more receptive to the Oankali and their entangled way of existing within the environment. I draw on both ecofeminism and sound studies to develop a concept of listening that attempts to hear beyond language in order to expand what it means to have a voice, ultimately broadening who is able to speak and be heard. Through the works of Greta Gaard and Val Plumwood, I examine what is meant to listen beyond the voice in an ecofeminist context, endowing the non-human world as a site of agency. Furthermore, I incorporate Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of listening as it relates to sound studies in order to examine how sound can break down boundaries between individuals and the surrounding environment, suggesting that sound has the potential to expand meaning beyond language. By understating the ways in which listening can fundamentally alter our relationship to the environment, dismantling hierarchies that determine what sounds have value and what can be heard, it becomes apparent that the Oankali chose Lilith because of her ability to listen and collaborate.

To further understand what sets Lilith apart from the other humans, the second chapter explores the sonic hierarchies established in *Dawn*, examining the ways in which humans come to understand their environment and themselves through sound. This chapter examines how communication play an integral role in the creation of a sonic resonant body. Yet, the Oankali fail to understand the significance of the voice as a source of human agency and sociality, using silence as a tactic of control against the humans, which ultimately reinscribes a hierarchy that turns the humans against the Oankali. I begin with the works of Nancy and sound studies theorist, Brandon LaBelle,

tracing how sound allows us to engage with our surroundings. In particular, I examine LaBelle's emphasis on the mouth as the source of friction between sound and language, looking at how the materiality of the voice attunes us to the sociality of speech. I then examine the Oankali's use of silence in terms of musicologist Ana María Ochoa Gautier's theory on the weaponizing of silence and control over sound. By examining the use of sound and voice throughout *Dawn*, sound becomes a source of division between the humans and the Oankali, ultimately interfering with their ability to listen to one another.

However, the third chapter problematizes this notion of the voice as a site of agency, suggesting that thinking of the voice as a source of self-preservation and authority reinscribes patriarchal values and instead attempts to consider what it means to listen beyond language and to the materiality of voice itself. This chapter begins by drawing upon the work of feminist scholars Annette Schlichter and Adriana Cavarero, who attempt to move away from a logocentric understanding of the voice, as logocentrism reduces any sounds outside of speech to meaninglessness. Instead, both scholars draw attention to the materiality and sounded features of the voice as important sites of meaning, providing a way of listening to non-human voices as they communicate through sounds. However, as ecofeminist scholars Charlene Spretnak and Deborah Rose Bird propose, moving away from a logocentric understanding of the voice, in order to make space for sounds to communicate, means giving up the voice as a source of individual identity. To move away from individualistic notions of the voice, I examine ecocritic Patrick Murphy's notion of "speaking subjects" to trace the ways in which voice and sound communicate outside of language within *Dawn*. I further incorporate

feminist theorist Karen Barad's concept of "intra-actions," which is the way we come into being through interactions with our environment, placing sound at the center of these intra-active relationships. By giving meaning to the non-logocentric features of the voice, we begin to see sounds that were previously inaudible to Lilith reverberate within her as intra-active forces.

To conceptualize of this tension between language and the voice, the fourth chapter examines the notion of artifice as it arises within Barthes' concept of the "grain of the voice," suggesting that it is the constructed nature of language and the voice itself that allow us to glimpse a way of listening outside of culture and meaning, giving voice to the way sounds speak to and through us. Because of Lilith's innate inconsistencies throughout *Dawn*, it becomes possible to understand Lilith in terms of Nancy's "resonant subject," which is a subject that is continually evolving as it reverberates with its surroundings, displacing the idea of the fixed, static subject. To conceive of this evolving subject, I draw on Roland Barthes concept of the "grain," which explores how language and sound work together as a way to think outside of culturally or linguistically embedded meanings. Through identifying the "grain" of a voice, I bring attention to the artifice of language itself, which is how the voice is encoded within a series of rehearsals that establish it within language. To uncover this artifice, I propose that Butler attempts to draw attention to the constructed nature of the voice by dislocating the voice away from the body, revealing the voice as a device that works to govern and reinscribe culturally sanctioned meaning. Butler achieves this through what sound theorists call the "acousmatic voice," or a voice dislocated from the body, which both Brandon LaBelle and Mladen Dolar take up as an important way of theorizing of the voice. Therefore, the acousmatic

voice draws attention to the ambivalent nature with which we classify and understand voice, which allows us to question the voice as a source of autonomy and expand conceptions of what constitutes a voice. Taken together, these chapters illustrate how *Dawn* is employing a new way of listening that looks at how the voice resonates as a source of meaning, conveying meaning outside and even contrary to what is said. Thus, sound is refigured as central to understanding how relationships are structured and function within a text.

CHAPTER 1

DAWN AND THE LISTENING SUBJECT

In the opening of his book *Listening*, philosopher and sound scholar Jean-Luc Nancy posits the question: “What secret is yielded—hence also made public—when we listen to a voice, an instrument, or a sound just for itself” (5). This chapter places listening at the center of Lilith’s Awakening in *Dawn*, situating sound, as opposed to sight, as the way Lilith comes to understand her relationship to the environment and the Oankali. I begin by drawing on an essay from sound and performance scholar, Deborah Kapchan, about the relationship between the body and sound to illustrate how Lilith’s Awakening is experienced sonically. I then draw on the works of prominent ecofeminists Greta Gaard and Val Plumwood to examine how Lilith’s sonic Awakening is illustrative of the ecofeminist concept of listening, which places an emphasis on sounds and perceptions, as opposed to language, as a way of allowing non-human entities to have a voice and communicate with us. Furthermore, I also draw on Jean-Luc’s Nancy’s theory of listening, which attempts to draw significance away from understanding and towards the potential meanings of sounds beyond language, to demonstrate how Lilith’s attention to sound resists hierarchies that determine who is allowed to have a voice. By letting go of speech and permitting herself to listen, Lilith’s experience during her Awakening fundamentally alters how she relates to the Oankali, which sets her apart from the other humans in *Dawn* and gives us a glimpse of what voices can be made public when we listen for sound itself.

When we first enter *Dawn*, we are awakened within the subjectivity of Lilith Iyapo, who is to become the “mother” of the first group of humans to reenter Earth after nuclear holocaust (110). Within the first few lines, we are told, “At an earlier Awakening, she had decided that reality was whatever happened, whatever she perceived” (3). Here, Butler sets us up for a journey of perception – we are to occupy the senses of Lilith as she comes to understand her surroundings, the Oankali, an alien species that has taken the last remaining humans as captives on their spaceship, and the humans she is to awaken. However, Butler gives us a crucial hint early on that the sonorous will become a significant sense by which Lilith comes to know herself and, ultimately, how she is to teach and learn from the Oankali.

That Butler names the first section of *Dawn* “Womb” is not just to symbolize a rebirth, but a sonorous rebirth. In her essay from *Keywords in Sound*, Deborah Kapchan explores how our first experience as a human, our first experience of subjectivity, emerges from sound. Kapchan claims, “The body wakes to the sounds of the body” (33). In the opening we see Lilith experience this sonorous awakening. Before Lilith even examines her environment, she recognizes herself awakening through the distinct sounds of her body – “Lilith Iyapo lay gasping, shaking with the force of her effort. Her heart beat too fast, too loud. She curled around it, fetal, helpless. Circulation began to return to her arms and legs in flurries of minute, exquisite pain” (3). Notably, Lilith’s first experience upon her Awakening is a gasping, an attempt to take in the surrounding environment as she tries to locate herself and her body. As Kapchan states, the breath is “The ether connecting inner and outer,” making Lilith’s first gasps symbolic of her emergence into an unfamiliar environment. The embryonic nature of her return to

subjectivity, particularly through the relation of her body to a fetus, suggests that Lilith comes to recognize herself as a “sound body,” a body materializing within a resounding environment (Kapchan 34). For Kapchan, the emergence from the womb allows us to recognize ourselves as, “separate but connected in sound in sensation” (33). For Lilith to awaken this way suggests an intersubjectivity between herself and her environment that is established through sound.

Lilith’s response to her environment as a sonic, resonant experiment can be seen in the beginning of *Dawn* when she picks up the first piece of cloth she has been given since her capture. Upon touching the fabric, Lilith observes that it is an “exquisitely soft material that made her think of silk, through for no reason she could have stated, she did not think this was silk” (Butler 4). Though Lilith had yet to meet an Oankali, her perceptive apparatus had told her that there was something unusual about what she was feeling. Lilith’s experience with the material allows us to realize that there is something about her environment that she had not yet allowed herself to utter, or even to think, but reveals a deep awareness experienced through her body and her senses. This ineffable sense of strangeness can also be seen when Lilith meets her first Oankali, Jdahya. Before Lilith sees Jdahya, she hears his voice and talks with him. Lilith observes, “He scared her somehow. She could not make herself approach him” (Butler 10). This “somehow,” she experiences when speaking with Jdahya, as with nameless reason she knew she was not touching silk, stems from a sonic awareness. As Kapchan explains, “Every movement is in fact a vibration, and every vibration has a sound, however inaudible to the human ear. What we cannot hear, we can sense. Intuition is this: awareness of the body perceiving, the senses moving” (34). What we see in these scenes is Lilith experiencing intuition

through sound: the way the fabric resounds within her hands as she picks it up, the lack of sonic vibrations from the “usual, quiet, androgynous” Oankali voice as it approaches her body (9). Lilith’s body is able to perceive the alienness of the clothing and the Oankali voice through intuition, trusting her immediate response over what her sight and mind tells her—she is listening to the sounds as they approach her body, not what the voice is saying or how the fabric looks. For Lilith, sound has become the way she perceives her environment.

Within this experience with the fabric, we see how Lilith’s relationship to sound is changing – she is letting go of speech and beginning to learn to listen. Lilith’s evolving relationship to sound is made explicit by Butler in the first few pages of *Dawn*, as after Lilith dresses herself in the Oankali clothing and eats, she begins the “oldest and most futile of her activities: a search for some crack, some sound of hollowness, some indication of a way out of her prison” (5). This lack of sound signifies that Lilith’s imprisonment is experienced sonically. However, through her attempt to detect an indication of sound within her confinement, Lilith seems to be suggesting that sound can become a potential source of freedom. As with the Oankali clothing, Lilith is allowing the room to speak to her through sound, looking for it to reveal a weakness. Significantly, this is the type of listening that ecofeminist Greta Gaard finds we often resist in our Euro-Western culture, as “children are taught at an early age not to receive – and certainly not to trust – the information being sent continuously by the animate world that surrounds us” (xix). By conceiving of sound as an entry point, something that allows her to gain knowledge about her environment, Lilith is giving agency to the living walls of the ship, even though she has yet to learn that they are living. This type of attention to sound

dispossesses speaking of its power, as Gaard points out how, “Speaking is associated with power, knowledge, and dominance,” instead allowing space for the non-human to speak through listening, which “is associated with subordination” (xvii). Therefore, Lilith’s relationship to sound functions within an ecofeminist context to subverts the hierarchies that dictate who and what has a voice.

When Lilith is searching for a crack or some hollowness in her confinement, she is engaging in what can be understood as *listening*. As both an important feature of sound and ecofeminist studies, listening offers a new way to think how human and non-human entities interact. Within ecofeminism, listening gives us the ability to see how the environment, and different species, have agency of their own that is both acting upon us and around us. To capture this agency, prominent ecofeminist, Val Plumwood, suggests writing as an especially valuable tool that can “reanimate” matter by presenting “nature in the active voice, the domain of agency” (9). When we present nature, and other non-human entities, as containing agencies, we are able to listen to the ways in which our environment is communicating with us and each other, displacing humans as the creators and interpreters of meaning. When we re-animate the non-human world, we are “making room for seeing much of what has been presented as meaningless accident actually as creative non-human agency. In re-animating, we become open to hearing sound as voice, seeing movement as action, adaptation as intelligence and dialogue, coincidence and chaos as the creativity of matter” (Plumwood 9). When we listen, the non-human world becomes a place of insight and activity. Non-human sounds, then, can put us more in touch with our selves, as we are able to discern hidden emotions or memories within these intra-actions. Lilith experiences this when she is in an enclosed, isolated buttness of

an enormous tree in the training floor of the Oankali ship. Within this slice of wilderness, Lilith feels a “sense of solitude and home,” revealing a familiar connection between her body and the resonance of the earth (Butler 201). For a brief minute, Lilith feels connected with the environment as an extension of herself, revealing how the non-human environment can communicate with us in ways that are not always vocalized or understood, yet these communications can enrich our capacity to learn from and empathize with others. In fact, Gaard finds that, “most trans-species communication comes through images or feelings rather than words,” suggesting that we have to be open not only to what our environment is trying to say, but how our bodies are receiving its messages (xxi). By forcing Lilith into a position where her voice has little bearing on her escape, she has to do something entirely non-human in nature—listening instead of speaking.

Within sound studies, listening is also a powerful tool that allows humans to rethink their relationship with the environment and other non-human entities. Listening, as opposed to understanding, enables humans to hear potential meanings in sound beyond semiotic communication. Listening allows us to inhabit “a shared space of meaning and sound” where the sound itself conveys just as much meaning as what is being communicated (Nancy 7). Furthermore, Nancy proposes that listening encourages us to rethink our understanding of the “self.” Instead of conceptualizing of the self as a discrete individual, sound breaks down the barriers between bodies, making them permeable and transformative. Nancy suggests that, “To listen is to enter that spatiality by which, *at the same time*, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as

well as toward me: it opens me inside me as well as outside” (14). When we listen to sounds—the sounds of our bodies, the sounds of the environment, the sounds of others—we are able to understand ourselves as part of a continual exchange of meaning. When we listen past meaning, we are able to escape our impulse to understand and instead make room for recognizing how sound works in us and connects us to others and the environment. When Lilith first speaks with an Oankali face-to-face, they try to communicate to Lilith that not everything can be understood and that some things just have to be felt. Lilith asks Jdahya what his species wants from the humans, to which he responds, “Not more than you can give – but more than you can understand here, now. More than words will be able to help you understand at first. There are things you must see and hear outside” (Butler 14). In these lines, hearing is given a distinctive significance, positioning it in contrast to words. Notably, hearing in this connotation has nothing to do with language but seems to point towards sound. By explaining to Lilith that words cannot accurately express what the Oankali need from the humans, Jdahya suggests that there is a potential to communicate outside of language—something Lilith has yet to experience. Through this suggestion, Jdahya encourages Lilith to not only listen to her environment, but to recognize that human methods of communication are only part of a complex web of meaning.

The particulars of Lilith’s Awakening are significant because they differ substantially from the Awakenings we see later in the book when Lilith is tasked to teach forty fellow humans to co-exist with Oankali. The primary difference between Lilith’s awakening is not where she was awoken, since all Oankali rooms are relatively

featureless, but how she came to understand her environment through her own body. The first human Lilith awakens, Tate Merah, has an entirely different experience from Lilith. Upon her Awakening, Tate's first experiences are mediated through Lilith. Instead of recognizing her own body as it awakens, Lilith is the first thing Tate sees upon opening her eyes. Her initial reaction to seeing Lilith is suspicion, with her first words being, "Get away from me," followed by "Who are you? What are you doing?" (Butler 128). It is not until after she has spoken to Lilith that Tate experiences gasping and shuddering, the process of reanimation. However, Tate's reanimation has been cut short – she does not receive the opportunity to listen to her body and surroundings but wants answers from Lilith. This difference in Awakenings shows how Lilith relies on perception to give her knowledge about her experiences, through hearing her body resound, while Tate's awakening is mediated through another person. Whereas Lilith has the time to negotiate her environment, letting her body resound in the space and come to an understanding through sonic perception, Tate automatically relies on Lilith to explain what she is experiencing. Fundamentally, Tate is looking for signification, or a signified, while Lilith listens to her body and her environment, allowing it to convey a meaning that she may not yet understand.

Because the other humans have Lilith to help rationalize their experiences upon awakening, it becomes possible for the humans to reduce any unfamiliar senses, anything feeling they do not understand, as deceptive. Thus, perception becomes estranged for the humans throughout *Dawn* as they refuse to listen to their bodies. Significantly, this doubt is voiced when Lilith finally awakens two men. Throughout this interaction, their suspicion and distrust invite both the other humans and readers alike to question the

reliability of Lilith's perception, as well. When questioning Lilith about their captivity, Joseph is careful to use the word "believe," finally stating, "I believe that Lilith believes . . . I haven't decided yet what I believe" (Butler 142-43). By voicing this doubt, Joseph is not simply understanding his experiences through Lilith, but refusing to believe what he is perceiving and what Lilith is attempting to communicate. Once this doubt is voiced, however, it continues to reverberate throughout the novel, causing the humans to question their own perception. Tate even remarks, "I'm not sure I'd believe not matter what I saw" (Butler 144). Thus, the humans believe that perception is not only unreliable but misleading, causing the humans to reject what Lilith and the Oankali try to tell them entirely.

For the humans, the reliance on ocular perception has become their weakness. Instead of listening, they rely on what their mind is telling them must be true based off of what they are seeing, not perceiving. The humans resist anything that does not look human, yet they let their perception mislead them when something is just human enough. This can be seen in an interaction between Lilith and Tate before they attempt to escape from the Oankali while training in the forest. When Tate is trying to convince Lilith to run away with a group of the humans, Lilith tries to communicate to Tate that they are still on the ship, no matter what their mind is telling them. Tate responds, saying, "In spite of the sun, the moon and the stars? In spite of the rain and the trees that have obviously been here for hundreds of years" (Butler 209). In these lines, Tate is relying on the same perceptions that have led her to question everything Lilith had told and shown her. The irony of this is revealed lines later when Tate responds to Lilith's insistence that they are on a ship with, "you can't trust what they do to your senses!" (Butler 209).

Tate's contradictory insistence to trust her senses when they point towards something human yet deny them when they feel alien brings forth an important insight. Though she seems unable to recognize it, Tate is resonating within the Oankali replica of Earth, feeling the earthly objects as they vibrate within her body when she touches them, which reveals a truth about perception that the humans want to deny. By recognizing the sounds and feelings the earthly objects promoted, Tate's body could distinguish the environment before her mind could, yet denying this fact resulted in a dissociation. This illustrates how the humans felt they could no longer trust their bodies, their minds, or their perceptions, viewing Lilith and the Oankali as a trial, something they must outsmart and defeat. Through this exchange, Lilith seems to recognize how her awakening differed from that of the other humans. Since she had a chance to acclimate to the Oankali environment, she learned to trust her perceptions and understand her body as a resonant being. By refusing to listen to the Oankali environment, the humans lacked this ability, ultimately losing the ability to understand their senses. Perception, which had been a tool for Lilith to come to know the Oankali and what it will take to survive, has become alien to the other humans.

To emphasize the significance of sound over sight in *Dawn*, Butler uses a black woman as her protagonist to show how human beings "had been trained *not to listen*, not to see, in order to preserve a system of white privilege" (Gaard xx). Through Lilith, Butler is drawing on the inherent biases of the other humans. As a black woman, Lilith automatically becomes a source of suspicion to the other, predominantly white humans, as she challenges who is able to speak and who listens. This can be seen in the way Tate's hostile response to seeing Lilith repeats itself once Lilith hesitantly decides to

awaken two men, who immediately question her with, “Who’s in charge here?” and “who are you working for?” (Butler 141). Just like Tate, both men immediately rely on Lilith to give them answers about their situation. However, neither men are actually listening—to their perception or to Lilith—but have already made assumptions about Lilith and her trustworthiness. In a way, Lilith becomes a reflection to the awakened humans; she is what the future holds for them and this future is no longer organized by human systems of domination that have long privileged categories and hierarchies. By having these men awakened by Lilith, listening becomes a catalyst for change in this new Oankali society, as they are forced to negotiate what it means to listen and who is worth listening to. In his essay, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” science fiction scholar Darko Suvin examines how, within science fiction, aliens, and even unfamiliar or estranged humans, often serve as a mirror. Suvin explains, “But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible” (374). In *Dawn*, Lilith and the Oankali become an inverted mirror that transform human traditions and ideals. Not only does the Oankali’s strength render human ingenuity and power meaningless, but they also work to invert human race and gender relations. They see in Lilith a mirror of their world where human binaries have been eroded and they fight listening, both to what Lilith and their bodies have to say.

Lilith’s ability to listen to her environment, and to the Oankali, does not just distinguish her from the other humans, but it makes her desirable as a trade partner to the Oankali. Lilith, unlike the other humans, is able resist the hierarchical impulses that the Oankali suggest contributed to the destruction of mankind by learning both from and about the Oankali (Butler 37). This shows how Lilith uses listening as a tool to gain a

better understanding of the Oankali, with an objective of eventually being able to truly understand and communicate with them. The other humans pick up on this trait of Lilith as well; once Joseph finds out that the Oankali changed her psychology, he questions Lilith, saying, “Do you understand why they chose you – someone who desperately doesn’t want the responsibility, who doesn’t want to lead, who is a woman?” (Butler 157). Joseph places emphasis on Lilith’s lack of desire to lead, suggesting that the Oankali have exploited her weaknesses that made her more susceptible to them. However, the Oankali do not seem to view these traits in this way, but instead find that her penchant for listening indicates a potential for a symbiotic relationship. Gaard highlights this collaborative potential of listening when she claims, “feminist methodology emphasizes *listening* as a hallmark of good scholarship . . . creating structures for collaboration, whereby the research subjects can themselves set the agenda, express needs, and benefit from the scholarly endeavor” (xvii). The Oankali recognize that they need Lilith if they are ever going to coexist and create a hybrid species with the humans on earth. Because of this, they begin to listen to Lilith, as well, allowing her to express needs and learn more about them. Kahguyaht, the ooloi parent of Nikanj that Lilith lives with before awakening the humans, reveals, “I didn’t want to accept you, Lilith. Not for Nikanj or for the work you’ll do. I believed that because of the way human genetics were expressed in culture, a human male should be chosen to parent the first group. I think now that I was wrong” (Butler 110). In these lines, Kahguyaht seems to be foretelling something important about Lilith – her propensity toward listening allows her to accept the Oankali in a way the other humans cannot.

CHAPTER 2

SOUNDING “OBSCENELY” HUMAN: COMMUNICATION AND ALIENATION

When Lilith first meets Jdahya, one of the Oankali she is sent to live with and learn from, she remarks how, despite his alien appearance, his voice was “obscenely, sounding more like a human being than some humans” (Butler 12). This chapter examines what it means to sound “obscenely” human, paying particular attention to the voice as a source of identity and sociality. I begin by examining how humans come to understand their environment and themselves through communication, particularly using Nancy’s theory on sound as a mode of engaging with our surroundings. Moving from sound to the voice, in particular, I integrate Brandon LaBelle’s concept of the mouth as a place of friction between sound and language, examining how this friction attunes us to the sociality of speech. Placing particular emphasis on his examination of hesitations, screams, and gasps, I trace how these different features of speech materialize within *Dawn*, especially when contrasted with the quietness of the Oankali voices. Contrasting the human voices with the Oankali voices, I draw on the works of music scholar, Ana María Ochoa Gautier, and her theory on the weaponizing of silence, bringing attention to the ways in which the Oankali employ sound as a form of coercion. By contrasting the use of sound and silence throughout *Dawn*, the obscene voice becomes tied to embodiment, placing materiality at the center of the human voice.

Though listening, particularly listening as sonic perception, is fundamental in understanding how Butler attempts to re-envision the concept of human, communication

also plays an integral role in the creation of a sonic, resonant body that transgresses bodily boundaries in order to become entangled with the environment. For the Oankali, language is essential to trading with the humans. The Oankali want more than just to manipulate the human reproductive system; they want also to become more like the humans in form (Butler 40). Lilith's collaboration with the Oankali, though coerced, is significant because it allows the Oankali understand how humans come to understand their environment and their selves through sound. By looking at the sonic structures of communication and sound in *Dawn*, it becomes possible to determine the significance of sound within communication and how the voice can work to structure the relationships between the humans and the Oankali.

The significance placed on communication is expressed multiple times throughout *Dawn*, but most notably towards the end of the novel when a group of humans revolt against the Oankali. When one of the Ooloi becomes seriously injured, from one of the humans swinging an ax through its chest, Lilith attempts to offer assistance, to which the Ooloi responds, "I never believed they would try to kill us. I never knew how hard it would be not to kill them" (Butler 230). Lilith, who had warned the Oankali of this all along, contends, "You should have known . . . You've had plenty of time to study us. What did you think would happen when you told us you were going to extinguish us as a species by tampering genetically with our children?" (Butler 230). In these lines, Butler is asking us to consider why the Oankali, in fact, did not believe that the humans would turn against them in order to maintain their humanity. Throughout the entirety of *Dawn*, the humans make it clear that they would accept neither their fate nor anything that Lilith tried to tell them. Yet, the Oankali, who had studied the humans for years and had even

learned their language, failed to understand this, making their attempt to convert humans into willing trading partners futile. By placing this question at the end of the novel, Butler asks us to consider where the Oankali failed in their attempts to understand and communicate with the humans. If the Oankali ever hoped to become successful and partner with the humans, they needed to do so via a model of consent rather than coercion; the Oankali needed humans as partners who would not once again destroy the Earth and each other through their “older and more entrenched characteristic” of being hierarchical (Butler 27). In looking at the way communication functions throughout *Dawn*, it becomes evident that the Oankali failed to recognize sound as a fundamental feature of human societies in the way it both reinforces and subverts hierarchies. Thus, to truly understand the Oankali’s failure with the humans, the structuring of sound and communication throughout *Dawn* must be examined in order to recognize how humans come to understand themselves, each other, and the environment through their relationship to sound and the voice.

It is important to note, however, that communication here does not simply refer to the meaning that words convey. Instead, communication refers to an exchange, a way of recognizing how sounds, in particular, envelop us in the surrounding environment. Jean-Luc Nancy finds that, of all the senses, sound is unique in that it allows us to relate to the world around us by challenging notions of a discrete body and subjectivity. Nancy suggests that “to sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself: it is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself” (8). Sounds, then, not only transmits meaning, but allow us to engage in an exchange with our surroundings.

Through sound, we are able to gain a sense of how we reverberate with others—how sound allows us to both change and be changed by others. In *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, sound studies theorist Brandon LaBelle further explores the connection between voice and subjectivity and how the mouth, the source of the voice, enters us into a relationship with our surroundings.

LaBelle poses the question, “Can we not understand sound as the shaking of an object, the squirming of a body, as a point of friction between this and that, you and I, and which stirs the in-between with its sudden, generative energy?” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* x). As LaBelle suggests, sound is a site of friction that connects both humans and non-humans. It allows us to occupy a space between ourselves and others where we can be transformed, or, as LaBelle describes, listening to sound “is to give the body over, for a distribution of agency” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* x). This point of friction is what I would like to focus on, as it is the friction between sound and language that opens up the potential of meaning, which allows us to see the way in which sounds, particularly embodied sounds, can work to both structure and subvert concepts of the self and humanity.

The voice, in particular, is an important site of embodied sound, as it is an intersection point between language and meaning. The voice is where language receives inflection and accentuation, allowing sound to transform and work within language to reveal depths of meaning. LaBelle claims, “The voice is that primary event that circulates to wrap us in its sonorities, silences and rhythms, and intonations. It operates as an essential force that animates the other to bring him or her closer to me, while also prompting my own” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 3). When we hear a voice, we are listening to both what is being said and how the sounds of the voice work at the language. However,

when a voice lacks embodiment, it can become unsettling. In the previously described scene, with Lilith and the injured Oankali, we begin to see this friction between meaning and sound. When the Ooloi begins speaking to Lilith about its injury, Lilith notices that it speaks with a “disconcertingly calm voice” (Butler 230). A few lines later, when Nikanj nearly has his sensory tentacle detached by a human’s ax, Lilith approaches Kahguyaht to ask if anything can be done to heal Nikanj. Lilith again remarks that, “Kahguyaht answered in its insanely calm voice. She hated their voice” (Butler 231). The emphasis on the voices of the Oankali here, in one of the most intense scenes from throughout *Dawn*, offers an interesting insight as to human relationships to sound. There is a tension between the tone with which the Oankali speak and the severity of the situation; the Oankali voice has no intonations, no vocality - it seems to be separate, indifferent to the surrounding environment. To further highlight their strangeness, the voices of the Oankali are contrasted with the impassioned voices of the humans, noting, “The humans shouted. The ooloi did not make a sound” (Butler 229). The quiet and composed manner with which the Oankali fight against the humans does not reassure Lilith but has the opposite effect. Instead, Lilith finds the flatness of their voices to be unsettling. It is this tension between silence and materiality, the quite Oankali voices compared to the impassioned human voices, that causes Lilith to once again acknowledge their alienness, even though she has become accustomed to their appearance.

A further unsettling feature of the Oankali voice is the fluidity with which they speak, lacking any uncertainties or interruptions that frequently accompany the human voice. In contrast to the silent Oankali, we hear Gabe’s voice described as both grating and gasping (Butler 229). These small disruptions are actually fundamental to speech, as

LaBelle suggests, “moments of fluid speech are actually quite rare. Rather, speech is most often punctuated by small interruptions and hesitations, notably pronounced in the micro-vocables” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 132). These small, almost imperceptible, interruptions remind listeners that the voice is continually evolving and responding through sound. Gaps and hesitations do not serve to disrupt speech, but instead reinforce the idea that we are continually engaged in a resounding with our environment, which gives way to small outbursts and reactions that alter the course of an utterance’s meaning. LaBelle suggests that interruptions within the voice “reinforce and remind of this primary action: that one is located within the flow of surrounding life, and wherein language is central” and that they, “reveal a body tuning itself to the sociality of speech, of being in front of another” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 133). Thus, when we hear the sounds emerging from Gabe’s voice, we are reminded that he is engaging with his surrounding, bitterly trying to regain a sense of control over it and, ultimately, relinquishing with “a small gasp of sound—as though there were not enough strength in him to force out a scream” (Butler 229). The gasp reveals Gabe loss of control, his inability to exert power over his surroundings: it is the external turned internal. LaBelle suggests, “Gasping is fully aligned with certain external events or actions; an intensity of energy passes between the event and the body, from the world to the individual, materializing in this quick breath, and this sudden sound” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 77). When we hear interruptions and hesitations in speech, we hear a voice responding to their surrounding - the body reacting before meaning is even spoken. For humans, sounds are essential in relating us to the environment.

The gasp is only one of many embodied sounds that separates the humans from the Oankali throughout this confrontation at the end of *Dawn*. The quietness of the Oankali is further contrasted with the humans through their screaming and shouting, which not only reveals a desire for control but a deep emotional struggle. When we hear Curt respond to the Oankali with a shout, “a wordless scream of rage, a call to attack,” we see a cry for a voice (Butler 229). Many of the male characters in *Dawn*, such as Curt, not only detest the Oankali but feel emasculated by them. The twin binaries of Man/Woman and speaking/listening are undone in the presence of the Oankali, over whom the male voice, the voice typically associated reason and power, has no command. We see this inversion when Lilith worries that Curt may become dangerous, Gabe confirms, “He’s not in control even of what his own body does and feels. He’s taken like a woman . . . Someone else is pushing all his buttons. He can’t let them get away with that” (Butler 203). Curt’s loss of control is culminated by this final scream. His emotional turmoil is echoed in his sounds; Curt is attempting to engage the Oankali in a sonic confrontation, yet the wordless Oankali just work to further enrage him.

LaBelle highlights this tension when he suggests that the shout can work to both empower us, by demanding a presence, while also revealing a deep suffering that results from the experience of powerlessness (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 58). Curt’s scream, filled with rage, both asserts his humanity and masculinity, forcing his voice into his surroundings for everyone to hear, while also revealing his scream as an indication of loss, both of control and of civilization. While a shout can reinforce our humanity, it can also undermine it, which LaBelle observes when he suggests that “To free the voice is to also expel it from its bodily shelter, one defined by certain cultivation. It is to turn against

language, encircling us with a raw vocality” (*Lexicon of the Mouth* 57). By resorting to a scream in this pivotal scene, Curt uses sound to embody his loss of humanity. The Oankali had taken the power of language away from the humans by not engaging with them socially, themselves fulfilling Lilith’s fear that the wrong leader “could undermine what little civilization might be left in the minds” of the remaining humans (Butler 118). Thus, by disengaging with the humans, detaching themselves from the “sociality of speech,” the Oankali dispossess the humans of their voice and humanity, causing the Oankali to fail in establishing a relationship with the humans as trading partners.

Throughout *Dawn*, power structures are established sonically through both voice and silence. The Oankali consistently use silence to coerce the humans, such as refusing to speak to Lilith when she does not answer their questions or remaining quiet if she asks any questions that they do not want her to know. When Lilith first meets Jdahya, she remarks how he can, “wrap silence around himself and settle into to” (Butler 22). Furthermore, when Lilith tries to communicate to Nikanj that they had led the humans to become dangerous by allowing them the illusion that they were on Earth, Nikanj responds with, “Silence. Stubborn silence” (Butler 235). By refusing to answer, the Oankali show the humans that they cannot be negotiated with - the humans must give in. In these scenes, we see the Oankali use silence strategically as a form of power and control. In fact, silence has long been used by and against humans as a form of control and submission. To understand how silence can function as a way to control others, I turn to the work of Ana María Ochoa Gautier, a scholar of music whose work focuses on bioacoustics and forced silences. Ochoa Gautier refers to the abusive use of silence as “sound weapons” finding that “The acoustic overtones of silencing include experiments

with loss of sensorial control in the use of sound waves as a weapon” (187). Ochoa Gautier claims that we see this weaponizing of sound in instances of solitary isolation, suggesting that silence does more than just establish authority, but can be used as a form of punishment and control. We first see the Oankali enact silence as a form of control when they leave each human in a solitary, silent confinement. This can be seen when Lilith reflects back on her first Awakening, remarking how the Oankali refused to speak to her, even while she was screaming and pounding on the walls, holding her in silent captivity: “Receiving no answer, she had shouted, then cried, then cursed until her voice was gone. She had pounded the walls until her hands bled and became grotesquely swollen. There had not been a whisper of response” (Butler 5). Lilith had exerted her voice until there was nothing left, yet the Oankali refused to respond. The sonic captivity the Oankali force upon Lilith is not only authoritative but is intended to break her sense of control. The Oankali would speak to her when she was ready to listen, not when she demanded it.

During Lilith’s captivity, the idea that control over sounds, particularly the sounds we emit, establishes us as rational beings is challenged by the Oankali. As Ochoa Gautier suggests, “modern subjectivity demanded a specific type of listening constituted by silent attention, understood as a crucial dimension of an ideal, rational subject that is in control of the production of meaning” (186). Yet, when faced with a silence, a silence that challenges the conception of the voice as a place of power, many humans lose their sense of control. This can be seen in the other humans who were also driven to insanity through their captivity. When Lilith is reading the dossiers the Oankali compiled while observing the humans in isolation, many of the humans react similarly as Lilith, losing their sense

of control when met with silence or the inquisitive, featureless voices of their Oankali. For example, Leah refused to talk to her captors and nearly starved herself to death, Hilary broke both of her arms attempting to escape her confinement, and Curt “had, alone in his isolation room, done his best to tear out his own throat with his fingernails” (Butler 119; 123). These reactions from the humans illustrate how silence and the powerlessness of their voices lead the humans to act out in order to reestablish control.

On the other hand, some of the humans were able to maintain control over their sense of self while in isolation. For example, Dominic, Joseph, and Beatrice had been responsive and somewhat compliant to their Oankali questioners (Butler 118-22). The difference in these reactions provides an interesting comparison between the human’s response to isolation. Whereas some of the humans experienced a complete loss of control, others believed their voice to maintain a sense of power, such as when Dominic, “promised to kill his captors if he ever got the chance,” which he said “calmly, more as though he were making a causal remark” (Butler 119). This is also seen when Joseph said that the Oankali gave him a “reason to live—to see who had caged him and why and how he might want to repay them” (Butler 121). The difference seen here is a clinging to rationality, an insistence that by maintaining control, a “silent attention,” the human voice still had power over their captors (Ochoa Gautier 186). These humans believed that their mind, their human rationality, allowed them to maintain power and overcome their confinement. Yet, the Oankali needed a human who was not guided purely by reason, as everything the Oankali had to share with the humans rejected what reason and subjectivity would lead them to believe. We see this when Lilith tells Jdahya that she is not the right person to lead the other humans, as there are many people more experienced

and knowledgeable about the wilderness than her. Jdahya responds, “They will have to be especially careful because some of the things they ‘know’ aren’t true anymore” (Butler 32). This seems to suggest that the Oankali noticed an unwillingness to listen in these humans who threatened the Oankali. Instead, the Oankali chose Lilith to parent the first group of humans, suggests that the Oankali needed a human attuned to their abilities of perception, who could recognize when listening was necessary.

In these opening scenes, we see the power dynamics shift due to the sonic environment. The Oankali’s refusal to socialize with the humans and their weaponizing of silence forces the humans into a position of subjection. Instead of courting the humans as trading partners, the Oankali institute a hierarchical relationship with them that overlooks the significance of engaging in cross-species conversation. When Lilith tries to convey to Nikanj that they had approached the humans in the wrong way, she pleads, “Listen to me . . . Let me help you learn about us” and when ignored thinks, “She was Cassandra, warning and predicting to people who went deaf whenever she began to warn and predict” (Butler 235). This scene reveals how though the Oankali knew human biology, culture and history, even their planet and environment, they lacked a central formational element of human identity – communication. By creating a sonic hierarchy, where the human voice was stripped of agency, Butler sets up a tension throughout the entirety of *Dawn* where Lilith must continually attempt to regain her sonic agency by establishing herself as a resonant subject.

CHAPTER 3

RESONATING BEYOND THE SELF: REDEFINING THE INDIVIDUAL

Early in *Dawn*, when Lilith is partnered with Nikanj to learn from and teach it, there is a scene where we see Lilith introduce written language by spelling Nikanj's name, remarking how "she listened in her mind to Nikanj saying its name, then wrote *Nikanj*. That felt right, and she liked the way it looked" (Butler 60). Significantly, this scene reveals that we have been experiencing the Oankali world through Lilith's point of view, which means that these experiences have also been filtered through Lilith's language and understanding of sound. This chapter attempts to problematize this one-sided understanding of the Oankali by redefining the individual. I begin by drawing upon the work of feminist scholars Annette Schlichter and Adriana Cavarero, who attempt to move away from a logocentric understanding of the voice, as logocentrism reduces any sounds outside of speech to meaninglessness. Instead, both scholars draw attention to the materiality and sounded features of the voice as important sites of meaning, providing a way of listening to non-human voices as they communicate through sounds. By moving away from the logocentric voice, Lilith is able to recognize the ways in which the Oankali communicate through sounds. However, as ecofeminist scholars Charlene Spretnak and Deborah Rose Bird propose, moving away from a logocentric understanding of the voice, in order to make space for sounds to communicate, means giving up the voice as a source of individual identity, which Lilith resists throughout much of the book. To move away from individualistic notions of the voice, I draw from

Patrick Murphy's notion of "speaking subjects" to trace the ways in which Nikanj attempts to communicate with Lilith outside of language, revealing the body as an important site of communication between human and non-human entities. In order to redefine Lilith's relationship with Nikanj, I conclude with feminist theorist Karen Barad's concept of "intra-actions," which is the way we come into being through interactions with our environment, placing sound at the center of how Lilith and Nikanj develop an intra-active relationship. By giving meaning to the non-logocentric features of the voice, we begin to see sounds that were previously inaudible to Lilith reverberate within her as intra-active forces.

For many of the humans in *Dawn*, the voice plays a significant role in self-preservation, allowing them to maintain a sense of separateness from the Oankali. However, thinking of the voice as a mode of self-preservation becomes problematic when it excludes those without a voice from being heard. When the voice becomes just a reinforcer of identity, it reinscribes the voice as a source of authority and maintains the binary that places speaking over listening. In examining the centrality of the voice in feminism and gender performativity, feminist scholar Annette Schlichter claims that equating the voice with agency reinscribes hierarchies of "gendered power and its absence, suggesting that in the tradition of Western thinking, woman is dispossessed of the voice, which is simultaneously the voice of reason and the voice of power/authority" (38). When the voice is equated only with speech, any sounds outside of this Western conception of the voice become overlooked and disregarded as bearers of meanings and sites of agency. Thus, when women fail to reconceptualize their notions of voice and instead attempt to reclaim voices as they function within patriarchal discourse,

particularly as a form of authority, they risk prioritizing the notion to “catch-up” with men, which ecofeminists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva caution against, as it results in “a demand for a greater, or equal share of what, in the existing paradigm, men take from nature” (7). To escape this pattern of thinking, we must challenge our relationship not only with the voice, but with how the voice communicates meaning through sound, repositioning listening as a way of subverting dualistic conceptions of voice.

Lilith’s reliance on these Western notions of agency and authority are revealed when Nikanj tells Lilith that they will have to alter her brain chemistry in order for her to learn faster and be able to awaken more humans so that they can return to Earth. Lilith argues, “Listen, no part of me is more definitive of who I am than my brain,” to which Nikanj replies, “Who you are won’t be changed” (Butler 74). The idea of altering her brain chemistry is so frightening to Lilith because, as humans, we value the mind over not just our own bodies, but the bodies of all others. A major factor in why we fail to listen to others is our inability to understand any forms of meaning or insight that cannot be rationalized by the mind. In her work on the embodied uniqueness of the voice, feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero warns against a logocentric understanding of the voice and sound, highlighting how reductive this view is by suggesting that, “the sphere of the voice is constitutively broader than that of speech: it exceeds it. To reduce this excess to mere meaninglessness—to whatever remains when the voice is not intentioned toward a meaning, defined as the exclusive purview of speech—is one of the chief vices of logocentrism” (13). Therefore, if the voice serves as just a function of the logocentric mind, it reduces all other non-communicative sounds to empty insignificance. Therefore,

to be able to listen to others, we must first be able to separate the sonority of the voice from speech, recognizing how the voice can communicate through sounds.

As Lilith indicates when confronted with the idea that her brain chemistry can be altered, our sense of self fractures and becomes unstable without a sense of control over our mind. Her insistence on the brain as a source of identity is drawn from a long tradition of thinking that ecofeminist scholar Charlene Spretnak calls “the modern Western enthronement of the individual” (426). Spretnak claims that “the perception of an essential, protective separation between the self and the rest of the world—a radical discontinuity—is of paramount importance. Hence the self is felt to be threatened with obliteration if unitive dimensions being are recognized” (426). By tampering with Lilith’s brain, the Oankali are tapping into a deep-rooted fear of the loss of the individual. This can be seen in the other humans in *Dawn*, and particularly in the male characters who feel that the Oankali threaten not only their individuality but also their sexual and patriarchal authority.

A significant way in which the Oankali threaten the humans with a loss of individuality is by situating themselves as sexual intermediaries, forcing the humans to engage in a “neurosensory illusion” simulated by the Oankali (Butler 168). This act of sexual dominance over the humans not only pervades their bodies, but turns their minds against them, as the humans feel a perverse connection to Oankali. Peter, one of Lilith’s chief human adversaries, perceives this loss of control over both his body and mind as a dissipating of his human autonomy and bodily limitations, which results in him attacking his ooloi. Lilith observes, “Under their influence, Peter might have laughed at anything. Under their influence, he accepted union and pleasure. When that influence was allowed

to wane and Peter began to think, he apparently decided he had been humiliated and enslaved” (Butler 192). In these observations, we see a man struggling to maintain the boundaries between his humanity and the Oankali. His sexual union with the Oankali throws into question both the physical and ontological borders humans had drawn around themselves and non-humans and the potential of uniting with the Oankali, of transgressing these human boundaries, made Peter feel that he was “turning against himself, causing him to demean himself in alien perversions. His humanity was profaned” (Butler 192-193). The line that humans had drawn between themselves and the Oankali is broken by these Oankali illusions, resulting in an entanglement that threaten the concept of a discrete human, which Peter and many of the other humans could not rationalize.

Though this loss of boundaries can be threatening to humans, particularly humans like Peter who desire to maintain a human supremacy, this fracturing of the self can also lead to a radical rethinking of our relationship to our own bodies and the environment that operates outside patriarchal, authoritative ways of structuring sounds and voice. Though the Oankali failed to communicate with the humans as a whole, reinstating hierarchical sound structures that caused the humans to become unhinged past the point of potential for consensual collaboration, amongst themselves they provide a model with which to think through what a non-logocentric, non-individualized way of conceptualizing the mind and voice could look like. Furthermore, through her relationship with Nikanj, Lilith is able to rethink communication, relying more on sounds to understand her connection between herself and others. We see Nikanj allude to this more collaborative way of thinking during the aforementioned scene where it tries to

convince Lilith to allow it to alter her brain chemistry. Instead of telling Lilith that it understood what Kahguyaht was saying, Nikanj remarks, “But ooaan . . . I understand what it feels. It says I have to change you now” (Butler 74). Nikanj’s suggestion that it understands Kahguyaht beyond what it is saying, but also what it feels, indicates that the Oankali are more attuned to one another, not just through empathy but through a shared connectivity. By using the word ‘what,’ as opposed to ‘how,’ Nikanj specifies that it not only understands the way in which Kahguyaht feels, but that it understands and shares the source of Kahguyaht’s feelings. For the Oankali, the mind is not individualistic, nor is it merely a source of agency and where individual make their own decisions, but a shared space of meaning where the Oankali are actively influenced and transformed by one another.

This connectivity established between the Oankali resists binaries that isolate the voice and mind as individual experiences, establishing listening as a subversive force that allows for collaboration and communication within and beyond language. The collaborative force of listening further challenges notions of the voice as a representation of the self-contained individual. Schlichter suggests that when we “equate ‘speech’ and ‘voice’ as metaphors of agency and self-representation, which also reads as self-presence,” we neglect its collaborative potential and reinscribe voice as a medium through which we separate ourselves from others as autonomous entities. The Oankali challenge this primacy of the individual that places speaking over listening when Jdahya tells Lilith, “We listen to the ooloi when they stop talking so much. That’s when we find out what our next generations will be like” (Butler 40). Here, Jdahya intertwines talking with listening, endowing listening with a collective agency. Instead of creating a binary

that places talking over listening, both are given an equal weight in sustaining the Oankali as a species. Moreover, Jdahya does not speak of himself as an individual, reinforcing the idea that listening functions as a unitive energy, allowing the Oankali to recognize themselves as part of an interdependent ecology.

For Lilith to survive among the Oankali, she must partake in the Oankali's collaborative, entangled way of being that reduces the role of the individual. Yet, she resists this collaborative learning at first, insisting that, "I need to be able to keep my writing . . . to study it. I need—" (Butler 60). In her insistence, Lilith reveals how she is still heavily entrenched in the concept of the individual. Lilith sees writing as her form of resistance to the Oankali—it preserves her humanity and allows her to maintain a sense of individuality by not having to listen to the Oankali. We see this insistence on writing as a means of preserving her humanity when Nikanj tells Lilith that she cannot have writing materials, to which she responds, "at least let me make my own records to help me learn your language. We humans need to do such things to help us remember" (Butler 60). Through making her own records, thus erasing the potential of listening, Lilith believes that she can use writing to reinforce the boundaries between herself and the Oankali, between humans and non-human others. By learning on her own, filtering what she hears through her own mind, she is encircling herself in her own subjectivity and not allowing herself to be penetrated by the voices of the Oankali. Lilith recognizes the invasive qualities of sound and listening, which Nancy also emphasizes when he suggests, "To be listening is to be *at the same time* outside and inside, to be open *from* without and *from* within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other" (14). For

Lilith, listening becomes threatening because it forces her to relinquish her individuality, making her body and mind open to the Oankali, simultaneously opening herself to them.

The Oankali see this individuality, this insistence on maintaining boundaries and resistance to listening, as a weakness of the humans, with Kahguyaht believing that “humans won’t be worth talking to for at least a generation” (Butler 77). However, as Nikanj shows Lilith, there is another way to learn and communicate, a way in which Lilith can recall memories instinctively, as if they were a part of language (Butler 72-73). Through this, we begin to see that the Oankali do not want Lilith to just learn their language, but to learn to communicate through her body and not just her mind, allowing herself to accommodate meanings that language can obscure. When Jdahya tells Lilith in the beginning of *Dawn* that they are on a ship, but “what it truly is doesn’t translate,” he is actually referring to more than just a translation (Butler 13). The meaning of the ship does not translate because it is entrenched in a history of memories and feelings that cannot be expressed in language. Jdahya attempts to convey this to Lilith when he is explaining the relationship the Oankali have to their ship, describing how “the human doctor used to say it loved us. There is an affinity, but it’s biological—a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship’s needs and it serves ours. It would die without us and we would be planetbound without it” (Butler 33). Jdahya’s difficulty to express this relationship is, in part, due to its shared physiology with the Oankali themselves. The Oankali cannot think of the ship separately because it permeates their existence. To rethink the body in terms of permeability, particularly in the way humans relate to their environments, “would,” as ecofeminist Deborah Rose Bird argues, “open us to dialogue not only with place, but with the history of the place,” claiming “place penetrates the

body, and the body slips into place” (321; 312). Since the Oankali share a symbiotic relationship with their ship, allowing each other bodies to be permeated, calling it a ship hides the true relationship between the two entities, yet the Oankali struggle to locate an English word that can linguistically represent this type of connection. By not allowing Lilith writing materials, the Oankali encourage her to think beyond language.

In order to communicate with the Oankali, Lilith has to learn to listen differently, considering the way that sounds, particularly the materiality of sounds, communicate both within and beyond meaning. When we listen to sounds, and to voices, beyond signification, we are able to think outside of culturally and linguistically prescribed meanings, which not only disrupts binaries between minds and bodies but allows us to recognize non-human entities as sites of value. To give a voice to unheard and often non-human voices, ecocritic Patrick Murphy promotes dialogic interactions, in which human and non-human entities are engaged in conversation and exchange, as a potential site to enact ecofeminist ideologies, claiming, “And just as that self enters into language and the use of *parole*, so too does the "other" enter into language and have the potential, as does any entity, to become a "speaking subject," although centripetal structures and cultural forces hinder such a realization” (151). To recognize non-humans as “speaking subjects” means to accept that meaning takes place beyond human understanding. This means assenting that not “all the actors, actions, and effects are human,” and that humans only encompass a small role in systems of interaction that surround us (Barad 124). By giving a voice to non-human others, we begin to locate ourselves within a network of sounds and communications that open the possibility for radical entanglement.

Lilith is forced to confront her logocentric relationship to sound when trying to teach Nikanj to communicate, as she is no longer able to distinguish between meaningful and insignificant sounds. When Nikanj attempts to communicate with Lilith for the first time, we are told, “Lilith frowned, certain she was being asked a question. The child’s rising inflection seemed to indicate questioning if she could depend on such clues from an Oankali” (Butler 54). Lilith’s first reaction upon hearing Nikanj speak is to rationalize the sounds she hears within a logocentric point of view, reducing the inflection in Nikanj’s voice to familiar, recognizable sounds. Here, we see the pervasiveness of language over sounds, as Lilith’s insistence that Nikanj is asking a question allows her to believe that she can interpret the Oankali in a way that prioritizing her position as an English speaker. We see this happen when she is interacting with other Oankali children, as Lilith remarks that, “she got the feeling some would have enjoyed dissecting her. They spoke aloud very little, but there was much touching of tentacles to flesh or tentacles to other tentacles . . . She was first amused, then annoyed, then angered by their attitude” (Butler 55). Instead of listening to the Oankali children, recognizing potential for meaning and communication through their touches, Lilith feels her own voice silenced by their touches and becomes angry. Just as with Nikanj, Lilith shuts herself off sonically from the Oankali children, refusing to acknowledge any potential meaning outside of what she had already decided their touches meant. Once Lilith escapes from the Oankali children, however, “She discovered she was trembling and took a deep breath to relax herself” (Butler 56). Through her body, Lilith acknowledged herself responding to the Oankali, identifying their ability to communicate through vibrations and touch. In examining how the non-human communicate with and through us, Murphy argues that,

“like the unconscious, the nonhuman also articulates itself by means of various "dialects," and neither requires volition to do so” (152). Lilith’s trembling body indicates a tuning to these nonhuman “dialects,” seeing their potential to communicate through sounds that only the body feels, instead of language.

In contrast to Lilith, however, Nikanj is already attuned to material qualities of language as a type of sound. When Lilith corrects its use of “goodly” instead of “well,” she notices how “The child seemed to taste the word” (Butler 55). In order to learn the English language, Nikanj does not just study words, but is attuned to the way they reverberate within its mouth. To taste the word “why” means to acknowledge something beyond language within a vocal act, bringing an awareness to the body as it absorbs and responds to language. In examining the materiality of voices, Amanda Weidman suggests that they “are not only sonic phenomena; they are material, in the sense that they are produced through bodily actions . . . it requires us to consider what is being done with the body, with space” (235). In listening to his voice say “well,” Nikanj is indulging in the materiality of the word, memorizing not only the word itself, but the way it resounds within his mouth, as if the word itself occupies space. When we focus on language, as opposed to the materiality of sounds, we silence the body as a receptor and transmitter of meaning. In trying to resituate the material voice as vital to speech, Cavarero claims that when we prioritize language, “The uniqueness of the voice thus goes unnoticed because, methodologically, it does not make a sound” (14). As Cavarero emphasizes, we only hear sounds that are coded in meaning. To subvert this logocentric way of hearing, and avoid reducing sounds to noise, we must listen not just to words themselves, but to materiality. Listening to voice in this way unsettles Lilith at first, as she remarks how, “The raw

sound of her own voice startled her” (Butler 78). Lilith is caught off guard by her own voice because it is not something she is attuned to; she is used to hearing her voice, but not listening to it. By recognizing her raw vocality, Lilith exposes herself tuning more to her body and away from the boundaries that language places around sound.

Examining Nikanj’s understanding of sound allows us to see how it can immerse us within our environment, revealing how we both act and are acted upon by sounds. This relationship can be understood through the ecofeminism concept of entanglements, as entanglements allow us to reconceptualize our connection to the environment and other non-human entities. Feminist theorist Karen Barad defines entanglement as a series of “intra-actions” within a phenomena in which humans and non-humans forms are inherently inseparable, interacting reciprocally with one another instead of independently (125). Intra-activity, Barad proposes, challenge our conception of individual entities by revealing how we come into being through relationships with our environment (125). Significantly, intra-actions make perceptible what our reliance on individuality and reason attempts to obscure; namely, that there exist meanings and connections in unlikely places and objects. Sound is a particularly useful site to examine intra-activity, as it continually positions us in a state of reverberations with the other, since, as Nancy proposes, humans “are not constructed to interrupt at their leisure the sonorous arrival” (14). Interrupting boundaries that position us as discrete and individual subjects, sound continually positions us in contact with others and our environment. Recognizing sound as a site of intra-activity subverts binaries that prioritize language, in which unfamiliar or insignificant sounds are reduced to noise. Instead, intra-actions acknowledge in these sounds a significance outside of language.

Once Lilith's brain chemistry is changed by Nikanj, she becomes more receptive to sound as an intra-active force, realizing the potential for inter-species communication. In fact, it is after her brain chemistry alteration that Lilith remarks for the first time that an Oankali does more than just "say" something. Nikanj's once flat, impassive voices takes on embodied meaning that Lilith was not receptive to previously. When Lilith agrees to accompany Nikanj during his final metamorphosis into an ooloi, she observes how, "Nikanj made a sound of relief—a rubbing together of body tentacles in a way that sounded like stiff paper being crumpled" (Butler 81). In this interaction, sound take on an intra-active quality in which a mundane, perhaps even insignificant, sound becomes an agentic force that connects Lilith and Nikanj on an intimate level. Though the crumpling of paper typically does not signify relief, Lilith recognizes Nikanj's tentacles as a speaking subject, allowing sounds to take on meanings outside of language. The same tentacles that she earlier believed would dissect her become an emotive energy, stirring within her a connection between Nikanj that crossed boundaries between human and non-human. In her examination of the sound body, Kapchan argues that "Every movement is in fact a vibration, and every vibration has a sound, however inaudible to the human ear. What we cannot hear, we can sense" (34). What was previously inaudible to Lilith now reverberates within her, as she finds that sensing Nikanj's relief makes her smile. By allowing sound to have a significance of its own, Lilith is able to break through the individualistic barriers that keep her body closed off from her surroundings and from the vibration of others. Instead of attempting to find meaning in the vibrations of Nikanj's tentacles, Lilith creates a space where meaning can resound on its own and where

uncertainty to reside. Though she may not understand the Oankali or Nikanj fully, this interaction shows Lilith releasing the need to rationalize every perception.

By recognizing each other as resounding beings, Lilith and Nikanj are able to establish an intra-active relationship through sound. Significantly, however, this relationship does not attempt to dismantle boundaries between human and non-human, but instead reveals how boundaries prevent us from listening to and finding significance in what we define as Other. In urging for a recognition of intra-activity in place of more dualistic ways of thinking, Barad challenges us not to see boundaries a mere matter of human differentiation, something that can, in turn, be deconstructed by humans, but to recognize that differentiation happen naturally and without human interference. (Barad 123-124). Instead, she persists, “what is needed is accountability for the cuts that are made and the constitutive entanglements that are effected” (Barad 123). Barad is advocating not for a disregard of difference, but awareness that these boundaries affect how we understand and view the world. Importantly, Lilith finds that when she finally listens to Nikanj, she does not feel herself less human, or her sense of self destroyed, but instead recognizes what her humanly boundaries had hidden from perception.

CHAPTER 4

SONIC RESILENCY: ARTIFICE AS A SLIP IN PERCEPTION

In the scene when Nikanj is attempting to convince Lilith to allow it to alter her brain chemistry, there is a small exchange between Lilith and Nikanj where it becomes confused by the multiple uses of the word “rear,” remarking “There’s no logic to such thing” (Butler 73). Though Lilith tells Nikanj that there is probably some etymological reason behind the multiple uses for the word, this exchange reveals something important about language—what we think is logical, or take for granted as common sense, is actually constructed. This chapter sets out to explore the constructed nature of both language and voice through the concept of artifice, as it arises within Barthes’ concept of the “grain of the voice,” suggesting that it is the constructed nature of language and the voice itself that allow us to glimpse a way of listening outside of culture and meaning, giving voice to the way sounds speak to and through us. I begin by examining Lilith in terms of Nancy’s “resonant subject,” which can be understood as a subject that is continually evolving as it reverberates with its surroundings—displacing the idea of the fixed, static subject—as Lilith’s conflicting point of view towards the Oankali illustrates the mounting ambiguity towards what constitutes a human. To conceive of this evolving subject, I draw on Roland Barthes concept of the “grain,” which explores how language and sound work together as a way to think outside of culturally or linguistically embedded meanings. Through identifying the “grain” of a voice, I bring attention to the artifice of language itself, which is how the voice is encoded within a series of rehearsals

that establish it within language. To uncover this artifice, I propose that Butler attempts to draw attention to the constructed nature of the voice by dislocating the voice away from the body, revealing the voice as a device that works to govern and reinscribe culturally sanctioned meaning. Butler achieves this through what sound theorists call the “acousmatic voice,” or a voice dislocated from the body, which both Brandon LaBelle and Mladen Dolar take up as an important way of theorizing of the voice. Through the acousmatic voice, I draw attention to the ambivalent nature with which we classify and understand voice, which allows us to question it as a source of autonomy. Ultimately, the voice and language are revealed as a method through which cultural ideas and values are reinforced, while simultaneously providing us a way to think outside of these boundaries and listen to non-human others.

Throughout the entirety of *Dawn*, Lilith is forced to reckon with what it means to be human and to maintain her humanity. However, Butler does not provide us with a clear resolution, as Lilith is constantly torn between fascination and repulsion for the Oankali, and, what she finds even more distressing, between caring for and despising the humans she is left to train. When the humans finally make it to the training floor on the Oankali ship, which resembles a forest on Earth, Lilith reflects on how a few of the humans are still being drugged, as they become violent when their senses are not partially sedated: “Oddly, she also admired them for being able to resist conditioning. Were they strong, then? Or simply unable to adapt?” (Butler 201). It is this question that haunts Lilith throughout the entirety of *Dawn*, as she questions what her ability to adjust to the Oankali means about her allegiances to humanity and, furthermore, what her ability to adapt reveals about herself. This question culminates towards the end of the novel when

Lilith tells one of the ooloi that all she wants is to get away from them, to which the Oankali responds, “I know you think that” (Butler 230). The Oankali’s word choice of “think” here indicates that there is some disparity in what Lilith is saying, even if she does not realize it herself. This disparity is finally expounded in the final pages of *Dawn*, when Lilith finds out that Nikanj has made her pregnant with the first hybrid human-Oankali child. In reaction, Lilith screams, “I’m not ready! I’ll never be ready!” to which Nikanj responds, “You could never had said so . . . Nothing about you but your words reject this child” (Butler 246). In these lines, the disparity Lilith repressed all along is laid bare—her mind and her body were at odds and she lost sense of which to trust. Nevertheless, her body ultimately decides for her, bringing attention to this disparate relationship between the voice and the body.

Through this disparity, however, Butler does not seem to be simply advocating for a simple collapsing of the mind/body binary, as she does not deny the mind as a central source of meaning. Instead, she advocates for a sonic restructuring of the relationship between mind and body, shifting conceptions of how we come to understand ourselves and the environment. However, Butler attempts to achieve this by going farther than simply challenging the voice as a site of agency and foundation of individuality, but by dislocating the voice from the body as a way to reveal the voice as a device that works to both govern and reinscribe culturally sanctioned meanings and values. To escape these power structures located within the voice, and to allow space to rethink what constitutes voice, Butler postulates these inconsistencies between voices and bodies in order to encourage us to examine what is being said throughout *Dawn* in terms of the performative—or, in other words, she draws attention to the craft of language. To do this,

Butler creates Lilith in the mold of Jean-Luc Nancy's "resonant subject," which he defines as "the intensive spacing of a rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self" (21). The continual relaunching suggests that the "resonant subject" is not a fixed subject, but something that is continually involved in transformation and can never be static. Thus, as Lilith's body attempts to tell her, despite her mind's inability to rationalize and give meaning to this awareness, the concept of the human as a fixed, distinct entity is deceptive. The idea of the human that Lilith so desperately clings to throughout *Dawn*, the human that she believes will be eradicated through reproduction with the Oankali, is in fact not an inherent being, but is instead constituted through an "infinite referral" with its surroundings (Nancy 9). As with Barad's theory of entanglements, the resonant subject's boundaries are not fixed, but are fluid and evolve through intra-actions. This sonic, resonant body is revealed in *Dawn* through Butler's adaption of Roland Barthes' concept of "grain," which is not merely embodied sound, but reveals language as result of *artifice* – which allows for the grain to become a carefully crafted "slip" that permits a way of thinking outside of culture. By drawing attention to the performative, constructed aspects of the voice, Butler is able to reinscribe materiality and embodiment as powerful, intra-active forces of communication.

What sets Lilith apart as a resonant subject is not that she is more vocal than the other characters, nor is it simply her receptiveness to sounds and listening, though these characteristics play an important role in her actually becoming a resonant subject. What truly sets Lilith apart throughout *Dawn* is her innate inconsistencies, the inability to read Lilith within a singular, static interpretation. For instance, within a span of two pages, we

see Lilith tell an Oankali that she longs to be away from the Oankali, yet, when she finds out that Nikanj is seriously injured, she removes her clothing to allow Nikanj's tentacle to pierce her body so that it can heal itself, "refusing to think of how she would look to the humans still conscious" (Butler 231). Lilith continues, "They would be certain now that she was a traitor. Stripping naked on the battlefield to lie down with the enemy" (Butler 231). Lilith's turmoil in this scene stems from the tensions surrounding the words enemy and traitor, as Lilith recognizes the subjectivity, and even power, associated with such words. To ignore Nikanj would make her a traitor and enemy to the Oankali, yet to help Nikanj makes her a traitor and enemy to the humans. Here, we see the power of language at work to reshape and form identity, while also revealing the ultimate fluidity of identity.

In describing the concept of the self, Nancy claims that the self is nothing more than "the form, structure, and movement of an infinite referral [*renvoi*], since it refers to something (itself) that is nothing outside of the referral" (9). Notably, Nancy highlights the "infinite referral" to signify the impossibility of a closed and static self, as the self is recreated each time it interacts with something or someone. Through interactions, how we conceive of the self is in a constant state of shifting, expanding, and taking on new meanings. The self, therefore, is created through a continual reference to something outside of the self, namely others and the environment. When a new referent, such as an alien species like the Oankali, is introduced, the concept of human can become expanded and take on new forms. Hence, what constitutes the self also changes as we now have to reassess our sense of self in relation to an alien species. However, if we are trapped thinking in terms of difference and what separates us from others, the potential to recognizing this powerful reconceptualizing of the human falls flat. In examining the role

of the subject in Nancy's work, Brian Kane explores this "unrepresentable self" when he suggests that "any representation of the self (a specular imago or proper 'I', the other, whether present or absent, rival or gap) cannot capture the productivity of the self as an ongoing temporal or rhythmic pulse" (445). Therefore, to recognize the multiplicity of the self means to recognize that the concept of the human is also ongoing and continually changing as language expands or sounds take on new meanings. By examining how Nancy's exploration of the subject works within voice, we can see that language allows humans to understand themselves through existent referrals, such as traitor or enemy, unconscious of a third possibility, a possibility in which Lilith does not exist in this human versus non-human binary.

To conceptualize of these evolving dimensions of the self, Roland Barthes provides us with the concept of the "grain of the voice," which is, as he describes it, "the materiality of body speaking its mother tongue" (182). Significantly, the embodied, material voice cannot be reduced to a "known, coded emotion," but instead "explores how the language works and identifies with that work" (Barthes 185; 182). Therefore, Barthes' "grain" can also be understood as not just an embodied, material voice, but a voice that allows us to think outside of culturally or linguistically embedded meanings. Thus, the "grain" represents the unknown or the insignificant, that which language cannot convey. The grain is a space "where significations germinate" but where it has "nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression" (Barthes 182). The grain works within language, but it provides a way for sound to function outside of cultural value. Within the grain, sound is not just a conveyor of communication or authority; instead, the grain seeks to work at language by challenging the value of

language itself. When we are listening to the grain of a voice, we are invited in the meaning-making process, allowing for the infinite referral of meaning to create fissures within language that reveal it as constructed, wherein language simultaneously both confines meaning and allows us to communicate outside of what is already known.

Crucially, however, we must recognize that the grain reveals the artifice of voice and language, “an extreme rigour of thought” that is placed into how the voice is conveyed (Barthes 183). In an essay examining the context behind Barthes’ concept of the grain, Jonathan Dunsby traces the prolific music career of Charles Panzéra, the focus of Barthes’ essay, concluding that “the apparent effortlessness, or indeed effortful-ness, of the great singer is complete artifice,” which Barthes does not deny himself (121). This is not to say, however, that the voice is necessarily deceptive, but that the voice is encoded within a series of rehearsals that establish it within language, which can become deceptive if not recognized. Therefore, Barthes’ grain of the voice is not simply inverting binaries between rationality and materiality, or mind and body, but is reinstating material, embodied sounds as sites of meaning that coincide within and despite language, which permit us to conceptualize of meaning beyond language once we have recognized the artifice of language itself.

Recognizing the creation of meaning as an ever evolving and boundless process, a process that is not always tied to a signified meaning, is at the heart of Nancy and Barthes’ theories, in which they highlight sound as a particularly useful instrument that exposes how language and voice can work to reinforce certain culturally sanctioned meanings, while simultaneously allowing us to think outside of these meaning. One place we see a tension between voice and linguistic meaning in *Dawn* is when voice appears as

separate from or without a body. By leaving us with just a voice, we are able to think through how sound functions within the voice itself, dislocated from the body. When the Oankali begin to speak to Lilith while she is in solitary confinement, they appear as a disembodied vocal apparatus. Lilith describes how “she remained sealed in her cubicle and their voices came to her from above like the light. There were no visible speakers of any kind, just as there was no single spot from which light originated. The entire ceiling seemed to be a speaker and a light” (Butler 5). Her comparison of the Oankali voices to a light with no source suggests that she is enveloped by the voices, yet she cannot tie the voices down to a particular body or origin point. This relationship between the voice and the body at the beginning of *Dawn* can be understood through the concept of the “acousmatic,” which both LaBelle and Mladen Dolar adapt from Michael Chion, which is a “voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place” (Dolar 60). Significantly, LaBelle adds to this definition of the acousmatic that it “stages the ambiguity of sound” (*Sonic Agency* 37). Thus, the acousmatic as LaBelle emphasizes, is not just a disembodied voice, but a voice that draws attention to the ambivalent nature with which we classify and understand voice.

By separating the voice from the body, we are forced to confront how we assign values and code identities onto certain voices, recognizing the ways in which sound functions to reinscribe cultural beliefs. In examining how, as a culture, we place notions of race and gender onto vocal timber Nina Sun Eidsheim, suggests that “when the beliefs are in place that we can know sound, and that the meaning we infer from it is stable, then whatever we believe is projected onto the sound,” (5). Eidsheim claims that this misconception leads to circular listening, as we are only listening to what we think we

know, which simultaneously verifies these assumptions and influences our perceptions (6). This results in us both inscribing cultural meaning onto certain voices and preforming certain voices to become recognized within culture. We see this when Lilith is confronted with the acousmatic voices without a body during her captivity, as she is careful not to assign a gender or other characteristics to her captors, only referring to the Oankali as either “the voices,” “they,” or her “captors.” Without a body, the voice evades these prescribed meanings and identifying features—it becomes just a voice. What Lilith is searching for is some indication of her relationship to these voices, an indication of who her captors may be, yet she can only describe the voices as “usual, quiet, androgynous” (Butler 9). The androgynous voice, then, begins to work against cultural assumptions related to sounds and the voice. These voices are tied to corporeality, to the idea of a body, yet they defy corporeality, refusing categorization and indications of what constitutes a voice. Therefore, the voice devoid of signification, severed from a reference, reveals the artifice with which these meanings are constructed and maintained.

However, once Lilith finally sees the “shadowy figure” of Jdahya and is able to once again locate a voice to a body, she reverts back to assigning values and assumptions, referring to the figure as “he” (Butler 9-10). After only hearing Jdahya speak, Lilith asks him if he is male or female, to which he responds, “It’s wrong to assume that I must be a sex you’re familiar with” (Butler 11). By pointing this out to Lilith, Jdahya encourages Lilith to reexamine how she conceives of gender and the voice, causing her to question her assumptions. Jdahya’s remark suggests that masculinity, or even femininity, is not constructed within the voice itself but is rather reflects what we are conditioned to hear in relation to a particular body. This type of listening, a listening that is entrenched in

cultural values and meanings, distracts us from hearing the voice in its actuality. Instead, Eidsheim suggests that when we place these values on sound, “we are conditioned to hear what we listen for, and to assume that what we hear is indisputable” (5). In other words, when we hear a voice, we are already listening for predetermined meaning that has nothing to do with the voice or sound itself, displacing actual sound from the voice. Accordingly, when Lilith refers to Jdahya as male, Lilith finds herself embedded in this conditioning that controls what we can and cannot hear, which Jdahya pushes back against. By introducing themselves as disembodied voices, the Oankali force Lilith to reckon with her own biases and judgements, revealing how the acousmatic voice “accentuates sound’s capacity to extend away from bodies and things, and to request from us another view onto the world, one imbued with ambiguity” (LaBelle, *Sonic Agency* 33). When confronted with these assumptions, Lilith is challenged to reexamine sounds with a lens of uncertainty, exposing what we think we know about the voice and sound as complete artifice, an indoctrination of the voice into categories and binaries that reinforce cultural values and assumptions.

However, recognizing the performative and constructed nature of the voice allows us to also envision it as a site of resistance by breaking down the binaries that structure what we are able to hear. The acousmatic voice, due to its inability to be pinned down to a single source, allows us to question the voice as a foundation of autonomy. In Dolar’s examination of the voice, he suggests that it is fundamentally acousmatic, claiming, “Every emission of the voice is by its very essence *ventriloquism*” in that the voice comes from the body and the mouth, yet it does not quite belong to the body (70). In thinking of the voice as ventriloquism and the potential that “we are ourselves the dummy,” Dolar

raises the question of the source of the voice and who is controlling the words that come out of our mouth. In the case of Lilith, we see this ventriloquism at work when she says what she is expected to say, such as when she claims the hybrid baby inside of her “won’t be human . . . It will be a thing. A monster” (Butler 246). However, Nikanj brings attention to the performative nature of Lilith’s words when it responds, “You shouldn’t begin to lie to yourself. It’s a deadly habit” (Butler 246). Claiming that Lilith is lying to herself works to dissociates the voice from the body, emphasizing how the voice can function to reinforce cultural values and beliefs.

This theme of the body and voice being at odds is seen with other humans, as well, such as when Joseph tries to resist Nikanj’s offer as a sexual intermediary between himself and Lilith. Nikanj replies to Joseph’s accusation that he was coerced by saying, “Your body said one thing. Your words said another” (Butler 190). Here, as with Lilith, Joseph’s words are enacting a culturally acceptable response to Nikanj’s suggestion. Yet, his body, as a voice of its own, works outside of language to communicate with Nikanj. To give meaning to this silent voice, Dolar suggests that “Inside the heard voice is an unheard voice, an aphonic voice” that “both evokes and conceals the voice; the voice is not somewhere else, but it does not coincide with voices that are heard” (74). As seen with Lilith and Joseph, the unheard or unspoken voices that coexist alongside the actual spoken voice are embedded in materiality and the body. Therefore, listening to the material voice itself, not what the voice is saying—which is coded in language and values—but the sounds of the voice and the reactions of the body allows for an opening up a language and meaning that can include the non-human.

As a culture enmeshed in an ideology that upholds the voice as a source of identity and authority, making space for the material voice means rethinking who and what can speak. In order to create this space, we must recognize the body as a site of voice. Barthes' concept of the grain addresses this necessity when he claims, "I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way 'subjective'" (188) To listen for the grain, then, is not only to listen to the body, but to recognize how the grain dissipates subjectivity, as "the climatic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it" (Barthes 188). This loss of subjectivity, then, is a relinquishing of our body and mind over to sound—the sounds of others are allowed to pervade us, attuning our perception away from the mind and towards our body, recognizing the body as "a substance that responds to the rhythms of its environment" (Kapchan 34). Therefore, the material grain of the voice speaks not to the mind, but to the body. Recognizing artifice, or how language works to condition the voice, simultaneously gives meaning to the pure sounds of the voice and how our body responds, as we are able to separate sounds from the words and examine how and if they work together.

This sensorial listening, a listening between bodies, is expressed in *Dawn* when Lilith listens to Nikanj speak. She remarks how "She thought there could be nothing more seductive than an ooloi speaking in that particular tone, making that particular suggestion" (Butler 161). In this scene, the tone of the voice, the actual sound Nikanj's voice generates, is what makes Nikanj's suggestion so powerful for Lilith, as its voice evokes in Lilith's body a potential for "an intimacy with Joseph that was beyond ordinary human experience" (Butler 161). Thus, when listening to Nikanj, Lilith is not just

listening to its suggestion, but to the unheard yet felt voice, a voice that had “simulated her auditory nerve directly” and had aroused a response in her body (Butler 162). The compelling nature of this voice, which speaks not only through language but through the body itself, causes Lilith’s body to react before her mind even has time to process the suggestion, as she had “stood up without meaning to and taken a step toward the bed,” is what Lilith poses as the ultimate lure of the Oankali (Butler 161). Recognizing this bodily reaction is what allows Lilith to experience a connectivity with her own body on a purely sensorial level that transcends humanly boundaries. Through this sensory awareness, she is able to experience a loss of herself, becoming receptive to the potential of interconnectivity with others. For example, when Lilith is connected with Joseph through Nikanj, she finds that there had never been a “‘time alone’ to contrast with the present ‘time together.’ He had always been there, part of her, essential” (Butler 162). This intimacy with Joseph fundamentally shifts Lilith’s understanding of herself and her connection to others, exceeding the self as she recognizes that the self is experienced through others. This loss of subjectivity is what allows Lilith to recognize herself as a resonant subject, a self that is rebounding through others. Therefore, listening to the body becomes listening to and giving meaning to others.

By recognizing the artifice of the voice, Lilith is able to listen to the way the body speaks, which transcend boundaries that promote a separation between the self and others. This new form of embodied listening, which is tuned not only to the voice but to the actual sounds of speaking, to “what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of musical instrument, even the wind in the branches” allows the concept of the voice to become expanded by

recognizing a voice in non-speaking subjects (Nancy 22). Thus, when Lilith mentions “the lesson all adult ooloi eventually taught” she does not seem to be talking purely about pleasure, but the ability to transcend what her consciousness allows, accepting that others and the environment can speak through her, even if not directly to her. For Lilith this release of control is the epitome of listening—a distancing away from voice and towards sounds, both heard and felt.

CONCLUSION

The essence of this project lies in the potentiality of sound to connect us with our surroundings, giving voice and meaning to the often unheard or inaudible participants in our environment. However, this project is not meant to reduce these non-human entities to anthropomorphic personifications, but to find significance in the animate world that surrounds us through a refiguring of the voice that encompasses the materiality of sounds. To accomplish this refiguring of the voice, this thesis set out to examine how ecofeminism, sound studies, and science fiction writing converge through the concept of listening, which works within each field to promote interrelationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment. Though little scholarly work has been done to examine how these different ideas of “listening” speak to one another, this thesis brings these conjoining methods of listening in conversation with one another by examining Octavia Butler’s novel, *Dawn*. This examination revealed how Butler employed listening within her writing as a way to promote a new understanding of subjectivity as it is created through sound, in which subjectivity is corporeal, rebounding, and inseparable from the surrounding environment, envisaging sound as a crease in perception that allows for an entangled way of being.

Through this examination of *Dawn*, we have seen how Butler establishes Lilith as a listening subject, illustrating how she comes to understand her environment through sound and resonance as opposed to sight. In listening to her environment, Lilith’s begins to let go of speech and understanding, attuning herself to her body and perception as

conveyors of meaning. Ultimately, Lilith's ability to listen sets her apart from the other humans, as she is able resist the hierarchical impulses that situates speech as a form of dominance, allowing her to learn to collaborate with the Oankali. To better understand these dualisms placed around speaking and listening, chapter two examined the ways in which sonic hierarchies unfolded throughout *Dawn*, paying particular attention to voice as a form of self-preservation. Though the Oankali claim to be non-hierarchical in nature, we traced how the Oankali employed silences and the absence of materiality in their voices as a form of sonic coercion that ultimately resulted in the humans developing an unwillingness to listen to and work with the Oankali.

To subvert these hierarchical structures that prevent the humans and the Oankali from being able to communicate and collaborate, chapter three problematized the voice as a source of individual identity, examining how a logocentric understanding of the voice that is focused on language works to silence non-communicative sounds and noises, reducing them to insignificance. However, Butler is able to move beyond language through the intra-active relationship between Lilith and Nikanj, which allows Lilith to give meaning to sounds and resonances that were inaudible to her in the beginning of the novel. The final chapter take this problematization of voice and language a step further, bringing in the notion of artifice, as it is through the recognition of artifice that the voice is revealed to function both as a way to reinscribe cultural significance through language, while simultaneously exposing what is hidden—the materiality of sound. When we listen to the materiality of sound, we are listening beyond what is being said and instead focusing on our perception of sound as it encounters our bodies and makes us more receptive to other and the environment.

Through her approach to listening, Butler shows us that more is needed than just a recognition of nature and non-human other—we must learn to reconceptualize of the voice, looking past language to see how sounds are resonating within and around us. Sound, then, becomes essential to our understanding of the voice, exceeding and expanding meaning. When we listen to the voices of others, we must also listen to the reverberations within the voice and to our bodies as they respond, disrupting the binary between mind and body that often keeps the body silent, insignificant.

However, this thesis does not only discuss the potential for sonic entanglements but provides a way of reading texts that performs these same entanglements. Throughout my reading of *Dawn*, I work to take attention away from what is being said and focus instead on how sound is used, within the voice, body, and environment. As my chapters argue against a logocentric understating of the voice, my examination of *Dawn* similarly attempts to look past the voice to see how sound is reverberating, influencing relationships between characters and establishing bonds between the human and non-human entities. Just as Lilith's notices when, "the raw sound of her own voice startled her," my reading attempts to locate these places where the voice or sound startles and upsets, taking on a significance of its own (Butler 78). As a methodology, reading texts through sonic entanglements allows us to view the text as an ecological environment, recognizing the ways in which sound draw attention to distributions of agency between the human and non-human, living and non-living, and even humans themselves. By incorporating sound within our understanding of voice, we are able to extend beyond language itself, "actually listening to it, rather than being reduced to hearing [*entendre*] it" (Nancy 63). Through sonic entanglements, we decenter logocentric readings and

closed signification, leaving space for ambiguity and inconsistencies as sound opens up new meanings within a text.

In continuing this project, my next step would be to expand upon the concepts of sonic hierarchies and entanglements as they relate to postcolonial and critical race theories. In examining how sound and voice play a foundational role in determining who or what is heard, it becomes clear that sound also functions as a colonizing or controlling force within society, reinforcing and reinstating binaries between speaker and listener, subject and object. Applying this methodology of sonic entanglement to theories centered on postcolonialism and race would mean examining how race intersects and interacts with conceptions of the voice as a source of power or identity, exploring the potentiality of the dispossessed voice as a subversive force, or tracing how certain voices function inherently outside of culture. Furthermore, intersecting these theories with an examination of the materiality of voice can work to further complicate the experiences of listening through a body that is coded in histories of diaspora and erasure, rethinking what it means to be connected with place and the environment. By uniting sound studies with theories of race, the voice and other sonic forces are revealed as ways of constructing who and what is heard, a recognition of which opens up the potential of sound to subvert these same hierarchical tendencies that structure how we listen.

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Sakakeeny, Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 232–245.

CURRICULUM VITA

Tristan DeWitt Carr

EDUCATION

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

August 2019 – May 2021 University of Louisville; Louisville, Kentucky

- Graduate Teaching Assistant
- Expected graduation date of May 2021

BACHELOR OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

December 2018 University of Louisville; Louisville, Kentucky

KIIS Study Abroad

May 2018 – June 2019

Western Kentucky University; Bowling Green, Kentucky

- Studied for six weeks in various locations throughout Greece.

WORK EXPERIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE; Louisville, Kentucky

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Composition Instructor

August 2020 – Present

- Course instructor, as the listed instructor of record, for two sections of English 101: Introduction to College Composition.
- Course instructor, as the listed instructor of record, for two sections of English 102: Intermediate College Writing.
- Encourage students to become more confident writers and to value writing as it is useful towards their future goals and careers.

Writing Center Consultant

August 2019 – July 2020

- Worked with all members of the university community to help them gain confidence in their writing.

- Offered questions, feedback, and suggestions by engaging in conversations with writers about their work, encouraging collaboration and allowing the writer space to develop their writing.
- Provided online consultations through written feedback and live video chats.

THE LEARNING HOUSE; Louisville, Kentucky

Online Advisor

January 2019 – July 2019

- Assisted online students with enrollment in classes and facilitated degree planning.
- Maintained communication with students and helped to develop personalized educational plans.
- Maintained student records and monitored student performance.
- Frequently checked-in with students in order to encourage retention and active enrollment.

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE; Louisville, Kentucky

Latin Tutor in the Learning Resource Center

September 2018 – December 2018

- Certified Level 1 tutor.
- Helped students to improve study habits by reviewing coursework and preparing for exams.
- Offered students assistance in developing organizational and critical thinking skills.
- Encouraged students to practice different study methods until they developed a strategy that worked best for them.

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE; Louisville, Kentucky

Student Worker for the Dean of Students Office

February 2018 – December 2018

- Assisted with clerical duties such as copying, scanning, and spreadsheets.
- Maintained office organization by arranging files and completing projects.
- Assisted with answering phone calls, taking messages, and making appointments for students.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

University of Louisville Writing Center Blog: October 14th, 2019; February 24th, 2020

- Published a blog post that encouraged students to take pride in their writing by recognizing the opportunities within each assignment for self-expression and discovery, promoting appreciation for the different ways in which everyone approaches writing process.

- Published a blog post that reflected on the significance of International Mother Language Day and the importance of multilingual and multicultural awareness within the university community.

The Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900: February 2020

- Chair of panel on Adolescence, Trauma, and Humor.

HONORS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- Dean’s List
- Treasurer of Eta Sigma Phi Greek and Latin National Honor Society
- Member of Mortar Board National Honor Society – Pallas Chapter

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Norton Healthcare Children’s Hospital Foundation

- Volunteer: Served as a volunteer for various fundraising events, helping with check-in, activities, and ticket sales.

Metro United Way

- Volunteer: As part in the 2019 Mayor’s Give A Day, I worked with Dare to Care to package dry and canned goods for distribution to local community centers.

Historic Locust Grove

- Docent: Worked as a docent at Historic Locust Grove giving small group tours and assisting school field trips.

Whitemills Christian Camp

- Elementary Counselor: Served as a group counselor for elementary-aged children for a weeklong summer camp. Helped to organize and coordinate daily activities, led small group meetings, and promoted community building within the group.

Taylorsville Elementary School

- Tutor: Worked with elementary-aged students in afterschool care on homework and reading development.

Lifebridge Missions

- Volunteer: Sorted and packed boxes full of canned goods for distribution to members of the community.