

FUTUREBODIES: OCTAVIA BUTLER AS POST-COLONIAL CYBORG THEORIST

Cassandra L. Jones

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2013

Committee:

Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

Susan L. Brown
Graduate Faculty Representative

Ellen Berry

Maisha Wester

© 2013

Cassandra L. Jones

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

Dr. Radhika Gajjala, Advisor

Donna Haraway has referred to Octavia Butler as a “theorist for cyborgs,” and while much work has been done to critically analyze Butler’s novels and short stories, there has been very little attention paid to her contributions as a theorist in her own right. Located at the intersection of postcolonial and cyborg theory, this study examines reason across Octavia Butler’s oeuvre, which groups historically have been granted access to reason via dominant discourses, and how Butler’s novels and short stories rework these discourses, creating an inclusive model of reason.

The study examines the historical linkages between Christianity and reason which fueled nineteenth century colonial projects as well as examining the construction of people of color as irrational and Butler’s postcolonial counter-discursive strategies in her novels *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Examining power in patterns of communication and knowledge production, the study also analyzes how the development of the experimental life in Europe in the seventeenth century shut out members of socially marginalized groups of the discursive site of the laboratory. Butler’s *Xenogenesis* and *Patternist* series, however, provide an example of networked communication that allows all participants to act as knowledge producers, granting women and people of color the ability to speak authoritatively. Finally, the study examines how Butler unites reason and religion in her *Parable* series to provide a grounded theoretical model to build these inclusive communication networks into the structure of a culture. The theory Butler

proposes provides us with a working model that stresses the importance of education, critical thought, and community-building in order to create a more just world.

To my family, both smooth-skinned and furry

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Radhika Gajjala for her unwavering support in this process and her mentorship in my professionalization. She opened many doors for me, both on campus and nationally, and I am deeply grateful for this. I would also like to thank Ellen Berry for the long-distance support she gave me as I found my way through the revision process and Maisha Wester for the helpful feedback and words of encouragement as I completed this process.

I would never have made it through this process without the help of two women in particular. The first of these is my dissertation/life coach, Rosalind Sibielski, who accommodated my long-distance freak outs, my progress reports, and ceaseless rants, and without whose encouragement and caring support this project would not stand completed. The second is my “dissertation cat” whose partnership and work ethic I have found inspiring. Her pep talks, hand clapping, and thirty-minute timer were all instrumental in seeing me through the writing and revising process. I hope I have been in any way as helpful or inspiring to you as you have to me, Angie Fitzpatrick.

This process was a long one and I leaned on all of the friends I made in Bowling Green throughout the journey. I am so pleased to have met you all and to have called you both my colleagues and my friends. I look forward to organizing and collaborating with you throughout our careers no matter where they take us, and to, hopefully, going to a few more Rock Star parties.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I. INTERROGATING COLONIALISM'S DICHOTOMIES: REASON AND RELIGION IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S PARABLE SERIES	21
CHAPTER II. PARTNERED MACHINES: BODY-TECHNOLOGY IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S XENOGENESIS AND PATTERNIST SERIES	45
CHAPTER III. SURVIVING THE RACIAL APOCALYPSE: LOVE, RELIGION, AND THE MARGINS IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S PARABLE SERIES	84
CONCLUSION	120
REFERENCES	125

INTRODUCTION

“No, I think the future of humanity will be like the past, we'll do what we've always done and there will still be human beings. Granted, there will always be people doing something different and there are a lot of possibilities.”

—Octavia E. Butler

The sly combination of despair and possibility, or as Jim Miller phrased it, “post-apocalyptic hoping,” that Butler creates in the landscape of her novels and fabric of her characters is one of the more compelling features of her work. The resignation that humans will repeat the mistakes of the past in new and different ways is Butler’s hallmark and what makes her work a powerful engagement with the politics of the day. This slyness that offers possibilities and hope alongside the destruction of the imagined safety and comfort of civilization always teeters on the edge of despair, never suggesting that the possibilities for the future are always imbued with hope. Even these moments of hope for change are embedded within and presented alongside the possibilities of a new sameness, highlighting humans’ innovative ways of harming each other along the familiar lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Her hopefulness does not suggest the complete escape of these systems of domination, but rather marks the possibilities of oppositional consciousness that can continue to shift and track these innovations in pain in order to resist and rewrite them.

Re-envisioning power structures is an ability that lies at the heart of science fiction. Speculative fiction theorist Darko Suvin calls this power, shared by both utopia and science fiction, “cognitive estrangement” (*Metamorphoses* 12). His definition emphasizes two related concepts. The first, “cognition,” “sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as

unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a cognitive view [...] not only reflecting *of* but also *on* reality” (*Metamorphoses* 7 and 10). This suggests that the realism present in science fiction, in contrast to fantasy, allows us to recognize a reflection of our reality. Indeed, Jeff Menne cites science fiction as “a mode of representation that can execute the realist function in better faith than other genres traditionally identified with realism” such as memoirs or documentaries (Menne 716). However, Suvin also adds the notion of “estrangement” or “the ability to view the present through a critical, distancing eye” which demonstrates how science fiction shifts our frame of reference allowing us to engage the problems of the day from previously unseen or unimagined perspectives (Wegner xix). In doing so, he challenges readings of science fiction as mere “forms of futurology, narrow prognostications of technical or social developments to come” (Wegner xix). From science fiction’s cognitive estrangement, Butler’s exploration of the dangers of the future, and more importantly, the dangers of the present are born.

Butler’s oppositional approaches are woven through the dominant themes of her work, examining racial, gendered, and sexual oppression, slavery, and means of affective labor in kinship and community-building. Butler described her interests and the work they spawned as having their roots in both science fiction and fantasy. Butler’s first novel, 1978’s *Kindred*, is often mistaken as science fiction, to which she responded that the lack of science to explain how the main character moves through time is rather “a grim fantasy” than science fiction (Crossley qtd in Yasek 1058). The bulk of her work, however, does contain elements of her various interests in astronomy, geology, anthropology, as well as her keen observation in our collective tendency towards hierarchy and “think[ing] we’re always right” (Barnes qtd in Page 44). Her oeuvre encompasses three multi-novel series, two stand-alone novels, and a collection of short stories.

Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines have examined the work of Octavia Butler. Donna Haraway brought Butler to academic fame by citing her as an example of a cyborg theorist in her 1984 piece “A Cyborg Manifesto.” Utopian scholars quite frequently study the worlds she created, putting her work in relationship to others who have created utopias and dystopias in the past. Of course, science fiction studies has often looked to Octavia Butler, and science fiction scholar, Sherryl Vint, in particular, makes use of Butler’s novel, *Clay’s Ark*, in tandem with Haraway in order to think through the representation of kinship and animal-human hybridity. Afrofuturists such as Alondra Nelson and Greg Tate often cite Butler as one of the black science fiction authors who center questions of race, history, and the recovery of lost African-American history in their work. Butler is particularly popular among scholars who study memory and the neo-slave narrative. Lisa Yaszek and Anne Donadey both explore how *Kindred* “re-present[s] African-American women’s histories” (Yaszek 1053) and examines the “contemporary legacy of traumatic national pasts and the treatment of women’s agency and desire under situations of extreme violence” (Donadey 66).

Postcolonial scholars as well find Butler’s work useful in understanding questions of postcolonial memory and the cognitive dissonance felt by some African Americans as they try to put the history of physical and sexual subjugation of American chattel slavery in conversation with contemporary expressions of interracial romance and marriage. Indeed, her popularity is apparent when one looks to the outpouring of grief from various corners of fandom and academia brought about by Octavia Butler’s untimely passing in 2006. What these treatments of Butler’s work share is an approach that I find somewhat problematic. It is a common practice to look to an artist’s work and see reflections of one’s own anxieties reflected there. In the case of academic analysis of Butler’s work, this practice results in finding the academic’s own thoughts

exemplified within her stories. Despite the fact that Butler's work preceded and in many ways prefigures the work of Donna Haraway and other scholars who would later reference her, no one has returned to the work of Butler to understand how her work presented a theory of its own: a theory that both converges and diverges with the circulating academic theories on various points and particular historical moments. What I find to be problematic about the conventional approach to Butler's oeuvre is the disappearance of Butler herself as a theorist. Although Haraway has referred to Butler as a "theorist for cyborgs" (Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 173), little work has been done to discover what that theory might actually be.

What I have done with this project is put Octavia Butler in conversation using her written work and her own words given in various interviews with postcolonial theorists and cyborg feminists—two sets of theory that have similar aims and themes as those present within the work of Octavia Butler; Rather than making her work a perfect fit for these theories, I examine the ways in which her work and these disciplines inform and are shaped by each other. The contribution to cyborg and postcolonial fields is found primarily in the working models of differential consciousness Butler fleshes out. These fictional worlds provide a cite of interrogation of these theories as well as a more adaptable real-world model of resistance and community-building, while also retaining Butler's, at times, discordant voice within these models.

A central question in the configuration of theorists is why postcolonial and cyborg theories are necessary for the interrogation of Butler's work. Postcolonial theory, which examines how identities and cultures can be reclaimed from the oppression wrought by colonialist and imperialist regimes, is a useful tool for investigating how Butler's characters function underground or at the margins of the worlds she creates. This axis of investigation also

allows me to interrogate the ways in which questions of race and racism arise, sometimes explicitly and while in other instances coded, in Butler's work and are interrogated by her characters. While critical race theory might seem a more natural fit, postcolonial theory allows me to examine the ever-present question of slavery with its attendant questions of racial and sexual domination that lie at the heart of her oeuvre. Indeed, many scholars have examined her primarily along the axis of contribution to the field of postcolonial literature, however, it is important to remember that her work is largely science fiction, with novels such as *Kindred* figuring as fantasy. Any consideration of Butler as a theorist in her own right must reconcile her chief concern with technology and communication.

Cyborg theory is a framework that explicitly addresses this concern. This set of theories examines the relationship between technology and the body as technology is used to understand and situate the body, moves inside the body, and offers possibilities for both a radical rethinking of hierarchy and increased surveillance and the loss of bodily integrity. The duality of cyborg theory's discussion of technology as both emancipator and purveyor of tyranny certainly matches Butler's tone of post-apocalyptic hoping and Butler's work has partially inspired the growth of the field of thought and been a focus of its study. As a result, this seems, at first glance, the perfect fit to reconcile the gap between identity politics and technology. Indeed, cyborg theory incorporates the plight of third world women into a complex theory of technology and the body.

Should this not then be sufficient for building an understanding of Butler as a theorist? I argue that this is not the case for a few reasons. The first is that neither postcolonial nor cyborg theory act as a perfect fit for understanding Butler's argumentation. Indeed, no theoretical paradigm is universal and while postcolonial theory does not address the specifics of technology and nature, cyborg theory often elides race to focus on the gendered aspects of embodied

technology. While both offer necessary discursive modes of thought for excavating Butler's work, neither can do it alone and therefore, this project uses both frames of analysis to understand how Butler's stories provide the reader with an approach for opposing forces of domination.

In order to more fully understand the interplay of Octavia Butler's stories and postcolonial theory and cyborg feminism, let us quickly review the work of the theorists most useful in developing an understanding of Butler as a voice that speaks in each of these fields. Of these works that directly and indirectly form the theoretical underpinning of this project, Gloria Anzaldúa is the first. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* forms the theoretical foundation of my understanding of postcolonial theory. Using the U.S.-Mexican border as both metaphor and political touchstone, Anzaldúa broadens her view to define border, border culture and borderlands looking to geography and identity as cultural sites of contention. "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (*Borderlands* 3). As people cross geographical/spatial borders, or as the Chicano saying goes "we didn't cross the border/the border crossed us," they transgress unclearly marked cultural borders. The idea of the ambiguity that exists along the dividing line of two concepts is widely applicable and has found a great deal of usage in works on identities and embodiment. Octavia Butler explores similar geological and spatial border crossings and the resulting battles over identity, resources, and ownership in many of her short stories and novels. Her *Xenogenesis* series in particular features aliens who colonize Earth, and in a move similar to histories of Western colonization, claim and utilize resources to

the destruction of those who would remain behind. Just as Chicano's identities shifted as a result of war and reallocated lands, the arrival of the aliens at the moment of nuclear holocaust found humans in position where not only their national citizenship shifted, but, with the genetic restructuring at the hands of these aliens, their very humanity was in question. The relationship between Chicano history in the U.S. and the fictional story in the *Xenogenesis* allows for an examination of Butler as a U.S. Third World feminist as well as a postcolonial thinker.

Another contribution Anzaldúa makes to this project is the *mestiza* consciousness. This consciousness that arose from the theorizing of the multiracial identity of "mestizos" is a consciousness of flexibility, ambiguity and hybridity. From the borderlands, it is a consciousness in constant evolution for whom "Rigidity means death" (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 79). These ideas are particularly useful for my examination of Octavia Butler's hybrid characters and the borders between human/animal and human/machine that their very existence calls into question. Butler's *Xenogenesis* series plays with the boundaries between living beings, particularly as the alien-human hybrid characters of the final book in the series, *Imago*, finds their bodies mutating and adapting beyond their ability to control them. In the novel, literally holding oneself together becomes the central goal of these shape-shifting characters, just as for Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* consciousness becomes a means of survival.

Despite the similarity between survival and fluidity in *Imago* and the *mestiza* consciousness, this is an example of one of the sites at which these two theories part ways. While Anzaldúa celebrates the flexibility of *mestiza* identity, Butler, while seeing endless possibility, uses the metaphor of the shape-shifter to take this idea to its fantastical extreme to point to the need to find a sense of stability in an identity which is ever-shifting. This is a useful moment which reveals the limits of the *mestiza* consciousness and calls upon Gayatri Spivak's notion of

“strategic essentialism,” the need to claim a contingent identity for the sake of organization and action. Political action, in Butler’s alien-human hybrid metaphor, is translated to survival. Within the “political” structure of the Oankali, their alien-human hybrid known as ooloi are a danger by nature of their very existence. A shape-shifter beyond control poses a threat to not only the lives of the Oankali, but the entire ecosystem in which humans and Oankali live. Despite their ability to reshape themselves, the Oankali must maintain some sort of actionable shape, an organization of their own internal organs/organisms, that can communicate with the larger system. An inability to do so would mean extermination at the hands of the greater Oankali system. This reflects Spivak’s notion that the need to claim an identity for a brief period of time in order to organize and take political action is a way to survive and partake in a political structure that would dismiss minority voices. Butler’s metaphor is an expansion of the idea the personal is political to highlight the life or death consequences of the inability to unite, even temporarily, as a unit.

When it comes to notions of hybridity, racial border-crossing serves as just one means of analysis. The following theorists take the notion of hybridity to mean the plexus of the body and technology through the various articulations of physical reproduction and the reproduction of identities. The first of which is, Donna Haraway, who must be included in an investigation of technology and identity. In her essay, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” Haraway examines the revolutionary potential of the cyborg as “a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource for some fruitful couplings” (272). She sees the relations between human and machine as a border war where “production, reproduction, and imagination” are at stake. In conceiving of ourselves as cyborgs, she argues, we can escape the binaries of public and private, of human and animal. Despite their origins in the patriarchal capitalist system, she finds the

cyborg a bastard child we can trust due illegitimate children's notorious desire to defy their parentage. So while the cyborg may find its roots in the military complex, like all technology (and, as her metaphor implies, humans), the origins do not define the totality of its application, nor can the creator of a particular technology control the ways in which it is used once unleashed upon the world. For Haraway, the master has created a tool in the cyborg that can ultimately bring an end to his patriarchal reign.

Haraway's essay, "The Promises of Monsters," discusses the role of Enlightenment in our understanding of the relationship between nature and culture, nature and technology, and human and non-human, non-organic, and non-technological "actors/actants." Haraway responds to Katherine Hayles' argument that global technology "appears to denature everything," (Hayles); Haraway argues this is actually a particular production of nature, not a removal from nature. This productionist project reduces everything to a commodity to be manipulated or produced/transformed; in effect, everything in the world becomes an artifact, including nature.

But, Haraway asks herself if we should continue to see nature this way. Is it not evidence of how we have been stripped away from our relationship with the earth and made to be dazzled by an insistence on technoculture, experiencing a particular technophilia? Is this idea not too bound up in Eurocentric and anthropocentric views to be useful? Should we be looking for a new way to see ourselves, the universe, and everything? For Haraway the answer lies in two related changes we should make: "Unblinding ourselves from the sun-worshipping stories about the history of science and technology as paradigms of rationalism" (66). Despite her problematic use of "false idoltry" in the form of sun-worship as a metaphor for false gods, her notion of uncoupling ourselves from rationalism as the ultimate end goal is a useful one.

Haraway's second change lies in "refiguring the actors in the construction of the ethno-specific categories of nature and culture. The actors are not all 'us.' If the world exists for us as 'nature,' this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological...it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans" (66). Reconfiguring the relationship between humans and non-humans allows us to escape from our patriarchal hierarchy and gives us a means to avoid a simple power reversal from the masculine to the feminine. The promise of the monster in this piece brings us back to the question of technology as inherently evil. Will all attempts to inflict technology on the body lead to a Frankenstein's monster or can technology be liberatory? This is a central question in Butler's work as well. For Butler, however, technology is housed in the wetware of the body rather than the hardware of circuits and wires. Where Haraway is useful in this project is how she opens up the dialogue allows us to see how Butler's hybrid shape-shifting ooloi provide us with useful metaphors for understanding how we see the world and the actants in it and what other avenues of thought we might explore.

Haraway's "The Promises of Monsters" seeks a "public culture" in which all actors/actants have agency "which/who can reconfigure the earth. "...perhaps those other actors/actants, the ones who are not human, are our topick gods, organic and inorganic" (66). Biology is a discourse, but it isn't constructed by humans alone—machines (actors because they can produce surprise) "and other partners are active constructors of natural scientific objects; not pre- or extra-discursive objects, but partners" (67). Rethinking our relationship with our creations, but technologically and discursively. The machine becomes a partner. This is a particularly useful idea when it comes to analyzing the work of Octavia Butler. We might envision Butler's relationship to technology as expressed in her work as active along two

vectors. In the *Parable* series, for instance, the characters' ultimate goal is to take root among the stars, thus technology holds a vital role in the destiny of humankind and the actants, both human and non-human, are very much linked, informing and shaping the possibilities for each other. But this is not the only relationship Butler constructs between actants. Butler does not claim a partnership between humans and technologies in her *Xenogenesis* series and perhaps, arguably, the *Patternist* series. The machine disappears and the body itself changes form. Innate bodily abilities, such as the cancerous growth that is transformed from a danger to a mechanism of healing, are not brought about by technology, but rather by the union of the human body with the alien body. This merging of bodily forms allows us to re-envision our relationship both to cancer and to ourselves.

In addition to this, Haraway's union of scientific studies of primates and religion that is used to create a false dichotomy between them is in itself a hybrid form that deconstructs the borders of disciplinarity. *Primate Visions* explores how primatology of the twentieth century has been used to justify and explain colonialist projects of the twentieth century, playing a major role in the discourses of difference and identity through to even the postcolonial attempts to recover self or to recover from constructions of race and gender. Deconstructing the division between human and animal and the forces of interpretation that frame relationships among primates as natural extensions of our own cultural relationships features heavily in Butler's novel *Clay's Ark*.

In the novel, the characters are faced with a question as to the nature of the natural when an alien virus transforms them into creatures driven nearly exclusively by instinctual impulse and desire. Their next generation is still further transformed into animals running swiftly on all fours. The struggle within as they cyclically (attempt to) resist and embrace these changes act as a critique of the notion of the natural and the cultural lens through which we view appropriate

behaviors that is very similar to that critique Haraway calls for in both *Primate Visions* and “The Promises of Monsters.” This notion also reappears within the work of Rosi Braidotti.

In the vein of Deleuze, Braidotti utilizes “the becoming woman/insect/imperceptible/molecular” as a means of desacralizing the division between humanity and animality. Similar to Donna Haraway’s work, Rosi Braidotti’s notion of nomadic subjectivity is a useful tool for thinking through how Octavia Butler deconstructs the subject position. But it is where Braidotti’s work questioning the anthropocentric worldview intersects with the posthuman that promises to be the most fruitful. Looking to the technological processes that blur the distinctions between the categories of human, animal, plant, and machine, Braidotti interrogates possibly liberatory modes of understanding existence. Regarding contemporary science fiction, her analysis examines how the “established success of...science fiction and cyberpunk...points to a new ‘post-human’ techno-teratological phenomenon that privileges the deviant or the mutant over the more conventional versions of the human” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 179). While her analysis seeks to uncover the relationship between the feminine in the monstrous in the contemporary science fiction, she opens up a challenge that is useful for my purposes.

For Braidotti and other scholars and theorists, science fiction functions as a site of emotion and of excess, akin to the neo-Gothic, that blurs gender boundaries in its excess (179). It is this blurring of gendered boundaries that holds the liberatory potential and provides for Braidotti a site at which to interrogate representations of the “hybrid, monstrous, abject and alien others” searching for representations that are expressed in such a way as to subvert the construction and consumption of pejorative differences” (182). That difference has been articulated in theoretical discourse as negative is what Braidotti refers to as a “metaphysical

cannibalism” within feminist theory “that feeds on its structurally excluded others” (175). While she is not successful in her search for a positive representation in the contemporary science fiction she examines, this is useful for looking at how Octavia Butler manages to avoid some of the failures Braidotti locates in others’ work.

Braidotti’s development of the term figuration was a compelling piece. She defines the figuration as a “politically informed account of alternative subjectivity” (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 1). She cites her nomad as a “a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows [her] to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience” (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 4). Arguing the difference between a feminist figuration and a classical metaphor, she writes, “where ‘figurations; of alternative feminist subjectivity, like the womanist, the lesbian, the cyborg, the inappropriate(d) other, the nomadic feminist, and so on, differ from classical ‘metaphors’ is precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one’s locations. They express materially embedded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of others” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 13).

Indeed, I drew heavily from her discussion of the metaphor in constructing the medusa figuration, a networked communication pattern that I trace throughout Octavia Butler’s work. I found her argument for additional theoretical iterations on the postmodern feminist stage to be a useful one in the justification of this contribution. She “plea[ds] for different ways of thinking about and representing the body” (5) and in the medusa figuration in a sense is an answer to this plea. Where others find the introduction of seemingly endless difference to be divisive, she considers this to both be an expression of “the logic of capitalist exploitation” and the emergence of self-defined subjectivities (13). Braidotti claims, “I believe in the empowering force of the political fictions that are proposed by feminists as different from each other as Luce Irigaray and

Donna Haraway...both are committed to the radical task of subverting conventional views and representations of human and especially of female subjectivity. They both rely on alternative figurations as a way out of the old schemes of thought” (Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects* 3). I agree that there is room in feminist theory for multiple perspectives and multiple figurations which can allow us to find “a way out of the old schemes of thought.” This is the site from which the medusa figuration emerges.

Another feature of Braidotti’s work that I found quite useful in the development of Butler’s medusa figuration is Braidotti’s discussion of the monstrous. She notes the fluidity of the monstrous “by blurring the boundaries of differentiation, the monstrous signifies the difficulty of keeping manageable margins of differentiation of the boundaries between self and other” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 205). I trace this fluidity in Butler’s work noting that this is a crucial element to the patterns and networks of communication that appear in her stories. The medusa figuration in Butler’s texts is relational, requiring difference, maintaining porous boundaries between the self and the other in and across these networks.

Anne Balsamo continues the investigation into the union of bodies and technologies. Her work, however, is less concerned with the utopian possibilities of this union. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* covers multiple dimensions of the concept of border and its subsequent border-crossing. Cyborg technologies or the blending of artificial human parts with the human body as it exists in nature transgress a host of binary boundaries: human/machine, male/female, life/death, and natural/unnatural. Balsamo explores the ways in which technology is used on our bodies (technologies of surveillance and pregnancy and cosmetic surgery), in our bodies (the artificial heart and other replacement parts) and to alter the way our bodies produce themselves (steroid use in bodybuilding). This she feels will contribute a

feminist dimension to a developing “thick perception” of the body, that is the body as not simply as an object created by multiple discourses, but also as an object of nature, that feels and exists in reality.

Chela Sandoval provides the final unifying vector of analysis. *Methodology of the Oppressed* gathers the work of feminist, postcolonial, and particular postmodern voices together under the umbrella of oppositional consciousness. Her discussion of revolutionary love is a particularly useful tool in mapping Butler’s work in relation to postcolonial theory in general and U.S. Third World feminism in particular. Sandoval notes that the answer to Jameson’s concern over postmodernity’s ability to usurp and repurpose opposition lies in utilizing oppositional consciousness already in circulation in the margins. This notion is particularly useful for two reasons. The first is that Sandoval confronts a certain arrogance in the suggestion that if it does not appear in the canon, theories of opposition do not exist. The second is the idea that oppositional consciousness flows under many different names in the margins and that in many cases prefigures what are now mainstream academic theories that made use of these oppositional tactics. I explore this notion in relation to Octavia Butler as a means of reclaiming her work from usage as a mere illustration of another’s theory; to take her work as a theory of its own.

The first chapter takes as its focus the ways in which Octavia Butler’s *Parable* series fuses reason and indigenous religion, represented by Earthseed, as a post-colonial counter-discursive strategy that refuses the nineteenth century colonialist dichotomy that joins Christianity to reason and dismisses indigenous religion as mere superstition. I begin the chapter with an overview of the (now-contentious) relationship between Christianity and reason that fueled the colonial and imperial projects of the West in general, and the American conquest of the West via the concept of Manifest Destiny in particular. Seeking to examine the continuing

dismissal of indigenous religions, and by extension, indigenous peoples as irrational resulting from these discourses, I excavate *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* as sites in which Octavia Butler subverts this discourse in a multifaceted approach. By demonstrating the adherence to dogmatic knowledges within fundamentalist Christianity as represented in the novels by the Church of Christian America (CA), Butler exposes the irrationality of both fundamentalist Christianity and the CA while simultaneously exposing the racism and sexism that pervade the institution as equally irrational. In this way, she holds Christianity accountable for the role it played in the subjugation of indigenous peoples in colonial and imperial projects. Finally, through examining a fusion of reason and religion that falls in line with similar attempts to recuperate spirituality made by postcolonial authors, I note how this approach constitutes a postcolonial counter-discursive strategy for not simply inverting relationships of power, but by proposing a rethinking of religious structures that incorporate a moral code alongside scientific inquiry and rational thought.

The second chapter leaves religion behind, but continues to examine discourses of reason in the arena of knowledge production. I explore how Octavia Butler and Donna Haraway both seek to reorder our hierarchical relationship with nature emerging from Judeo-Christian mythology and supported by positivist scientific research as well as to entrench the body and technology in nature. Neither views nature as a pre-discursive object whose the mysteries might be revealed through scientific inquiry, nor is nature a completely a fluid text as some postmodern thinkers claim. Instead they view humans and technology as co-constructors of nature arranged in a Mobius strip-like relationship in which each affects the other continuously.

Butler's oeuvre, particularly the *Patternist* and *Xenogenesis* series, which form the basis of my interrogation in this chapter, explores, what I refer to as, "body-technology." The fusion of

body and technology, in which the body and our knowledge of it act as a form of technology itself, can be found in the Oankali's ability to understand the human body and their ability to transform cancer from a deadly function to one of healing. This fusion gives rise to the medusa figuration, a political myth that breaks down the boundaries between animal, human, and technology, that reconfigures our relationship to technology, and offers liberatory potential for gendered and raced power relations.

This concept, which I argue developed alongside Haraway's cyborg myth, offers a mode of analysis similar to the cyborg. Both attempt to reconfigure the borders between animal, human, and technology; however, Haraway's theory is frequently disassembled and used only to analyze the ways in which technology and the body are fused, focusing on the image of a cyborg as a synthesis of these two constructions. On the other hand, the medusa figuration resists this disassembly, retaining the power to deconstruct the categories of animal, human, and the technological with elements of each dimension appearing in every expression of the figuration.

The medusa figuration pulls its name from the myth of the Medusa, a woman whose monstrous head of snakes holds the power to turn observers into stone. This myth is reworked in Octavia Butler's oeuvre producing a recuperated monstrosity. Where the Medusa of mythology, when gazed upon, turns the observer to stone, limiting, in effect, their humanity and retaining the sole power of the look for herself, the medusa of this model is a figure whose power lies not in the ability to disenfranchise those who would look upon her, but rather whose gaze reaches out to incorporate observers into her web. Her gaze forms communities in which power and the ability to produce knowledge about both the medusa and the web itself is distributed among community members. This model grants monstrous femininity and races previously barred from it access to rationality, disrupting positivist scientific claims that have previously denied this

access. Just as the previous chapter examines Butler's recuperation of non-Western religion from the irrational, this chapter examines how non-whiteness and femininity have also been dismissed as irrational, and how Butler's model decenters white masculine reason by dismantling the boundaries of animal, human, and technology that form the underlying structures supporting this claim as the sole arbiters of reason.

The third chapter unites Octavia Butler's contributions to postcolonial and cyborg theories to examine her own practical theoretical model for not only surviving contemporary racism and sexism, but also how to build a world which, through kindness, community, and education, addresses these hierarchies of power. I explore how Butler demonstrates the potential recreation of colonialist power structures within postcolonial liberatory movements across her oeuvre, and how she is skeptical of a centered power position, but nevertheless creates a character in Lauren Olamina whose movement from the periphery of society to a position of political and social power reflects a certain desire to occupy that central position. From this novel, I argue that the union of Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness, Chela Sandoval's notion of revolutionary love, and Butler's own decentralized networks of knowledge production as culturally encoded in a religion, Earthseed, provides a framework for remaking a world that is committed to reason and social justice.

In what may be a somewhat self-serving detour, I would like to reflect briefly on my own relationship to this material over the past few years. I first discovered Octavia Butler's work on the day of her death. As is common in social media sites like Facebook, the death of important figures is mourned publically. A friend rued Butler's untimely passing and I found myself suddenly intrigued by the idea of science fiction written by a black feminist. Sometime later, while passing through the public library looking for nothing in particular, a book with a shocking

blue-hued cover caught my eye. Recognizing Butler's name and my interest, I picked up the copy of *Kindred* and brought it home to read.

I was originally drawn to the racial diversity of the characters, but more importantly I was intrigued by the depiction of an interracial couple surviving during slavery. As I pushed forward to her other works, her hybrid characters, which reflected my own multiracial background was the first time I could recall reading a science fiction story that reflected my existence in anyway, even if metaphorically. I was hooked.

Although I had been a fan of science fiction before finding Butler's work, fandom in my youth was focused on the utopian examples of the Star Trek universe. What I found appealing about the universe, which I still enjoy although now with a more tempered love, was the ability to watch an interracial cast interact without the need to reflect on racial dynamics. It reflected my own anxieties about race at the time and my own tactics of simply refusing to acknowledge contemporary expressions of racism through escaping to a utopian universe. As I grew to a certain level of comfort in acknowledging and confronting these feelings, I came across Butler whose work incorporated the aspects of technophilia and space exploration that I enjoy while firmly grounding these in a framework that calls attention to systems of social construction, privilege, and histories of colonization and oppression that make up our contemporary understandings of race and racism.

What I found in that first reading of *Kindred* was a kinship with Butler as her characters gave voice to my own thoughts, confronting racism, seeking justice, and contemplating systems of power particularly while trapped in the antebellum South. This relationship I felt to both the stories and the author herself occurred along many of the same vectors that I examine here: kinship, hybridity, love, and the desire to find a concrete approach to issues of social justice. This

feeling of solidarity gave rise to my desire to re-insert Octavia Butler's own words as well as her writing into discussions of meaning in the various treatments of her oeuvre. Butler frequently noted that the most interesting aspect of her life was her stories and they remain the only way to answer the questions I would ask her were she still alive.

CHAPTER I

INTERROGATING COLONIZATION'S DICHOTOMIES:
REASON AND RELIGION IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *PARABLE* SERIES

Reason and religion have frequently found themselves at the center of colonialist and imperialist discourse. Having long been constructed as binary opposites in Western culture, the association of Europe and the United States with reason has been an underlying motivation in imperialist and colonialist projects of domination and expansion. European expansion to the “New World” and its understanding of difference across the globe has been examined by scholars such as Jose Rabasa whose study of the atlas as a genre illuminates the ways in which European cartographers expressed cultural understandings of Europe as the site of reason, knowledge, and a universal masculinity. Rabasa notes how the mapping of spaces created an ideological division in the colonialist imaginary between “the naked and the dressed;” “Dressed and learned in the sciences, Europe rules and supercedes Asia, the origin of science, art, and religion. In contrast, Africa and America in their nudity testify to the dominance of the feminine and typify the barbarous stares that are, nonetheless, full of treasures for Europe” (Rabasa 204). Mercator’s 1636 Atlas provides further evidence in which Europe “appears as an elaborately dressed woman who also wears a crown and holds a book in her hands. Also clothed (but without a crown), Asia extends her bejeweled arms toward Europe. Africa forms a rather dramatic contrast since she is both dark-skinned and unclothed...’America’ [is] an Indian Queen [wearing a crown of feathers], but who is also naked and supplicating” (Donaldson 524). Through this complex intermingling of gender, logic, and spirituality, it becomes clear that the masculine

West is constructed as the site of logic, while other areas of the world are constructed as exotic beauties to be ravaged, owned, and plundered by the masculine West.

The division between West and East as sites of reason and illogical spirituality respectively is made more complex by the role Christianity plays in colonization and imperialism. Laura Donaldson has noted the importance of considering the role of Christianity in conquest stating “While many countries occupied and dominated foreign territories, only the group of nations claiming Christian identity implemented a global colonial system upon which the sun never set” (522). While contemporary constructions of this dichotomy place science/reason as antithetical to religion, as evidenced in debates over the role of evolution and creationism/intelligent design in the classroom, it is important to consider Christianity in its historical context as functioning alongside reason in colonialist discourse¹.

This chapter explores how Octavia Butler’s *Parable* series examines the relationship between reason and spirituality in discourses of discovery and expansion, simultaneously acknowledging the role Christianity played (and plays) in colonization, examining fundamentalist religion as oppositional to reason, while disrupting the contemporary notion that spirituality or religion is inherently antithetical to reason. In so doing, I discuss how Butler bridges the divide between this binary that lies at the center of colonialist discourse, while holding Christianity to account for the role it played in legitimizing and perpetuating colonization.

¹It is a problematic assertion to state uncritically that Reason and Christianity sit side by side. Indeed, science and Christianity have long held a contentious relationship. We can note this in the relationship between Catholic Church and the rejection of theories and excommunication of scientists such as Galileo whose claim that the Earth travels around the Sun found him tried by the Inquisition. While many scholars have discussed the role Christianity played in early European exploration and conquest, and others have cited the relationship between science and constructions of indigenous religions as superstition, there does not seem to be a body of research that examines the ways in which Christianity as an accepted Western religion functioned alongside science and reason to justify colonial expansion. This is quite an important area of study that, unfortunately, lies beyond the scope of this argument.

Dreams of and justifications for the colonialist project have long found a home in science fiction. A genre that, arguably, arose from the post-Enlightenment development of scientific inquiry, John Rieder notes that “evolutionary theory and anthropology, both profoundly intertwined with colonial ideology and history, are especially important to early science fiction from the mid-nineteenth century on” (Rieder 2). Rieder and other scholars cite the height of imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century as a crucial moment in the emergence of science fiction as a coherent genre. The expansion of the genre’s popularity mirrors the emergence of actors on the colonial stage first in England and France and then the United States, Germany, and Russia, gaining popularity alongside these countries’ increased imperialist competition (Rieder 3). From “Fantasies of Appropriation and Wealth” in early science fiction stories of lost races to the intermingling of colonial ideology and discourses of evolution in stories such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the colonialist framework helped construct the other through what Rieder calls, borrowing Laura Mulvey’s term, the “colonial gaze.” Much like the male gaze of film, the colonial gaze is an interpretative lens by which power accrues to the one who studies, becoming the subject, while the object of the colonial gaze is not granted access to the power of ‘the look’ and therefore to knowledge production (Rieder 7). About this, Rieder notes:

...many of the repetitive motifs that coalesced into the genre of science fiction represent ideological ways of grasping the social consequences of colonialism, including the fantastic appropriation and rationalization of unevenly distributed colonial wealth in the homeland and in the colonies, the racist ideologies that enabled colonialist exploitation, and the cognitive impact of racial cultural differences on the home culture. (Rieder 20-21)

Even stories that flip this interpretive paradigm such as H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, wherein the white, Western male is not the source of all knowledge and power subduing lost-races or aliens, but rather is himself being beaten by an unknown race of scientifically superior aliens, utilize the trope in order to establish the subject positions of conqueror and conquered (Rieder 7).

Colonialist science fiction depicts indigenous religion as the binary Other to science, reflecting colonialist discourse and configuring religion among the colonized as “unsophisticated superstition” that is ultimately trumped by reason. Of religion in science fiction, Farah Mendlesohn notes: “[I]ts role in sf was either to be undermined or to indicate the level of civilisation which any given alien race had achieved.’ As a result, ‘sf is full of stories in which superstition is defeated by explanation; the immaterial is tamed by manifestation.’ (qtd in Thrall 291).

These science fiction texts reflect discourses that united the forces of reason and Christianity in pursuit of Empire. Examining the role Christianity played in American empire-building illuminates this complex discourse. The concept of Manifest Destiny that undergirds territorial and colonial expansion in the United States belies the threads that unite reason and Christianity in colonialist discourses. It is through the discussion of America’s expansion across North America, the possibilities of Caribbean conquest, and overseas expansion into the Philippines that we can trace the interweaving of Christianity, science, and white supremacy in nineteenth century discourse. Social gospelist Josiah Strong’s influential treatise *Our Country*, promoting missionary work in the American West, intertwines these three areas quite clearly stating:

While the Christian religion was never more vital, or its hold on the Anglo-Saxon mind stronger, there is taking place among the nations a widespread intellectual

revolt against traditional beliefs. ‘In every corner of the world,’ says Mr. Froude, ‘there is the same phenomenon of decay of established religions... Among the Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, traditionary creeds are losing their hold. An intellectual revolution is sweeping over the world, breaking down established opinions, dissolving foundations on which historical faiths have been built up. ‘The contact of Christian with heathen nations is awakening the latter to new life. Old superstitions are loosening their grasp. The dead crust of fossil faiths is being shattered by the movements of life underneath. In Catholic countries, Catholicism is losing its influence over educated minds, and in some cases the masses have already lost all faith in it. Thus, while on the continent God is training the Anglo-Saxon race for its mission, a complementary work has been in progress the great world beyond. God has two hands. Not only is he preparing in our civilization the die with which to stamp the nations, but, by what Southey called the ‘timing of Providence,’ he is preparing mankind to receive the impress. (Strong 177-8)

Strong references several imperialist and colonialist projects in his claim that “Mohammedans, Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins...are losing their hold.” In addition to the imperialist project of England, we might note that Strong reveals he sees contemporary projects as part of a growing pattern in Western history up to that point. Indeed, we might cite Napoleon III’s campaign in Egypt as an important moment which marks the loss of a certain kind of power.

Cultural theorist Edward Said noted this moment as a turning point in the relationship between Europe and the Middle East and one that marks the modern era and the development of Orientalism. Napoleon’s cultural and political conquest of Egypt is a pivotal moment in the

development of this framework for understanding the Middle East. Having sent a number of historians, architects, and other scientists to discover the secrets of Egypt, Napoleon's corps of researchers sought to interpret Egypt for the West. This became a moment in which tradition, religious and cultural, lost its ability to define itself for the rest of the world. It was the West who held control of how the Middle East was seen by others. While Catholicism has claimed this power previously through religious conversion and wars for control of the Holy Land, the modern era saw discursive control gain power through cultural imposition.

Indeed, the power that Catholicism held not just in terms of political and religious might, but also the power it held in the scientific and intellectual community was, and had been waning since the beginning of the Enlightenment era. This too is referred to in Strong's remarks. What Strong refers to is both the secularization of the European mind that occurred in the 19th century. He cites the movement away from Catholicism in intellectual development and notes the cultural domination of colonized nations, which carries with it Christian, and at times, overtly Protestant characteristics and values. Missionaries are among the cultural imports that arrive alongside colonization.

This quote from Strong's final chapter predicting the future of the Anglo-Saxon and not so subtly promoting imperialist expansion beyond the U.S. indicates how a particular brand of Christianity, Protestantism, is not only a "true" religion and not mere "superstition," such as Eastern religions, Judaism, and even Catholicism, but also conveys the notion that Christian colonial expansion brings intellectual development, firmly uniting reason and Christianity, and God's will in the rise of Anglo-Saxons to dominance. It is this marriage of reason and Christianity, to the exclusion of other religious forms that post-colonial thinkers reject.

Post-colonial science fiction, like other forms of post-colonial literature, utilize post-colonial counter-discursive strategies which “involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local’” (Tiffin 101) in response to colonial discourse that construct non-Christian religions as irrational. It is this characteristic within Octavia Butler’s *Parable* series that, I argue, mark her work as post-colonial, a description of her work that is not widely accepted.

This same counter-discursive trend is given a new name in what Madhu Dubey calls “black anti-science fiction.” This form of science fiction written by black authors frequently cites the ways in which racist and masculinist science has subjugated black bodies to brutal experiments and produced “scientific evidence” of black intellectual inferiority. However, in a counter-discursive move, these stories posit diasporic religious practices such as those associated with voodoo and Santeria as triumphant over the principles of reason (Dubey 34). Black women’s science fiction speaks back to dominant racist discourses similarly subverting notions of scientific knowledge as the only acceptable form of knowledge by blurring the boundaries between animal and human in stories such as Octavia Butler’s *Wild Seed*.

It is, however, in Butler’s *Parable* series that we can detect the most direct engagement with the reason/spirituality binary of colonialist discourse. These two novels tell the story of the birth of a religion called Earthseed. *Parable of the Sower* is the first of the series and tells the story of a young woman, Lauren Olamina, living in the near-future. Olamina’s small neighborhood was built during the rise of gated communities in the early 1990s. Although it was at one time an upper-middle class enclave, due to a general economic collapse and environmental disorder resulting from unchecked global warming, the inhabitants are now barely

above the poverty line, and the surrounding community has deteriorated into a mass of homeless vagrants, drug-addicted street gangs, and other unsavory characters. The government has largely dissolved and the police are as likely to scam residents as the street gangs. Within their small enclave, Olamina and her family: her father, the Baptist minister who preaches to a congregation in their living room on Sundays, her stepmother, Cory, who endlessly pines for a return to “the good old days” (the late 90s-early 2000s), and her four brothers, Keith, Marcus, Ben and Greg, all struggle to survive. Lauren, a theologian in her own right, sees the coming fall of the walls, and prepares herself for the change that is inevitable, relying on her religion, Earthseed, as means to find the strength to plan for the coming tragedy. The religion posits god not as a human-like deity with concerns for one’s earthly travails, but rather as change itself.

After the walls of Olamina’s neighborhood fall at the hands of drug-fueled arsonists and her family is killed, Lauren attempts to recover and survive in the outside world. She begins a trek north, toward Canada, along the highway as are thousands of others. Along the way, she picks up people in need of help, people capable of making human connections, and eventually sharing her vision of Earthseed with them and building a small community called Acorn.

Told from perspective of Olamina’s estranged daughter, Asha Vere, in a story reconstructed from her personal recollections and the diaries of her mother, father, and uncle, the second novel, *Parable of the Talents*, returns to Acorn as Olamina and her small Earthseed community thrive and hope to expand beyond their enclave. The time of the Pox (as the period of instability in the first novel is referred to) is coming to a close as the United States begins to stabilize and displaced people begin to find some footing. However, during this period, the influx of migrants from the southern states to Alaska, which had become popularly thought of as a promised land in which clean water, jobs, and cheap housing were plentiful, closed its borders

and ceded from the union. Unpopular vice president, Edward Jay Smith, runs for president against popular and inflammatory former Baptist minister, Andrew Steele Jarret, who branched off to create his own church, the Church of Christian America. Smith, who is regarded as largely ineffectual, is defeated by the man who preaches fire and brimstone, unleashing a new wave of political and social instability as religious and racial intolerance reach new peaks. Acorn, caught in the growing wake of these troubles, is pin-pointed by a branch of Christian America known as Jarret's Crusaders and transformed into a "re-education facility" called Camp Christian where Olamina and her followers are kept for a number of years before escaping. Olamina, finding herself once again without home or family, must recover her sanity and find her daughter, Larkin, that had been taken by the Church to be raised in a "proper" Christian American home.

As noted above, colonialist science fiction's dismissal of indigenous religions as superstition reflects the European ethnocentric and white supremacist views of the time utilizing a model of progress that posits a continuous movement from savagery to civilization. In this model, indigenous religions represent a savagery waiting to be civilized by colonialist's forces of reason. These constructions, however, problematically overlook the history of religion, particularly Christianity, in providing impetus for colonizing forces. Butler re/members this history by performing a two-pronged move: She begins by imbricating Christianity within colonialist science fiction's dismissal of indigenous religions as a 'lack of thought' by suggesting it is fundamentalist Christianity rather than Earthseed that rejects reason. The Church of Christian America (CA) functions as the means by which Butler charts the discursive division between reason and fundamentalist religion. Members of CA are continually shown to reject critical thought in favor of dogmatic adherence to patriarchal domination. This becomes apparent in the presentation of Jarret himself, who relies on a certain level of ignorance to win followers:

[Jarret] wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, worshipped him in the same way, and understood that their safety in the universe depended on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different. There was never such a time in this country. But these days when more than half the people in the country can't read at all, history is just one more vast unknown to them (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 19).

Butler never makes clear whether it is Jarret's own ignorance of American history or his willingness to manipulate others' lack of knowledge that leads him to claim a common religious history, but this quote makes clear the anti-intellectual undertones of Jarret's political and religious order. The quote also demonstrates that Jarret's rhetoric appeals to a false history and that utilizes people's ignorance of actual history to gain followers and ultimately political power. The novel cites this lack of education as a culture-wide phenomenon brought about a devaluing of education in general and the country's economic collapse that closed many of country's public schools and thus access to education for the growing number of poor. Butler also interrogates the vulnerability of those without an education, and for the purposes of my current argument, the ways in which religious (and political) leaders manipulate this vulnerability by providing a false history and discouraging knowledge-building activities.

We can trace this discouragement to the Church of Christian America at large. Lack of critical thought is traded for blind faith, demonstrated by Christian America followers who reject knowledge that arises from non-codified or unsanctified sources, even when to their detriment. One such example can be found in Olamina's thoughts while at Camp Christian:

I took some lashes for pointing out [the cesspit] was being put in a bad place. It could contaminate the underground water that feeds our wells. That could make

us all sick, including our ‘teachers.’ But our ‘teachers’ know everything. They don’t need to take advice from a woman, and a heathen woman at that. It was entirely their own decision a few days later to relocate the cesspit downhill and far away from the wells. (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 225)

Camp Christian’s “teachers” insistence on rejecting the observations and advice of Olamina because of her “heathen woman” status jeopardizes their own health as well as that of their prisoners reasserting a refusal of knowledge from unsanctified sources. However, CA’s “teachers” do not simply reject Olamina’s advice. Indeed, this is a moment in which they accept locally produced, while at the same time refusing to acknowledge the source. This is a rhetorical move replicated in colonial histories and, indeed, within America’s own colonial history.

One parallel we might draw to African American history is the ways in which American chattel slaves are coded as non-skilled laborers. While slaves with knowledge of rice production were highly sought after in the American South, this memory has been disavowed in mainstream America’s vision of history (Littlefield 135). The knowledge and expertise of the African slaves was highly valued and implemented at the same time, their culture, religious traditions, and languages were rejected as naturally inferior. The rice-planting techniques imported from Africa, under the influence of the pseudo-scientific claims about race and racial superiority of the nineteenth century, were rewritten in mainstream U.S. history as a white American invention and the various degrees to which slaves were skilled was erased in the view of slavery as a monolithic institution. Olamina’s experience as a slave-prisoner in the camp reflects this moment of American history. Her guidance is accepted, but it is immediately rewritten as the knowledge of CA’s “teachers.” Where this process took decades in American history, within the novel

uncodified knowledge is simultaneously rejected and reinscribed as codified knowledge instantaneously.

Beyond her 'heatheness,' it is Olamina's womanhood that causes their rejection of her advice. Indeed, sexism and the patriarchal structure of Christian America are intimately linked with the repudiation of critical thought and non-dogmatic knowledges. This patriarchal structure is made evident in Christian America's desire to return to traditional gender roles in which women eschew involvement in the public sphere, dedicating their labor to the work of raising children and providing a moral compass for their family. The espousal of these gender roles are made clear in legitimized media narratives. Within the Christian America community all films and television are deemed sinful, allowing only for Dreamasks with religious themes for entertainment purposes. Beyond her 'heatheness,' it is Olamina's womanhood that causes their rejection of her advice. Indeed, sexism and the patriarchal structure of Christian America are intimately linked with the repudiation of critical thought and non-dogmatic knowledges. This patriarchal structure is made evident in Christian America's desire to return to traditional gender roles in which women eschew involvement in the public sphere, dedicating their labor to the work of raising children and providing a moral compass for their family. The espousal of these gender roles are made clear in legitimized media narratives. Within the Christian America community all films and television are deemed sinful, allowing only for Dreamasks with religious themes for entertainment purposes. Asha Vere describes the scenarios available for CA consumers and evident in these Dreammask scenarios is the imperative for boys to enter the masculine domain of the public by going "to war against heathens, or...out as missionaries in dangerous, wicked, foreign jungles and deserts," while girls are encouraged to develop their home-making skills, such as "cooking, cleaning, sewing, crying, praying, taking care of babies or

old people, and going to church,” for use in the private sphere and simultaneously discouraged from leaving this sphere. (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 326). This rejection of critical thought is apparent in CA’s control of information, to the degree of marking non-dogmatic entertainment forms as not only illegitimate, but dangerous, we see an emphasis on strict gender roles, but also the notion that any critical engagement of these socially prescribed roles is itself a dangerous act that threatens the nation as a whole.

The danger to the nation is similarly evident in the rhetoric of Jarret who directs followers to return to strict gender roles. “He’s so good at asking nasty rhetorical questions—so good at encouraging young men—not young women, only men—to ‘Do your duty, to your country and to yourselves. Prove yourselves men worthy to be called good Christian American soldiers. Serve this country, now that it has such great need of you’” (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 155). Examining both the above quote and the messages of the Dreammask scenarios, it is the men and boys who are encouraged to engage with the public sphere while women’s and girls’ activities are relegated to the domestic sphere demonstrating a reliance on a combination of the nineteenth century notion of “True Womanhood” and fundamentalist Christian Orthodoxy that fuels Christian America’s mission. Jarret’s insistence on a return to a simpler time and the return to nineteenth century gender roles each suggest that progressive politics are not only misleading, but destructive to American culture. Indeed, Christian America’s leaders assert that feminism is to blame for the current state of the country:

Their superiors have told them that parasites and heathens like us brought down ‘America the mighty.’ America was the strongest country on Earth, but people like us went whoring after foreign religions and refused to do our duty as citizens. We women lost all modesty and offered ourselves in the streets and the men who

should have controlled us became our pimps. (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 211-212)

This quote claims a destructive element in feminist's critical engagement of traditional gender roles as well as an impediment to the "progress" of the nation. Had "out-of-control" women not corrupted America, it would have continued and perhaps grown in its position of global authority. Thus, it is not only Olamina's status as a heathen that threatens the CA "teachers" serving as a reason to reject her guidance, but also her authority within her "heathen" religion that threatens their patriarchal power.

This characterization of female authority as barrier to progress is a trope utilized within the rhetoric of colonization as well. Indeed, it is worth exploring how women in indigenous religions or folk traditions have been used as scapegoats in order to further the colonialist project. The witch-hunts of Medieval Europe and their connection to the colonization of Africa provide some insight into this process. Scholars such as Heinsohn and Steiger relate the beginning stages of modernity in the West with the persecution of witches. "The modernization process of the 'occidental rationalism' at the beginning of the European modern age and the suppression of nature as a condition for this modernization was paid for with 'the souls and bodies of the feminine witches' (qtd in Troche 135) They characterize witch-hunts as the "extermination of wise women" who threaten developing power structures. The women were believed to have held illegitimate knowledges in the areas of "medicine, nature, spirituality, and magic—a domain in which women across cultures feature strongly" (Troche 165). Ursula Troche links the persecution of witches with the rise of patriarchy, the transatlantic slave trade, and colonial practices, suggesting that they arise from similar desires to control and dominate. Expanding upon the work of Heinsohn and Steigler to include the attacks on "witches" in Africa

as part of the colonialist project, she notes that just as the women with knowledge of medicine were eradicated in Europe, colonization sought similar goals in the destruction of traditions and spiritualities of African peoples across the diaspora. It is these same knowledges that transmit feminine authority that threaten patriarchal power in medieval Europe and the potential to subvert the progress of colonization in Africa. As part of the colonial project, these knowledges had to be expunged in order to gain cultural control and import the “progress” of “occidental rationalism” so marked, as previously noted, by Christianity. This history of fear of female power and its characterization as barrier to progress is clearly reflected in the rhetoric of Jarret and the Church of Christian America.

In a two-pronged approach, while reinforcing appropriate gender roles through means such as the Dreammask scenarios, the CA also disavows uncodified knowledges and the potentially disruptive feminine authority they may bestow. The trope of the ‘out-of-control woman’ as scapegoat also emerges in the reflections of Asha Vere regarding her mother. Taken from her mother as a baby and raised in the Christian American church, Asha Vere (nee Larkin) harbors a resentment towards her mother that arises, in part, from Olamina’s inability to “properly” perform motherhood according to the dictates of the Christian American church. Although Vere herself is confronted with the restrictive feminine ideal embraced by the Church of Christian America; losing faith when her congregation declares her a ‘fallen woman’ after, as a single woman, she moved from her childhood home; her comments demonstrate her thorough indoctrination in CA dogma, particularly regarding CA’s views on motherhood and femininity. Vere’s reflection on Olamina’s involvement in Earthseed demonstrate that it is Olamina’s ambition beyond the role of nurturer that makes her a figure to be feared: “If my mother had created only Acorn, the refuge for the homeless and the orphaned...If she had created Acorn, but

not Earthseed, then I think she would have been a wholly admirable person.” (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 63-4). Vere continually expresses a desire for a “proper” mother who places her children at the center of her world. This is evidenced in her own fascination with Olamina’s early life and the frustration she feels at Olamina’s refusal to give up her dreams for a normative future with her family.

I’m not entirely sure why I’ve spent so much time looking at my mother’s life before I was born. Perhaps it’s because this seems the most human, normal time of her life. I wanted to know who she was when she was a young wife and soon-to-be mother, when she was a friend, a sister, and, incidentally, the local minister... She sacrificed us for an idea. And if she didn’t know what she was doing, she should have known—she who paid so much attention to the news, to the times and the trends. As an adolescent, she saw her father’s error when he could not see it—his dependence on walls and guns, religious faith, and a hope that the good old days would return. Yet what more than that did she have? If her good days were to be in the future on some extra-solar world, that only made them more pathetically unreal. (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 137-8)

In this passage we see the notion that, for Vere, Olamina’s very humanity rests on this time in her life when she was the “normal...wife and soon-to-be mother,” a time in which she had yet to fully abandon her “proper” role in the private sphere. Concurrently, we detect that Vere’s frustration at her own loss of family is displaced from the CA church which stripped her from her parents onto her mother for stepping outside of this sphere, “sacrificing” her daughter and husband for an ideal.

This frustration also forms a sibling rivalry of sorts as Vere repeatedly refers to Earthseed as her mother's "other, best-loved child;" usurper of her mother's love. "She even imagined names for the Acorn clones like a girl thinking up names for imaginary children that she hopes to have someday. There was a Hazelnut, a Pine, a Manzanita, a Sunflower, an Almond..." (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 170). By noting the ways in which Olamina imagines these religious enclaves resemble children, we again see how Asha Vere comments on her own displacement from the center of Olamina's world by Olamina's "inappropriate" love for her religion.

In the repetition of Earthseed as child to be protected, sibling to be hated, and enemy to be feared, we find that Olamina, and her aberrant love of Earthseed, becomes a mother figure not just her estranged daughter, but to the religion and her followers as well. She comes to represent the matriarchal power that CA seeks to destroy. Acting as a dispossessed reflection of CA's attitudes toward gender, Vere's disdain for her mother demonstrates not only the fear of the feminine found in colonialist discourse, but the destructive force of colonialism and imperialism on families and matriarchal power structures seen in Olamina as "mother" of her religion. Vere's indoctrination in CA continually encroaches upon any feelings of warmth she has for her mother and a persistent fear of authority, and particularly female authority marks Vere's thoughts and actions.

Asha Vere's construction of Olamina as 'inappropriate' mother resurfaces and takes on new meaning in her notes on the dangers of her mother's obsession: "She was a better-than-average community leader. But beneath it all was always Earthseed and a longing, an obsession that was far stronger than anyone seemed to realize. People who are intelligent, ambitious, and at the same time, in the grip of odd obsessions can be dangerous. When they occur, they inevitably upset things." (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 171). It is in her feelings about her mother's "odd

obsession” that we see the crystallization of Vere’s belief that Olamina’s ambition makes her more than a “pathetic” figure with misplaced beliefs but rather transforms her into a menacing force in a reflection of CA’s characterization of matriarchal power as detriment/impediment. Taken together, these reflections on her mother’s position construct Olamina as an inappropriate mother whose ambition threatens to bring instability beyond their shared home to the entirety of the public sphere.

From Jarret’s rhetorical insistence on a fraudulent history to Asha Vere’s suspicion of her mother’s ambition as a result of her CA indoctrination, we can trace the intimate connections between Butler’s construction of Christian America as both a sexist organization and one that fundamentally rejects critical thought and liberal education. In demonstrating this, Butler suggests that it is fundamentalist Christianity itself, rather than Earthseed, that is irrational in a counter-discursive move that subverts historic associations of Christianity and reason. By deeply embedding sexism and patriarchy in and alongside this construction, she simultaneously rejects the sexism that results from their patriarchal structure as equally irrational.

However, Butler does not simply invert the power relations between Christianity and reason. Nor does she dismiss all religion as irrational. Butler explores the dichotomous relationship between science and religion, complicating the relationship by suggesting that science and religion are not necessarily diametrically opposed in the second prong of her counter-discursive attack. Indeed, Butler continually demonstrates that both Olamina and Earthseed are committed to liberal education and critical thought. Earthseed is a religion organized by Olamina² and created from the cobbling together of various religious thoughts—those that would be considered the superstitions of a savage population in colonialist science

² Olamina insists repeatedly that she neither invented nor “made up” this religion, referring to it instead as a “collection of truths.”

fiction- on the nature of the universe as well as scientific principles. Adaptation, education, and contribution to community form the three major tenets of Earthseed. Olamina states these goals clearly saying, “Earthseed is about preparing to fulfill the Destiny. It’s about learning to live in partnership with one another in small communities, and at the same time, working out a sustainable partnership with our environment. It’s about treating education and adaptability as the absolute essentials that they are...’ (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 358-360). Via verses such as the bedrock –“All that you touch You Change. All that you change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God Is change” (Butler *Parable of the Sower* 3)—Earthseed suggests that the only eternal is change itself, but that in order to survive, we must be ready to adapt as the world changes around us. Education and teaching in contribution of knowledge gained to the community are both vital components in the ability to manage or shape change as much as possible. Olamina’s insistence on the importance of critical thought, political awareness, and education mark Earthseed as diametrically opposed to the Church of Christian America while also disrupting the mutual exclusivity of reason and non-Christian religion.

Critical engagement with ideas forms the basis of Earthseed’s ideology. Not only are followers encouraged to observe and gather information, they are also encouraged to teach and invite questions from their students. In an exchange between Olamina and her brother Marcus in *Parable of the Talents*, we find this insistence on critical thinking.

‘I won’t talk about Earthseed. I want to preach.’ ‘Preach then.’ ‘What’s the catch?’ You should know. You’ve been to our services. You choose the topic. You say what you want. But afterward there will be questions and discussion.’ ‘I’m not out to teach a class. I want to preach a sermon.’ ‘That’s not our way, Marc. If you speak, you have to face questions and discussion. You need to be

ready for that. Besides, no matter what you call it, a good sermon is just a lesson that you're trying to teach.' (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 149)

This exchange demonstrates that all ideas proposed within the community are debated from a variety of perspectives. Additionally, we might note that Olamina extends the possibility of contributing to the community via teaching beyond Earthseed by noting that all good sermons are lessons, intimating that religious sermons, Christian and non-Christian alike are, at their core, educational. However, there is a tension between Marcus's and Olamina's definitions of preaching. While Olamina views preaching as a form of educational conversation, Marcus views preaching as a one-sided presentation of ideas, verging on incontrovertible fact. Marcus's refusal to allow Earthseed practitioners to question his sermon, and thereby his authority, provides further insight into CA's discomfort with feminine authority as well as CA's rejection of critical thought.

This exchange also further exemplifies the problematic ideological underpinning of the CA which rejects critical thought, a vital part of the teaching/learning process for Butler. Shortly after this conversation, Marcus, unwilling to engage this form of critical process, leaves and finds success as a preacher in the Church of Christian America. His easy success demonstrates how the CA embraces those who are willing to expound dogma that disinvites critical engagement.

Marcus, as a figure of the Church of Christian America, continues to expose the familial betrayal brought about by colonialism. Feeling uncomfortable with his sister in a position of authority that he cannot achieve without restructuring his belief system, Marcus's abandonment in a world where Olamina is desperately trying to reconstruct familial ties offers further betrayal. Once embedded in CA, Marcus hears of the destruction of Acorn and the kidnapping of

Olamina's daughter, Larkin/Ashe Vere. When Olamina escapes and contacts Marcus, he refuses to help, lies about his knowledge of her daughter's whereabouts, and hides the truth of her mother from Ashe Vere until Vere deciphers that Olamina is her mother through her own adulthood investigation. Before discovering how Marcus deceived her, Olamina felt saddened that Marcus's decision to leave arose from his inability to reconstruct his manhood after having been repeatedly raped while in captivity and his embarrassment as his own rescue at the hands of his sister. However, their relationship was irrevocably broken upon learning the truth. Here we see the union of masculinity, reason, and religion, similar to those in the colonialist project disrupting previously stable familial relations.

We must also consider the role of science as an extension of reason and how Butler works to weave the two seemingly disparate categories of science/reason and religion together. As the popularity of Earthseed grows, the importance of focused scientific inquiry emerges as integral to the progress toward the Destiny. In addition to funding scientific exploration, inquiry, and technological creativity, the followers organize grade schools and colleges, offering scholarships to low-income, but talented students in exchange for a seven-year term of service "teaching, practicing medicine, or otherwise using their skills to improve life in the many Earthseed communities" (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 379). Butler marks this as quite different from the Church of Christian America in two important ways. The first the characterization of Earthseed is a "strange cult" by the CA which marks its outsider status. The second is, again, the centrality of innovation and creativity that stands in decided contrast to Asha Vere's experience in creating Dreammask scenarios as a schoolgirl for which she was punished severely.

However, the opposition between the Church of Christian America and Earthseed not only counters the colonial relationship between Christianity and intellectual development, it also

speaks to the association of knowledge-building with masculinity. Butler positions CA as a fundamentally patriarchal organization that calls for strict gender roles, whereas Earthseed espouses an equitable division of power among genders, despite the association of Earthseed's advent by a matriarchal figure. We find examples of this in the division of labor among the Acorn residents. The residents participate equally in the public and private spheres of the community, teaching children and each other, debating community concerns, raising crops and caring for family. Specialized labor such as medical care and woodworking are not particularly gendered with those whose skills and interests incline them to the work finding ready mentors in other community members. In constructing Earthseed as the logical counterpart to Christian America's patriarchal irrationality, Butler disrupts the discursive coupling of reason and masculinity in colonial discourse that is evident in Mercato's Atlas as well as challenging the association of masculinity with intellectual authority found in Marcus's refusal to open discussion around the topics presented in his sermon.

In a move that disrupts the discrete division between religion and reason/science created through nineteenth century colonialist discourse, science and religion function co-constructively in these novels. It is critical thought and scientific principles such as the second law of thermodynamics that form the principles of religious thought and the structure of the religion that provide an impetus for the focused scientific inquiry necessary to achieve the Destiny to take root among the stars. Olamina directly references the useful structure of religion stating, "The truth is, preparing for interstellar travel and then sending out ships filled with colonists is bound to be a job so long, thankless, expensive, and difficult that I suspect that only a religion could do it." (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 359-360).

While Butler's employment of the term colonist may call to mind the very colonialism her work seeks to undermine, her personal thoughts on space exploration and her publishing record suggest otherwise. Butler expresses relief at the discovery that no alien life exists in our solar system, saying that this affords us an opportunity to explore our solar system and face the challenges that it imposes with the goal of "grow[ing] up," reaching a maturity that she believes includes an acceptance of difference among ourselves as humans without "doing terrible things...to some unfortunate aliens" (McCaffery & McMnamin 26). Colonists would be taking these next steps not only in *The Destiny*, but also towards what Butler hoped would be a species maturation.

Looking to her oeuvre, only two of her stories take place off-world and these explorations are vastly different from each other. The first of which, her novel *Survivor*, does suggest humans who leave Earth in search of new worlds do so in the tradition of colonialism and imperialism. This was also the only novel she ever disavowed and refused to put back into print. Of course, this type of colonialism resulted in tragic ends for those who refused to meet the aliens they encountered on equal ground. Their declination to acknowledge difference as anything other than inferiority resulted in the enslavement of the human missionaries. However, the second of which, the short story "Bloodchild," features humans leaving Earth not for conquest in the tradition of colonialist expansion, but leaving Earth as refugees and forming a symbiotic relationship with the aliens they encountered.

Between her comments on space exploration and her rejection of *Survivor*, we might deduce that her suggestion to send colonists to new worlds is not a form of colonization that would result in the oppression of alien peoples, but rather an educational exploration and one that would perhaps spur the biological changes necessary to reorder our hierarchical natures. This

privileging of the biological that I refer to is one I explore in the following chapter in greater detail.

To return to the quote, Butler notes the power of religion and refuses to draw a distinct boundary between logic/science and religion. She sees religion as a tool to be used in the pursuit of scientific inquiry. Her use of religion is not a means of encoding specific knowledges and excluding others, like the approach taken by the CA. The CA's approach leads to a certain inflexibility in the calcification of tradition. However, hers is not an absolute flexibility either. Religion, in these novels, functions a means of maintaining certain values. Rather than dictate particular knowledge, Butler's use of religion seeks instead to dictate the *uses* of knowledge. Earthseed notes that knowledge should not be hoarded by a select few, but rather shared for the good of the community. It should also not go uninterrogated. Earthseed sermons and communities are designed to continually question motives, outcomes, assumptions, difficulties, and successes. These uses of knowledge gained from scientific inquiry and other methods are built into the verses that make up Earthseed. Butler sees religion as a means to cement these methods of interrogation of knowledge and the idea that knowledge should be freely accessible into the culture at large. In this way, she subverts colonial discourses that unite illogic and non-Christian religions.

By joining religion and science, while uncoupling the discursive linking of reason and masculinity, Butler completes the trajectory of disruption that she began by mapping colonialist discourse, exposing the framework of assumptions and dismantling these discourses from the perspective of a postcolonial subject who moves from the margins to the center of her own discursive field.

CHAPTER II.

PARTNERED MACHINES: BODY-TECHNOLOGY IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S
XENOGENESIS AND PATTERNIST SERIES

What is nature? The very notion of nature has been hotly contested by postmodern theorists, who reject claims to universal knowledge and who see nature as a text constructed from the perspective of patriarchal domination and biologists and other positivist scientists who see their study and understanding of nature as a "Truth" and theirs as the only acceptable paradigm of reason. While engaged in vastly differing aims, these approaches share the relationship of humanity and technology to nature. The viewpoint of Western science is that nature is a site to be studied and uncovered by that study; ecologists seek to preserve and protect it. Each view nature as a separate space which one can 'escape' to, possess, or protect; each constructs nature as a space outside of which man and his technological creations exist.

However, Octavia Butler's discussion of the nature of nature falls into neither of these categories. She sees the pitfalls of viewing nature as simply a text as well as the problematic aspects of relying on it as a pre-discursive object to be unveiled by scientific inquiry. Butler, like Donna Haraway, seeks to entrench both the human body and technology in nature. Butler refuses to capitulate to either the insistence that the body is simply a text or that technology saves us from nature or somehow manages to exist outside of nature. In her work, technology and the body are merged. The flesh itself is the technology and our understanding of it serves as technological "progress." This differs from other versions of cyborgian technology which function as a series of attachments or amendments to the body proper. It also differs from the question of androids or robots in which machinery stands in for the human form or in which

human consciousness is housed. For Butler, “body-technology” represents the body itself and new ways of understanding the body’s potential as, itself, the technology. This merging of body and technology is the expression of Butler’s desire for a connection between technology and nature and leads to an alternate subjectivity or a ‘political myth,’ the medusa figuration, that can help us reconfigure our relationship to technology and provides a system of networked communication with liberatory potential gendered and raced power relations.

How did we come to find ourselves with this disjointed view of humanity, technology, and nature? Judeo-Christian and earlier forms of mythology, according to Haraway, are the origin of this idea of man living on the world rather than in the world, arising from the notion that a supreme deity placed us on this planet and placed all of nature under our dominion. This colors our relationship to nature in Western thought and separates us from our animal kin and facilitates the disconnection of our technological creations from the system of nature. We might even, as we frequently do, envision our technological creations as further attempts to ‘master’ the environment in which we live. We frequently use verbs like “harness” when speaking of the raw power of nature and our attempts to bend it to our will, clearly indicating a subordinate status to our own as owner of the space.

Where the previous chapter examined how religion, particularly Christianity, and reason were united in the colonial and imperial projects of the nineteenth century, this chapter takes this line of inquiry in another direction. Leaving religion behind for the time being, this chapter is concerned with knowledge production that relies on rational thought and the scientific method that is part and parcel of the understanding of nature as a pre-discursive object and the desire to command nature’s forces. This inquiry questions modes of knowledge production of the past,

joining extant feminist conversations about the philosophy of science, and building on and alongside Donna Haraway's myth of the cyborg.

As both Haraway and Butler argue, technology and humanity do not exist outside of nature as depicted in mythical original texts, but rather co-construct it. Haraway notes, "In scientific embodiments, as well as in other forms, nature is made, but not entirely by humans; It is a co-construction among humans and non-humans...not all actants organic, not all of them technological" (*The Haraway Reader* 66). To suggest that nature is made entirely by humans is reading nature as a text alone and claims that humanity alone creates nature via our interpretation. This severs our relationship not only to other biological organisms, but to technology as well. Indeed, it allows for claims such as that by Katherine Hayles that global technology *denatures* everything; a line of thought in which technology is an aberration that radically alters nature, but is not shaped by nature (Hayles 265-95).

So what is nature? Both women claim that nature exists somewhere in between positivist "Truth" claims that so frequently mark biological determinism or what Haraway would call the "sun-worshipping stories about the history of science and technology as paradigms of rationalism" (*The Haraway Reader* 66) that play a central role in imperialist and colonialist projects and their embedded racism and sexism and as a site constructed solely through social mechanisms. Haraway defines it as a site of continuous shifting ground that, on the one hand, has never existed beyond its interpretation by us, but that is also not constructed wholly by humans (*The Haraway Reader* 67). The relationship between nature, humanity, and technology is not hierarchical; nature is no longer a separate space which one can 'escape' to, possess, or protect, a space outside of which man and his technological creations exist. Instead, our natural environment shapes us physically and we shape nature through our interpretation of it.

Additionally, our technology is simply not a series of objects that we create. They, too, have a relationship with nature in which they affect and are affected by it. They become our co-actants as we create and inhabit nature. This relationship is not hierarchical in the traditional sense, but one of a triangular Mobius strip of humanity and other biological organisms, technology, and nature which is marked by continuous development during which each of the three are sculpted by and sculpt each other (Haraway *The Haraway Reader* 67). Indeed, as noted, Haraway suggests that machines are co-actants, our partners, and help us create the world we live in. This places human and machine side by side rather than in a hierarchical relationship, but also places us both firmly within the world rather than on top of it. Haraway sees machines as co-actants primarily because of their ability to create surprising results. They do not always function as we intend and have unforeseen consequences, the most clear of which to me is the unforeseen consequence of the massive output of machine-created CO₂ that has led to global warming. We created the machines that, in turn, create CO₂, and operate them continuously, but that have led to their own surprising results and one that makes the need to re-envision our relationship to our planet that much more pressing.

As I mentioned previously, Haraway is not alone in attempting to reconfigure our relationship to technology and nature. We can see Butler developing a similar relationship between these co-actants and nature in the *Parable* and *Xenogenesis* series. For instance, the characters' ultimate goal in the *Parable* series is to take root among the stars not just to survive as a species, but in hopes that new environmental stressors will alter our evolutionary track; thus technology holds a vital role in the potential environment of humankind and the actants, both human and non-human, are very much linked, informing and shaping the possibilities for each other while also being shaped by nature themselves. Additionally, Butler envisioned a much

more complex partnership between humans, technologies, and nature in her earlier *Xenogenesis* series. In a world co-inhabited by humans and aliens, technology and the body are merged in her rendering of the Oankali, an alien race whose purpose is the travel the universe enacting a series of genetic trades and for whom technological ability is fused with possibility of the flesh. Indeed, this series demonstrates the recuperation of the monstrous that lies at the center of this re-envisioned relationship, or what I am calling the medusa figuration. In this series, biomedical “discoveries,” such as the cancerous growth that is transformed from a danger to a mechanism of healing by the Oankali, are not brought about by technology, but rather by the union of the human body with the alien body and resulting body-knowledge. Here as well we see a merging of the body, technology, and nature in which each shapes and is shaped by the other. This chapter will further discuss these examples in which Butler re-envisions our relationship to technology and nature and her contribution to the field of cyborg feminism via the political myth³ of the medusa figuration, a means of understanding the shape knowledge production and communication might take under this new theoretical model.

We can trace Butler’s goal to reestablish humanity as belonging to nature rather than existing outside of its framework to an interview with Marilyn Mehaffy and AnaLouise Keating. In this discussion, Octavia Butler was asked about her use of biology in her novels and her discussion of hierarchical tendencies as a function of biology. Butler’s claim that hierarchy is hard-wired in humanity triggers Mehaffy and Keating’s, and many of Butler’s critics’, mistrust of biology as deterministic and limiting. Butler sees things differently, however. Her fear is not that men and women share biological differences, but rather how this knowledge is used to reinforce existing gendered and racial power structures. This is quite different from feminists like

³ I am invoking Rosi Braidotti’s discussion of the political myth from *Nomadic Subjects* as a way of claiming that the landscape for useful feminist theoretical models is not a closed one.

Judith Butler who are much more interested in the deconstruction of gendered categories and view bodies as texts upon which and through which we create meaning. Finding Butler's work "refreshing after the persistent impasse between pure constructivists and... female body feminists," Nancy Jessor concurs: "Butler proposes a world of interaction between the female body and the culture it is situated within, while condemning formulations of racial purity and cultural identities based on genes rather than history and experience" (Jessor 39). For feminists and other postmodern thinkers who take up this deconstructive work, we run into difficulties when faced with scientific studies which claim difference rooted in biology. This is not to claim that all studies that examine differences between men and women are without fault, but rather, according to Octavia Butler, those that are accurate are being lumped in with those that are flawed due to assumptions made before the study began. Many feminists believe studies of that nature to be always already flawed. For instance, Keating notes, "The rhetoric is so powerful, though, because science is the 'truth,' so if science says these things about bodies, they must be truth" (109). What Keating reveals is her belief that the studies themselves are already imbued with the rhetoric and results demonstrate the assumptions used to design the study. Butler, however, disagrees claiming, "But it isn't science that makes the sociobiological connections. We manage to do that without the benefit of science. Again, consider the fact that women are better with verbal skills: why isn't the popular perception, then, that they would make better diplomats?" (Mehaffy & Keating 109). It is not the results of the study that claim a difference between men and women regarding spatial and verbal skills, but rather that we ignore part of the resulting knowledge that interferes with existing power structures; thus men are still considered more suitable diplomats despite studies that suggest women are more apt verbally.

Our resistance to the biological seems to emanate from a desire to not feel our destinies or futures are bounded by biology. We can see this in the post WW II notion that higher education is for everyone—but the result was a decline in the value of manufacturing or other labor-intensive jobs, despite the fact that many who might excel in those areas find themselves forced to fit an academic mold that does not speak to or further their existing talents. However, in many ways we already agree that biology does play a role in our life chances. For instance, we recognize the importance of childhood development and the role that nutrition plays in brain growth, attention-span, and resulting educational success. This information, by itself, is not seen as inherently flawed or condemning. Instead, it has fostered nutrition programs, free and low-cost breakfast and lunch programs in schools, and other programs that recognize the importance of this biological fact: healthy brains are well-fed brains. So, this knowledge, in and of itself is not harmful. However, what is done with it may be. While programs that meet the nutritional needs of children from low-income families are a helpful use of this knowledge, it may be used for social Darwinism to suggest that poor people are poor because they were nutritionally-deprived as children and they can never be helped or rise beyond their current station or that children who were mal-nourished will never achieve academic success. According to Octavia Butler, this is what we must pay attention to most: not the knowledge itself, but rather the ways the knowledge is employed (Mehaffy & Keating 108).

As a result, Butler is keen to think of alternative uses for thorough understanding of the body. According to Butler, body is central to the self and “is all we really know that we have” (Mehaffy & Keating 110). It becomes the “central communicator” in many of her novels where spoken and written language often does not fully convey accurate meanings. For instance, Oankali communicate primarily through bodily contact and frequently are more inclined to

believe what a human's body is saying when there is a conflict between what is spoken and what is felt. And indeed, this understanding of the body and unconventional uses of it may have liberatory consequences. As Mehaffy notes, "Body-knowledge could, possibly, dehierarchize, or maybe re-hierarchize, social and political relations" (Mehaffy & Keating 110). Body-knowledge is what fuels Butler's reformation of knowledge production and communication and it is this notion of the body as primary communicator that connects body-knowledge, a scientific and personal understanding of the body, and body-technology, the site at which the body and technology merge, which is a major focal point of this chapter.

Body-technology is a fusion which merges body and technology in a way that retains the fleshy realities of embodied existence without reducing the body to "meat," or to the status of a familiar parasite and the liquid unsubstantiality of the "wetware" (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 257). Unifying the terms loosely in this way signifies the bonded relationship between the two concepts of 'body' and 'technology' that refuses to permanently cede ground symbolically to either category. The machine and the body are partners, co-actants, building each other, as well as participating in a relationship with nature. In doing so, I seek avoid the problematic aspects of the post-human that posit the body as simply a container for the mind and its flesh-less interactions with technology.

While she incorporates technology similarly to traditional science fiction, where technology appears in the form of spaceships, Butler's focus lies not in the conquest of space or the imperialist designs of nineteenth and early twentieth century science fiction, but rather in the relationship humans have to technology as one in which each is shaped by the other. In the *Parable* series, for instance, the characters' ultimate goal is to take root among the stars; thus

technology holds a vital role in the destiny of humankind and the actants, both human and non-human, are very much linked, informing and shaping the possibilities for each other.

However, in her *Xenogenesis* series as well as in the *Patternist* series, technology is a self-awareness, a deeper form of understanding one's own body that takes the form of telepathy, mental healing, and other fantastical skills, or what Butler herself refers to as a body-knowledge, that allows for the envelopment of traditional technology. In these works, the machinery becomes invisible while maintaining a presence within the relationship of body-technology, while the body itself changes form and ability. In this way, Butler's conceptualization of the cyborg positions technology not as a removal from nature, but firmly entrenched in this system which forms our bodies.

Innate bodily abilities, such as the cancerous growth that is transformed from a danger to a mechanism of healing, are not brought about by traditional technology, but rather by the union of the human body with the alien body. The combination of these bodies and the disparate modes of communication that happen between them produce surprising results. This merging of bodily forms allows us to re-envision our relationship both to cancer and to ourselves. Where traditional technology seeks to master cancer, to beat or destroy it, Butler's Oankali seek to embrace the potential that it holds. This potential is accessed through the Oankali's understanding of their own bodies and the human body. Body-knowledge in this scenario opens a pathway of communication with the cancer cells and, in turn, changing a relationship of domination to one of cooperation. The communication that brings about this shift functions throughout Butler's oeuvre. Indeed, the body, as the 'central communicator' in Butler's work, is itself a communication technology; a technology not of mastering the world we live in or harnessing its

power, but rather a technology through which we might more fully express ourselves and finally be heard and completely understood.

To fully develop how this understanding of the body as a communication technology reworks the relationship between nature, humanity, and technology, we must return to feminist critiques of positivist claims to universal knowledge. Before we can understand how Butler's oeuvre proposes a new relationship, we must first explore the old and the ways in which the philosophy of science contributed to the construction of gender and race. Donna Haraway's *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*TM provides a useful moment in the development of the philosophy of science to interrogate knowledge production and particularly who might act as a credible producer and witness to said production. Using the figure of the air-pump as means to explore the emergence of race and gender in relationship to science, she explores the work of Robert Boyle, 17th century scientist known as "the father of chemistry and, even more important, the father of the experimental way of life" (24).

Three technologies emerge from his discoveries of the 1650's and 1660's issuing an order to the production of knowledge known as the experimental way of life: "a material technology embedded in the construction and operation of the air-pump; a literary technology by means of which the phenomena produced by the pump were made known to those who were not direct witnesses; and a social technology that incorporated the conventions experimental philosophers should use in dealing with each other and considering knowledge claims" (Shapin & Schaffer qtd in Haraway *Modest Witness* 24). These three technologies and the air-pump are at the center of the development of ways of knowing, of organizing the world outside of politics or religion (Haraway *Modest Witness* 24). Relying on "objective" knowledge gathering in this way allows for human agency to be removed from the picture. "It is not I who say this, it is the

machine.” (Haraway *Modest Witness* 25). By letting the machine speak for itself, the presence of the workers who produced the knowledge as well as those who labored to create the machine was erased. This transformed those who lived this experimental way of life to “modest witnesses” who, problematically, according to opponents such as Thomas Hobbes, conducted their work in a privileged circle that operated outside of the public sphere (Haraway *Modest Witness* 25). This “modest witnessing,” in who it allowed to produce knowledge was instrumental in the formation, reformation, and solidifying of masculinity and femininity as Haraway and Elizabeth Potter each note.

To understand the role of the air-pump in reification of old and the creation of new ideas about gender, one must consider that crisis in gender that marked this European age. Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the break with the mystical and alchemical of the hermetic tradition and its associations with the feminine while marking a corresponding rise of the “scientific mechanistic orthodoxy” (Haraway *Modest Witness* 26). The rise of witch hunts in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the “involvement of men who saw themselves as the rationalist founders of the new philosophy” demonstrate a “crisis in gender in that molten period in both knowledge and religion” (Haraway *Modest Witness* 26). The air-pump enters this period of shifting definitions of gender and acted as means by which the gender roles of the modern era were solidified. Haraway explains: “Insofar as the experimental way of life built the exclusion of actual women, as well as of cultural practices and symbols deemed feminine, into what would count as the truth in science, the air-pump was a technology of gender at the heart of scientific knowledge” (Haraway *Modest Witness* 28). Elizabeth Potter concurs characterizing Boyle’s own views of appropriate gendered behavior thusly: “Womanly women are chaste and modest, and serve men who, as manly, are chaste and modest experimental

philosophers" (Potter 9). Woman's modesty was relegated to the body in an appropriate chasteness, while men's valor shifted from the battlefield, won with sword and shield, to a virtue of the mind. "This modesty was to be the key to the gentleman-scientist's trustworthiness; he reported on the world, not on himself (Haraway *Modest Witness* 30).

Haraway and Butler propose a *witnessing*, a means of knowledge production, that may escape this semi-private space of the laboratory. Where the modest witness of the sixteenth century renders the labor of the non-gentleman-scientist invisible, endowing the scientist with a transparency and an unimpeachable ability to create knowledge under the guise of objectivity, Butler and Haraway each seek to rework the way knowledge is produced by opening the doors of the semi-private laboratory, making labor visible, and opening access to production of knowledge beyond just the gentleman-scientist. These forms of witnessing technology render the mechanisms of knowledge production visible, leaving the privilege attached to earlier forms of invisible knowledge production exposed and able to be questioned. Haraway explores the usefulness of the cyborg for understanding this in an interview with Nina Lykke, Randi Markussen, and Finn Olesen:

It was the joint implosion of human and machine on the one hand, and human and other organisms, on the other, within a kind of problematic of communication that interested me about the cyborg. There are many levels in this, for example labor process issues: the particular ways that women—working class women, women of color, women in Third World countries with export processing zones that would attract international capital for micro-electronics manufacture—were implicated in the labor process of cyborg production, as scientists too, but in relative minorities. Women occupied many kinds of places in these worlds, in

biomedicine, in information sciences, but also as a preferred workforce for transnational capitals. Strategies of flexible accumulation involved the productions of various kinds of genders, for men and for women, that were historically specific. The cyborg became a figure for trying to understand women's place in the 'integrated circuit'—a phrase produced by feminist socialists. (Lyke, Markussen, & Olesen 322)

Understanding women's place in the "integrated circuit" renders the labor used to produce technology visible while, at the same time, explodes the dichotomy of human and machine, as well as human and other organisms, by merging technology with the body via the myth of the cyborg. It refigures each of these categories as communication systems and the relationships between them as problematics between these communications. This formulation of existence of "everything as communication-control system" (322) is present in both Haraway's form of witnessing and, as we have seen in the body as communication technology, Butler's.

Octavia Butler's model of witnessing is built upon understanding of body and technology as one and the same. Using this model, she explores through various short stories and novels what knowledge production might look like when made communally. One metaphor in particular from the *Xenogenesis* series forms the basis for this form of witnessing that I am calling the medusa figuration, a form of knowledge production that envisions that production as a whole unit, or a cloud, that is comprised of various strands. Each strand represents the labor used to produce knowledge and the circuits of communication as well as the various bodies and identities produced by them. I take this inspiration from the following passage: "The whole business was like Lilith's rounded black cloud of hair. Every strand seemed to go a different way, bending, twisting, spiraling, angling. Yet together they formed a symmetrical, recognizable

shape, and were all attached to the same head” (Butler *Lilith’s Brood* 742). This cloud is not a static space akin to the semi-public space of the laboratory. Unlike that space that closes its doors and the subsequent ability to make authoritative assertions to laborers and women, this cloud is one in constant development whose tendrils reach out and draw would-be knowledge producers into the various decentralized sites of knowledge production.

While the notion of decentralized or cloud computing informs my political myth to a certain extent, the figure of the Medusa complicates this notion by invoking the monstrous feminine held at the center of Boyle’s positivist claims and the ways in which the feminine was locked out of the laboratory as masculinity claimed the sole right of rationality. The Medusa⁴ allows the recuperate of femininity and the incorporation of it into the site of knowledge production. Simultaneously, it allows us to envision the site as one of constant, writhing motion, that is never settled and that is relational. It does not remain in communication solely with itself. It does not have a true “inside” and “outside,” wherein insiders are the sole arbiters of knowledge and Others have no access, but reaches out to interact with those not linked directly to its sphere.

It is important to pause briefly to note the ways in which I am not using the figure of the Medusa. This description recalls but does not replicate Cixous’s recuperation of the figure of the Medusa. Cixous utilizes the medusa to represent women’s writing and the recovery of femininity from the banishment of witchery; a site of interrogation that is reflected in Butler’s post-colonial

⁴ As a figure reclaimed from the sphere of the demonic, the Medusa is not the only figure evoked in this passage. The name of the main character, Lilith, in *Dawn*, the first of the *Xenogenesis* series, recalls the Judeo-Christian Lilith myth. As the human who is the first to be awakened by the Oankali, and who is chosen to be the human to awaken the first cohort of humans, she evokes the first wife of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, use of genesis in the series title connects us to the first book of the Old Testament. Where the Lilith of the myth was expelled from the Garden to become a demonized figure for her unwillingness to submit, the Lilith of *Xenogenesis*, despite her unwillingness to force other humans to submit, becomes the center of a new Garden of Eden. The new Earth she inhabits is one of peace and long life, and her children are the first of the true human-Oankali hybrids. Indeed, this also demonstrates a reenvisioned relationship with nature that involves the recuperation of the feminine. Donna Haraway’s *Primate Visions* discusses the role of Lilith and the destruction of Judeo-Christian myths of origin as well.

counter-discursive strategies discussed in the previous chapter. I invoke the metaphor here to re-examine not only the boundaries of knowledge production as Cixous does, but to consider the ability to embrace and incorporate those who had previously been passive observers. Medusa, as a mythological creature turns those who gaze upon the nest of coiling, writhing snakes sprouting from Medusa's head into stone, freezing the viewer outside of the event witnessed. However, Butler's medusa figuration extends tendrils to draw the witnesses inside the nest, the cloud, to become a part of the communication.

This movement inward occurs for the characters of her novels and short stories with simultaneous feelings of comfort and claustrophobia, demonstrating the tenuous and uneasy communication that happens as the result of continuously shifting epistemological landscapes. For example, humans cradled by the branches of the plant-like alien clusters called Communities in the short story "Amnesty" find an indescribable comfort in the dark, weightless grip, but these emotions are always presented alongside unease. I find this description of communication compelling as the metaphor describes a kind of networked communication that takes place via a signifier of the body rather than through that of mechanical or technological signifiers. It communicates Butler's vision of the relationship between technology and the body, in which the body figures primarily as the "central communicator" and the technology emerges from within that body.

These technologies, rather than cold, objective machines, are, as result of this emergence, embedded with and are conduit for a variety of emotional expressions. For instance, Mary, the first Patternmaster, who unites the disparate Patternists into a telepathic network, finds that the body-technology opens empathy for the plight of others within her for the first time, connecting her to a system of social values. While technological development and scientific inquiry are

often considered to be flawed if influenced by these values, this is envisioning scientific inquiry and knowledge production in the vein of feminist philosophy of science. Rather than viewing all science that is influenced by social or moral values as “bad” science, and work that is not as “good” science, as is the common usage, we ask ““Can gender values influence scientific research and the research still be rational?” The mark of a feminist philosophy of science is that it offers a positive answer to this question. Most respond, ‘yes, frequently’; some simply respond, ‘yes’ (Potter 162). Envisioning knowledge production in this way, we are not severed from our social or moral values, nor are we positioned in a dominating relationship with nature or technology. Just as Haraway seeks to cast machines as co-constructors of nature, these modes of knowledge production emerging from body-technology and represented by the snakes of the Medusa head include our partnered machines. Butler offers three distinct visions of body-technology and the networked medusa figuration—the *Patternist*, and the Clayark virus, the Oankali each of which I have named after her characters which exhibit differing modes of communication via their bodies, but that are each centered around a model of incorporation that transforms witnesses into participants in the process of communication.

The first of these figurations, illustrated through the characters of the *Patternist* Series, emerges most clearly in *Mind of My Mind*, the second novel in the *Patternist* series. In this novel, we are introduced to Mary, whose transformation/maturation, referred to as “transition,” brings with it the creation of the Pattern, the mental network linking/binding the telepaths bred by Doro through his centuries-long attempt to create others like himself. This medusa figuration brings together the telepaths, linking them through the central figure of Mary, the Patternmaster. The Patternists use their individual talents, such as imprinting knowledge into inanimate objects, to develop knowledge and present it to the whole.

While knowledge is not necessarily communally produced in this variation, it does do the work of drawing the witness to the network into the network itself. Those non-active telepaths and telekinetics who had not reached or successfully completed their original period of transition are encouraged to come to maturity by the presence of the Pattern. Those who become fully telepathic after their transformation take their place in the Pattern among the others, contributing to its power and growth. This reveals the relational nature of medusa figuration. It is not a system that simply communicates meaning to itself. It brings those involved in the cloud, in this case the telepaths already enmeshed in the Pattern, into contact with difference. Additionally, it does simply rub up against difference or use that moment of contact to define its edges. The medusa figuration incorporates that difference into the cloud producing new forms of knowledge and new skill sets, such as healing, that increase body-knowledge while further erasing the boundary between body and technology, replacing traditional medical machinery.

In this variation, we can see how the medusa figuration not only creates a network of knowledge producers who use their body-knowledge to replace traditional forms of communication technology, but also whose network extends to draw witnesses to the center of knowledge production. Indeed, Mary visualizes the pattern as expanding to activate the dormant telepathic and telekinetic powers of “latents” whose potential as knowledge producers was not recognized by traditional systems of knowledge production. The following passage describes Mary’s first understanding of the effect proximity to the Pattern has for latent telepaths:

A slender, fragile-seeming thread, like a shadow of one of the comparatively substantial threads of my actives. But it was a pattern strand. Somehow, Clay had become a member of the the pattern. How? I could think of only one answer. The

pattern was made up of actives. Just actives, no latents until now. No latents period. Clay was on his way to transition (Butler *Seed to Harvest* 376).

Again, from this description we see the Pattern as web that extends itself to the latents, drawing them into the medusa configuration which alters communication and knowledge production from one of stilted, often misinterpreted language to one of complete and instant communication.

Transforming the means of communication from cold mechanical technologies to the warmth of body-technology allows for a connection to social and moral values previously denied “objective” positivist claims to universal knowledge, bringing about empathy for the plight of others. Indeed, Mary, the first Patternmaster, shifts her perspective from one of selfish self-obsession to one of caring for the existence and the suffering of non-active telepaths. It seems that the power Mary receives from the Pattern aids in her empathic development. At the outset of the novel, she has little to no control over her life, and little ability to ease her own suffering. As a result, she cares little for the feelings or experiences of others. It is only when her own suffering is eased and she experiences the ability to ease that of others that she seeks to bring as many latents into the Pattern as possible.

This is a more empathic form of communication—one that encourages other to recognize the pain or difficulties of those one is connected to and even those outside the immediate vicinity of connection. However, before we suggest a utopian element to this form of communication, Butler gives a warning in the form of Mary. Indeed, being drawn into the network of telepaths in this way is not accompanied by tension or claustrophobia beyond the fear of the original telepaths forming the pattern and Doro, whose own paternal power is displaced by formation of the pattern. Those drawn in after its formation are relieved from the torturous state of uncontrolled telepathic information that leaks through to their consciousness. This lack of

tension in those who gain access to knowledge production points to the problematic aspects of this figuration. While Mary's motives are presented throughout as altruistic, at least in her mind, her motives are continually questioned by the other characters who assume she is simply seeking power. This is particularly true in the case of Doro who, in his treatment of humans as breeding material, had long since lost the bulk of his ability to empathize with others. He can only see the growing power and feel his own displacement by it. Mary herself, while claiming that she wants only to help, does discuss proprietary feelings about what she calls "her Pattern." Indeed, this is a decidedly hierarchical organization. Mary is the leader; the only Patternist who can read others, but not be read without her permission. The knowledge she produces is shared by no one unless she desires it; a situation that relies on the beneficence of the leader and can be easily corrupted. Indeed, this book is a prequel to *Patternmaster*, a novel in which the Pattern has become a complete replication of hierarchical patterns of the twentieth century and, in many ways, a throwback to the serfdom of medieval Europe.

What this demonstrates is not a failure of the medusa figuration to achieve the form of knowledge witnessing I am discussing, but rather an examination of how these variations, despite the act of enmeshing the witness to the system within the system itself, may fail when some components are left out of the reconfiguration of society. We might read Butler's oeuvre as a continuing exploration the relationship between nature, humanity, and technology and how to overcome hardwired tendencies to hierarchize. The *Xenogenesis* series suggests that the introduction of an entirely new biological configuration could move us beyond these tendencies. However, what the Patternist figuration reveals, as part of Butler's overall exploration of the relationship between nature, technology, and humanity is this particular biological change—the development of telepathic abilities through the Doro's breeding program—demonstrates a failed

path; how biology, when failed to put into the service of intellect cannot save us from the biological imperative to hierarchize. The *Patternist* series demonstrates that evolution without a radical reordering of our society on an intellectual level is not enough to save us, and will result ultimately in a repetition of the repressive social orders of earlier societies despite the best intentions of those who took the first steps toward change.

While this variation eliminates the distinction between humanity and technology by positioning communication technology as a function of the body itself, it leaves intact the hierarchical relationship between humanity/technology and nature, wherein the humans of the *Patternist* society still conceive of themselves as dominant in relation to nature, continuing to sever the relationship between humans and animal kin. This is demonstrated most clearly in the relationship the *Patternists* share with animals in *Patternmaster*. Finding animals easier to control than traditional modes of transportation technology, *Patternists* frequently put “controls” on the horses they ride, forcing them to bend to their will. This is revealed in the early stages of the story and functions as an indicator of the problematic nature of the *Patternist* society yet to be revealed. What this ultimately uncovers, as I mentioned before, is not the failure of the medusa figuration, but rather the limits of altering only one of the sets of relationships at work in the triptych of nature, humanity, and technology.

Clay's Ark provides the second model of communication imagined by Butler in the mode of what I am calling medusa figurations. The human/technology binary is also troubled in this model. The *Clay's Ark* virus represents body-technology, a means by which we can envision the collapse of these two categories. As a result, the literal representation of technology appears differently in the two worlds in the story—those infected by the virus and those who are not. The uninfected are linked with technology in a variety of ways. For example, the car gangs (the

moniker itself calling on associations with automotive technology) watch television and use cutting-edge jail cuffs to incapacitate their prisoners. The outside world is also the site of communication technology such as video phones and medical technology represented by the medical bag Blake Maslin carries.

The infected, on the other hand, live on a subsistence farm with no technology beyond nineteenth century barbed wire, cooking implements, and the few vehicles they use to collect new victims. They acquire a radio only at the moment at which these worlds come into persistent contact, at the moment the virus slips beyond their control into the world of the uninfected. The technologies of the outside world do not necessarily disappear in the Clay's Ark enclave, but rather are displaced by the bodily abilities of the changed humans. They are increasingly mobile due to heightened speed, communication happens across long distances thanks to their heightened sense of hearing, their ability to read body language makes them seem able to read minds. By drawing technology inside the body, Patricia Melzer notes that Butler metaphorically echoes the shift in technological development and the increasingly invisible forms these technologies take:

Finally, the communication systems in the Patternist series, which are based in mental mechanisms, echo the growing invisibility of communication technology, such as cell phones and wireless Internet access. Strength and perseverance are measured, not in physical terms, but in terms of mental power---they are invisible and unpredictable (reminiscent of cyberpunk's celebration of mental capacities within cyberspace), creating new dimensions of strength and competence. (Melzer 95)

This body-technology brought about by the fusion of the human host and virus produces ways of knowing that eschew the hierarchical structures of the *Patternist* model. Indeed, communication among those infected by the alien microbe brought back to Earth by the Clay's Ark spaceship happens in a communal manner. The microbes change the humans affected on a genetic level, producing children who are vastly different than their human parents. These microbes cannot exist alone, however. They force the humans infected to seek out other humans to infect and to create a community among those infected. Eli discovered upon the ship that those infected, when isolated, died. The microbes work communally to keep the host alive and they must reinfect each other; the microbes must have contact with other slightly different microbes in other hosts. This condition forces those infected to be physically near others infected. The shape the community takes is created by those infected and their desire to keep the microbe as contained as possible. For this reason, they live on an enclave and infect only a few people at a time in order to help shepherd them through the initial, and potentially deadly infection, and to instruct them in the cultural values of the enclave, stressing the importance of retaining as many human attributes as possible (eating cooked, rather than raw meat, not raping the newly infected, etc.). A hybrid community exists not just in the combination of human/alien bodies, but also in the cultural structure of these beings.

These microbes are genetic engineers, affecting their hosts on a physical level and communicating the needs necessary to the survival of the virus, and thereby the host, via impulses and "alien" desires. This engineering fuses the alien and human to create a hybridized means of knowledge production. In fact, knowledge production in this series is created both in the "traditional" scientific ways by those scientists aboard the ship and Blake Maslin functioning as doctor, but also by the communication of microbial bodies and those bodies they are attached

to. Through the knowledge production of the scientists, we discover the shape of the virus, but it is through the lived experiences of those changed by the virus that we learn much more about it. This form of knowledge production is one in which the body operates as the “central communicator,” transmitting the needs and history of the virus to the human host in a much more appreciable way than the knowledge garnered by the laboratory. For example, Lupe notes, “Sometimes I look around and everything seems to be the wrong color. The sun is too bright and...not red. I feel surprised that it isn’t red” (Butler *Seed to Harvest* 521). The communication between the host and virus happens on the level of instinct. That Lupe and the others who have been changed “sense” that the light is “wrong” because of the color indicates a communication between the virus and the host in which the evolutionary history and environment of the virus is disclosed to the host via sensation and instinctual knowledge. This is discussed repeatedly among those changed by the microbe as “the compulsion” or in terms of impulses that are foreign or heightened since their change. Indeed, this communication results in a heightened awareness of one’s body as the virus reshapes it, intensifying hunger, particularly for raw meat, and the sex drive of those changed.

By formulating knowledge production as a function of body-knowledge in this way, Butler suggests that laboratory space has foreclosed the authoritative assertions not just of those unwilling or unable to participate as gentleman-scientists, but that of the objects of study as well. The gaze of the scientist that pronounces claims about objects of study is put into question as that object claims subject-status as an organism that speaks back. In this way, knowledge production in *Clay’s Ark* occurs not in an invisible manner in which the status of the knowledge producer renders their own subjectivity invisible. The very alien nature of the virus continually calls attention to itself and the “infection” of the scientists, who are then unable to ignore the

transmitted messages of the virus they study, utilizes the trope of contamination to remove the categories of subject and object in the space of the laboratory.

The metaphor of the virus indicates the decentralized unit of knowledge production key to the medusa figuration. Communication circulates body to body, individual to individual. Each individual retains their subjectivity, yet the presence of the virus changes them, requiring contact with other knowledge producers in the cloud, in this case, others who have been changed. This is evident in Butler's description of communication of the Clayark microbes among themselves as Eli and Kiera hold hands: "She felt something happened between them, a moment of nonverbal communication... Confused, she tried to pull away, but somehow her desire to pull away did not reach her hands. They did not move. 'Be still,' he said. 'I just went through this with your father. His organisms 'knew' something mine want to know. So do yours'" (Butler *Seed to Harvest* 619). This passage demonstrates how the individual retains their subjectivity as decentralized knowledge producers within the medusa figuration while maintaining a connection with the larger cloud. The microbes evolve based on the body they inhabit, changing to match the chemistry of that body. In order to stay alive, they must have contact with other microbes that have equally changed in their own hosts, communicating the "knowledge" they have produced through their contact with difference within the cloud.

Communal knowledge building in this model is vital to the survival of those changed. Indeed, the opposition of the *Clay's Ark* model to that of the laboratory space of knowledge production is made clear in the confrontation between these two models of knowledge production on the spaceship. The original crew members of the Clay's Ark, and the first infected with the virus, were scientists whose model of knowledge production advocated isolation between the subject, the scientist interpreting the object, the virus and human host. Indeed,

within this model, the human host had already lost subjectivity and had been reduced to an object of study. The screams to be released of those infected and their tearing at their own bodies was not enough to be heard by the scientists observing them. Ultimately, these changed human-objects died, unable to communicate amongst other changed humans. This indicates the opposition of the two models in which one grants subjectivity to only legitimate knowledge producers and refuses to admit the object of the study the space to speak their own knowledge.

The need to connect as means of survival also speaks to importance of community-building and the fragility of social movements. A system wherein isolation equals death indicates the ways in which the vitality of systemic changes to power structures are in constant danger of reversion to previous systems of knowledge formation without continual access to and sustained contact with others working towards the same end. The type of community-building facilitated, perhaps even necessitated, by the virus's need to remain in communication with its decentralized parts is another aspect of the medusa figuration and appears frequently throughout Butler's oeuvre. In an interview with Mehaffy and Keating, Butler notes, "All of my characters either are in a community like Lauren in *Parable of the Sower*, or they create one; she does that, too. My own feeling is that human beings need to live that way and we too often don't" (Mehaffy & Keating 112). While knowledge-building through communal avenues is my focus here, community-building, social movements, and the application of the medusa figuration to lived experience is the central focus of chapter three.

Though I have thus far focused on the communication as it occurs between human host and virus as part of a decentralized cloud of knowledge production, as previously noted, the medusa figuration does not limit communication to those already enmeshed within the system. Like the *Patternist* model, knowledge producers within the system in the *Clay's Ark* model are

“compelled” to literally reach out and make contact with unchanged humans, thereby bringing them inside the cloud.

The virus also performs triple-duty within the text signifying not only communication technology merged with the body and the object which claims subject-status, but in its effects on the humans who are changed by it, it also troubles the human/animal binary. Whereas the previous model left the human/animal binary largely intact, the *Clay's Ark* model places the question of humanity and animality at the center of story. Humans are infected with an alien virus which mutates them and makes them more “animal-like,” which is to say they become driven by appetites—ravenous hunger, the drive to copulate, and the “compulsion” to spread the virus by touching, scratching, or biting uninfected humans. Indeed, even the communication of the virus with the host via instinct recalls the ways in which animal behaviors are rhetorically made distinct from human consciousness. The tension between the pull of the virus and what the infected feel is a loss of their humanity is the central struggle of the novel.

As the final novel within the *Patternist* series, *Clay's Ark* gives provides the origin story of the Clayarks, the human/animal hybrids warring with the telepathic Patternists in *Patternmaster*. It is in *Patternmaster* that the ways in which the label “animal” has been used to delegitimize certain identities, both diagetically and extradiagetically are made clear. “Mutes,” non-telepathic humans, have been enslaved by the Patternists and are constructed as domesticated animals, “sometimes gently as pets are treated, but often cruelly as we treat work or game animals (Vint 283). On the other hand, Clayarks in *Patternmaster* are positioned as wild animals who live outside the Patternist communities, occasionally attacking or raiding the Patternist's resources, in opposition to the “civilized” Patternists. The indiscriminate slaughter of the Clayarks at the hands of the Patternists recalls North American colonization's similar use of

the term “animal” to justify the treatment of Native people (Vint 283). This echoes the previous chapter by demonstrating how, just as colonialist discourses uniting reason and religion barred non-Western religions access to reason, the human/animal binary has functioned to block non-white groups from access to reason and credible forms of attestation to knowledge production.

Although some may claim interrogating and even dismantling the human/animal binary is a means of dismissing histories of oppression intimately linked with the construction of non-white races as “animal-like,” it is a means of disassembling the underlying ideology that has been used to justify that oppression. Where *Patternmaster* and other novels in the series focus on “the consequences of animalizing the other,” it is *Clay’s Ark* that most clearly troubles the underlying binary structure (Vint 288). However, as with all sweeping ideological shifts, this change is not without its difficulties. Indeed, the deterioration of the boundary between animal and human is quite troubling to the characters and the attempt to maintain one’s identity in a shifting landscape of meaning forms the center struggle for the characters of the novel. As Sherryl Vint notes, “Although Butler frequently shows her characters who can respond positively to difference in order to survive in her futures, she as frequently shows that living with such difference is not easy” (282).

As noted previously, discomfort within Butler’s stories, and as a feature of the medusa figuration, generally denotes the troubling of a system of privilege or the disturbance of an identity or binary structure. Drawing on Deleuze and Guatarri, Vint reads the discomfort felt by Eli and other changed humans as the process of “becoming” in which their molar, or fixed identities, are giving way to new hybrid, molecular, fluid identities (288). “*Clay’s Ark* provides a metaphor and model for becoming animal: the characters in the novel are initially horrified to find themselves crossing the line between humanity and animality. Butler ultimately shows us,

however, that such a radical transformation is necessary if we hope to imagine another way to be human subjects” (Vint 288). Indeed, the medusa figuration is a new “way to be human subjects” in which identities are fluid and the boundaries between animal, human, and machine are continually troubled. And while this fluidity causes temporary feelings of horror in those whose identities are shifting from a subject position outside of the cloud to that of a knowledge producer within it, the discomfort is a sign of the successful shifting of deep-rooted ideologies and resultant confrontation with difference.

The horror of the dissolving of the animal/human boundary returns us to another crucial element in the medusa figuration at work in the *Clay's Ark* variation: the recuperation of the monstrous. Philosophical teratologies have examined the monstrous as a site of coping with the anxieties of the fractured identities of late postmodernity. Massumi and Braidotti both explore the monster as “the accident or catastrophic event [that] has already taken place, the viewing of which provides a catharsis by exploring the realization of our fears,” arguing contemporary science fiction and horror films visions use the monstrous to explore “otherness within,” or the fear that “the monster dwells in your embodied self and it may burst out any minute into unexpected and definitely unwanted mutations” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 201). Post-nuclear diseases and cancerous growths provide a variation on this theme. Butler, however, finds new uses for the cancerous growth in the Medusa figuration. That which is monstrous in existing epistemologies, is recuperated and repurposed within the unsettled landscape of the decentralized cloud of knowledge production.

Where Barbara Creed reads the Medusa’s Head as an emasculating vagina dentata, whose power over men and threat to patriarchy horrifies, I am concerned with examining this as a site not of horror, or of an exploration of the ways in which the monstrous feminine horrifies,

but of that horror itself as a signal of power and potential; A moment that signifies change. As Braidotti notes, “The metamorphic power of monstrous others serves the function of illuminating the thresholds of ‘otherness’ while displacing their boundaries” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 202). And indeed, the discomfort caused by the temporary horror marks the transition from a molar identity to a molecular identity.

As many feminists of color have noted, those who are oppressed within a system have a different standpoint in relation to it and can utilize their outsider status to critique the system in ways those who benefit from privileged status might have more difficulty doing. The Medusa, as a monstrous figure who stands in opposition to a patriarchal structure as a powerful woman, read as a woman whose monstrosity emerges as much from animal/human hybridity as it does her power, calls on this notion. I invoke her as the figure for this model which privileges her outsider status in relation to entrenched systems of power, while recognizing her ability to construct new models of knowledge construction that reorder approaches to difference. While the Medusa figuration signifies the monstrous-feminine reworked, the dissolution of the boundary between animal and human found in her monstrosity simultaneously embeds the history of the label of animal as a means to exclude non-white identities from the “family of Man” and an attack on the racist ideologies that undergird such exclusions. In this way, the Medusa figuration relegitimizes previously dismissed identities facilitating an open system of knowledge production while maintaining an intact history.

Discomfort as a marker of shifting ideologies is equally expressed in the final variation of the Medusa figuration through the characters of the Oankali in the *Xenogenesis* series. The series features Lilith Iyapo, a survivor of nuclear holocaust who awakens aboard an alien ship, home to the Oankali, an alien race who moves through the galaxy adapting their species by

performing genetic trades. Genetic engineers, the three-gendered Oankali find themselves drawn to the potential they see in humans, their ability to grow cancer, but who are wary of what they term the “human contradiction,” humans’ tendency to capitulate intelligence to hierarchical organization. The series examines the tension between the human resisters, Lilith and the others who live among the Oankali, and human-Oankali hybrids, or “constructs” whose bodies are more porous and malleable than previous generations.

While the series is most often interrogated for its play with gender and racial formations, and continues to be hotly contested among constructivists and “female body feminists,” my interest in the series centers on the communal production of knowledge that lies at the heart of Oankali social and biological structure. The Oankali have a deep understanding of the bodies and the pursuit of genetic trade fuel their exploration of the universe. As genetic engineers, they can manipulate their bodies from generation to generation, making changes that facilitate communication and these trades between species. Their understanding of their own bodies and those of the other species they meet allows for uses of the body which displace traditional transportation and communication technologies as well as, quite literally, the space of laboratory. Body and technology are indistinguishable from each other in this model as all Oankali technology is composed entirely of living biological matter. The ship, the settlement, the “seed” which grows a town, everything plays a part in the ecology of the Oankali. Donna Haraway has argued this and other aspects of this thesis, albeit briefly, in *Primate Visions*. It is in this displacement of technology by biological matter that one means of achieving a non-hierarchical relationship with nature, one in which nature is shaped by body and technology while acting upon these categories as well, can be found. However, even nature produces surprising results

and reveals hidden assumptions about a worldview in which sentient beings view themselves as custodians and masters of the world(s) in which they live.

The reworked relationship between the environment and the body is most visible in the human-Oankali ooloi constructs that appear in *Imago*, the final book of the series. These children whose sex does not develop until maturity find their bodies responding to the loneliness of their Earth-bound ooloi parents, and who develop into ooloi well ahead of the Oankali schedule for the introduction of construct ooloi. These unexpected developments cause genuine fear and concern among the Oankali adults who see the infinitely malleable bodies of the ooloi constructs as potentially dangerous to the life around them. While the older Oankali can manipulate the genetic structure of the next generation, they have no ability to change themselves in such a way. However, it is the human genes which allow the new generation an even more malleable structure. As ooloi, with an ability to alter structures on a genetic level with simply a touch, the constructs have a deadly potential. Repeatedly, their fear of this potential is expressed to the ooloi constructs in the Oankali demands to “control” themselves, employing a discourse of mastery over nature via their insistence on mastering control of their bodies. The ooloi constructs are asked to institute some conscious control over their bodies, an ability with which they struggle and ultimately fail to master in a way that satisfies Oankali demands.

It is this inability of the ooloi constructs to “control” themselves that suggests a reworked relationship with nature. Despite celebratory interpretations of the Oankali as “thoroughly postmodern,” and Haraway’s claims that “they are complexly webbed into a universe of living machines, all of which are partners in the apparatus of bodily production,” (*Primate Visions* 379) Oankali body knowledge and their work as genetic engineers share, in some ways, a relationship with nature that is similar to the Western worldview, which is to say, a hierarchical one. This is

also apparent in the construction of the ships which allow them to travel through the universe and which are alive themselves. Planted in the soil of a new planet, they grow and develop to provide the nutrients the Oankali need as they travel. These ships leach all living material and useful building blocks from the planet on which they grow, leaving lifeless rocks behind. The ooloi construct, on the other hand, whose existence was brought about by the material conditions facing Oankali ooloi and the ooloi's loneliness resulting from a lack of ooloi children on Earth, represent a non-hierarchical relationship with nature. The conditions on Earth and the genetic trade with humans create a situation in which Oankali are denied same-sexed children. These environmental stressors have an effect on the ooloi, which, in turn, has an effect on the unsexed children, pushing them to become ooloi themselves. This is not a relationship in which one dominates nature, but one in which nature shapes as well as being shaped. The Oankali's fear of the construct ooloi, whose ability to shape nature unintentionally exceeds even their own, represents not just a desire to protect life as it exists on Earth, but the desire to consciously construct that life, to direct its evolution, and in a sense to master it.

The construct ooloi struggle and ultimately fail to master their bodies alone. Reasserting the relational aspects of the Medusa figuration as it re-envision a non-hierarchical relationship with nature, the construct ooloi are only able to gain some control over their shape via their relationship with their mates. Aor, a human-Oankali construct ooloi, "deeply, painfully afraid, desperately lonely and hungry for a touch it could not have" (Butler *Lilith's Brood* 681) while transitioning to full adulthood without mates, found its body becoming less and less complex. Jodahs explains the essentialness of finding mates, "We called our need for contact with others and our need for mates *hunger*. The word had not been chosen frivolously. One who could hunger could starve" (Butler *Lilith's Brood* 682). This "starvation" at the deprivation of touch

with mates causes Aaor's body to disassemble and slip towards an ever less complex life-form. Once joined with human mates, Aaor, like Jodahs, finds a more stable form. Their shifting bodies have certainly been interpreted as a model of adaptability and feminist scholars have extensively debated the model of gender at work in the Xenogenesis series. Indeed, Haraway has found the series and Butler herself to be a "theorist for cyborgs" who offers a model for alternatives to late capitalism (Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 173). As previously mentioned, although the centers for knowledge production in the Medusa figuration are decentralized, the unit is relational and must maintain contact with others to continue to operate. The Xenogenesis series, and the human-Oankali construct ooloi and the requirement of mates, provide another example of this relationship.

Examining the communication among the Oankali, we find that knowledge is produced via a decentralized cloud composed of an integrated circuit of bodies. As Haraway notes, "the aliens live in the postmodern geometries of vast webs and networks in which the nodal points of individuals are still intensely important" (*Primate Visions* 379). The unification and hybridization of bodies form a public space in which sensory perception, feeling, and intellect converge in a novel communicatory practice. Again, this is not a wetware-style visualization of the post-human, in which the body disappears and the consciousness communicates directly. As in each variation of the Medusa figuration, the body is very much the 'central communicator' in this model. Where the wetware privileges the mind over the body, the Medusa figuration seen in the Oankali model is not a "wireless" connection in which consciousness is projected to a virtual cyberspace, but a model wherein the physical bodies are linked to each other in small group communication or via organisms of the living ship for larger moments of consensus. The body and the mind are inexorably linked.

The importance of the body to this model becomes apparent in ways that that language, when expressed verbally, is not sufficient for communication between the different beings. The body, on the other hand, allows for understanding about the world and relationships between beings to be expressed more fully than is possible via speech. For instance, in the moment in which grief over the death of Lilith's human mate, Joseph, is shared between Lilith and Nikanj:

It gave her...a new color. Totally alien, unique, nameless thing, half seen, half felt or ...tasted. A blaze of something frightening, yet overwhelming, compelling...“That’s all I can give you,” Nikanj said. “That’s what I feel. I don’t even know whether there are words in any human language to speak of it.”

“Probably not,” she whispered. (Butler *Lilith’s Brood* 226)

Emotions and ideas are communicated in this moment via sensations and impulses that reside outside the capacity of language to express them. The body acting as the primary communicator between the two facilitates this moment of non-verbally communicated grief in which shared understanding of the importance of Joseph to both bridges the difference between them. Lilith expresses this understanding that has passed between them by noting, “Grief was grief” (226).

This series represents the most thorough collapse of the categories of animal/human/technology seen thus far in the various models of Medusa figuration. Indeed, Haraway notes, “Butler explores the interdigitations of human, machine, nonhuman animal or alien, and their mutants in relation to the intimacies of bodily exchange and mental communication” (*Primate Visions* 378). The “animals” they use to sedate and sustain the immobilized humans are plant life culled from other planets. These tubes slide from the wall following a chemical command released by an Oankali and sustain the life within them, paralyzing and rendering the victim unconscious. The ship produces the food the Oankali eat and

disposes of the waste materials created by the aliens. The small platforms that carry the Oankali across the vast expanses of the ship are also a kind of animal life form that contributes to the whole of the Oankali ecosystem. Each aspect of Oankali life merges the animal, the body, and technology. Technology is not depicted as an addition to nature or a denaturalization of this world, as Hayles proclaims, but rather it is deeply embedded in the nature of the universe and represents a collection of experiences and trades among vastly different ecological systems and the traits that evolved in those biological spheres.

This collapse of categories opens up new means of knowledge production. The bodies of the Oankali act as genetic technologies and their primal drives to reproduce become distributed and rewired as “embodied commerce, conversation, communication” (Haraway *Primate Visions* 379). This embodied circuit of technology is depicted via an organ the ooloi refer to as “yashi.” The organ houses the genetic history of the Oankali from their origin onward as well as tissue samples from all other forms of life encountered. It is the site at which genetic mixing of their mates’ offspring takes place and functions like a miniscule laboratory where the ooloi “natural genetic engineers” work. The body itself functions as a space of biotechnological innovation and discovery. It also is embedded with pleasure among the distributed producers of this knowledge. While the yashi itself is housed within the ooloi body, and the vast stores of collected information is passed on from ooloi to ooloi, the ooloi are not invested with the power of the “gentleman scientist” who alone possesses access to the information or the ability to speak authoritatively and for whom “modest witnessing” renders his labor invisible. Each member of an ooloi’s family collects information and derives vast pleasure in both experiencing the world and sharing information with their ooloi. In this way, the laboratory is dispersed among a larger circuit of communication while retaining the importance of individual nodes of knowledge

production and the labor in the cloud. Within the circuit of uniting bodies and consciousness, the pleasure each derives from producing this knowledge is a means of rendering the labor of each producer visible.

This functions not just as critique of the production of scientific knowledge, but also of the means of capitalist production. The Medusa figuration at work in the pleasure among the Oankali mates as they produce that scientific knowledge echoes Karl Marx's thoughts on personhood, alienation, and labor:

Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. 1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality, its specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a *power beyond all doubt*. (Marx)

His discussion of the ways in which labor performed as human beings can provide gratification in both the “communal nature” and the individual aspects are similar to the distributed labor of the Oankali in which participation as individual knowledge producers also enmeshed in a larger system of that same production provides pleasure. The labor needed to produce this knowledge is not alienating nor does it preclude participation of unauthorized witnesses.

The final axis of interrogation of the *Xenogenesis* series and the Medusa figuration is the role of the monstrous and its reclamation in the novels. Regarding contemporary science fiction, Rosi Braidotti's analysis examines how the “established success of...science fiction and cyberpunk...points to a new ‘post-human’ techno-teratological phenomenon that privileges the

deviant or the mutant over the more conventional versions of the human” (Braidotti *Metamorphoses* 179). Indeed, the *Xenogenesis* series involves a series of hybridized, mutant bodies that inspire revulsion and fascination and these monsters have the potential to define otherness with blurring the boundaries. This fluidity marked by the monstrous is quite literal in the world of the Oankali. Their bodies are marked by the feminine and the masculine as they are both porous and probing. They defy the border between sentient creature/human and animal with bodies covered with snake-like protrusions and sensory arms that evoke elephant trunks for the humans searching for meaningful signs to communicate the monstrosity. Their bodies provide the organs and organization of transport, exploration, and understanding of difference, merging the flesh and machinery. And yet, while these bodies do horrify the humans, they also contain a powerful potential for change. Their otherness makes clear the ways in which gendered and raced hierarchies function within human culture, and their insistence on intimate contact with the intent to create human-Oankali “constructs” refuse to allow humans within their webbed pattern to organize itself in this way.

While much of what I have described as the Medusa figuration in Butler’s novels echoes the representations and metaphors put forth by Haraway as the cyborg myth, the modest witness, or the primate, what I offer here is an examination of how Butler herself develops a political myth beyond the pages of the oft-examined *Xenogenesis* series alongside Haraway’s own developing myths. What I have explored is the deep intertwining of animal, human, and technology that exists in Butler’s oeuvre seeking to dismantle these binaries, much in the same way that Haraway’s own cyborg myth does. However, in the application of Haraway’s work, her cyborg myth is often disassembled and the thorny question of the human/animal binary, with its attendant questions of how the animal has been used to exclude racial others from the human

family, is left behind for the sole examination of boundary between human and machine. What the Medusa figuration offers is a political myth that cannot be disassembled in this way. At every turn, the animal, the fleshy human, and the machine are profoundly interwoven. One cannot consider the Pattern without the mutes it enslaves as “pets” or the Clayarks whose animal-like bodies lock them perpetually outside the body-technology represented in the telepathic network of communication. The virus that causes the mutation of the Clayarks creates bodily changes that situate communication technologies within the bodily abilities of the altered humans and increase appetites that signify the animal and yet refuses to cede ground to the human and constitutes an uneasy negotiation of both dichotomies. And finally, the Oankali themselves, who are frequently taken as symbols of the cyborg, with their interlaced circuits of communication, whose bodies are themselves genetic technologies, and whose alien features become humans with animal-like features when interpreted through a human-centric worldview, must be understood as dissolving the boundary between both human/machine and human/animal.

Alongside Haraway’s vision of the cyborg as a means to end the privilege attached to the “modest witnessing” of scientific knowledge production, stand Octavia Butler’s Medusa figuration, constructed across various novels, which propose a means of communication which emanates from the body itself, but that does not, cannot exist individually. Not only are medusa configurations embedded within nature and biology, but they reach out to form connections with spectators, drawing even casual observers into the web of communication. From the Clay Ark virus that brings painful death to those kept in isolation to the Oankali bodily technology that extends from the aliens themselves to the ship they use to travel through space as well as the food they eat, these communication organizations attempt to leave no one outside the circuit. However, the limits of these forms of communication are clearly drawn in the Patternists’

treatment of so-called “mutes” and firm resistance felt in the Maslins as they try to escape the Clay Ark enclave and the humans who attempt to start reproducing anew without the interference of the Oankali. Ultimately, in each of these systems, someone must be left out. As Haraway notes, “These webs are hardly innocent of power and violence; hierarchy is not power’s only shape—for aliens, primates, or humans” (*Primate Visions* 379-80). To imagine a world without this is a utopia, an idea to which Butler was strongly opposed: “Personally, I find utopias ridiculous. We’re not going to have a perfect human society until we have perfect humans, and that seems unlikely. Besides, any true utopia would almost certainly be incredibly boring, and it would be so overspecialized that any change we might introduce would probably destroy the whole system” (McCaffery & McMennamin 26). Similarly to other feminist theorists, Butler’s work lives in and lives for the spaces in-between. Flexibility, hybridity, and continual reevaluation form the basis for many of her worlds. In each case, these same traits are the source of profound discomfort for the characters, making clear that remaining in this space is not easy, nor comforting, but in many cases necessary for survival.

CHAPTER III.
SURVIVING THE RACIAL APOCALYPSE: LOVE, RELIGION, AND THE
MARGINS IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S PARABLE SERIES

According to Judeo-Christian belief, God granted humans dominion over Earth and all its creatures. This colors our relationship to nature in Western thought, providing an origin story through which we frame our understanding of nature as a hierarchical relationship. The first chapter examines how religion and reason were united in the colonial and imperial projects of the nineteenth century and how Butler utilizes a postcolonial approach to demonstrate how religious fanaticism and reason are divorced, recuperating a space for non-Western worldviews and religiosity as reasonable. In addition, Butler demonstrates that religion, when aligned with reason, and scientific inquiry, may be used to form an entrenched dedication to rational thought.

The second chapter takes this line of inquiry in another direction. Leaving religion behind, the chapter concerns itself with knowledge production that relies on rational thought and the scientific method, but that questions the modes of production of the past. Joining extant feminist conversations about the philosophy of science and building on and alongside Donna Haraway's myth of the cyborg, it examines how Butler builds networks of decentralized knowledge production in order to rework the hierarchical relationship and destabilize the categories of human, animal, and technology.

This chapter revisits these both of these areas, beginning with Butler's examination of the pitfalls of postcolonial regimes, and her healthy skepticism of those in the central position of power, to unite Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness and Chela Sandoval's concept of revolutionary love with Octavia Butler's theories of communication. By reconfiguring our

relationship to the margins and religion, this interrogation exposes how Butler proposes a theory for surviving existing racist and sexist structures, but also provides a clear methodology for building a world in which we utilize decentralized networks to dismantle these structures.

Isaiah Lavender III and Donna Haraway both cite Octavia Butler's work as a form of "survival literature" that posits a means of escape from the "evolutionary dead end of discrimination" (Lavender 23). Lavender suggests that Butler's work is a form of cathartic prose through which Butler attempts to come to terms with "the hurts suffered as the result of racism" (23). In doing so, she exposes the perseverance and personal strength necessary to endure and overcome such trials.

Similarly, Haraway, examining Butler's work through a feminist lens, sees Butler's *Xenogenesis* series as means of rewriting the origin story which creates and justifies a hierarchical worldview. According to Haraway, Butler's is a vision of a monstrous birth that holds both the horror and the promise "that the child will not, after all, be like the parent" (Haraway *Primate Visions* 378). Indeed, as the previous chapter argues, the hybrid births of *Xenogenesis* offer a model of decentralized communication and a need for contact with difference that reorders this hierarchical thinking. "Catastrophe, survival, and metamorphosis," which form the underlying themes of Butler's oeuvre, provide a model for how we might reconstruct our own world in order to dismantle a system which causes these hurts (Haraway *Primate Visions* 378). Metamorphosis in Butler's novels provides a structure for surviving racism and alleviating pain while using a fluid sense of cultural identity as a means of adapting to changing circumstances, surviving those changes, and using the ruptures to re-order our culture and minimize, if not completely deconstruct, hierarchical relationships.

This notion of fluid cultural identity counterbalances the essential identities attributed by colonial and imperial powers. These powers of the nineteenth century relied heavily on pseudo-scientific research on racial difference as a justification for the colonization of African and Eastern lands. As these regimes fell in the twentieth century, newly freed areas struggled to rebuild their countries and identities within a post-colonial landscape and to unlearn the racism which had pervaded the previous ruling structures as a result of this justification. The postcolonial theory that emerged from this struggle, Sandoval's own discussion of U.S. Third World Women, of which Anzaldúa is a part, and the model of revolutionary love that they espouse all provide a ready means to analyze the ways in which Butler's own survival literature illuminates the difficulties of constructing cultures and political structures in the aftermath of such an event. Addressing the replication of problematic power structures within the Patternist series, Butler herself acknowledged that her intent was to discuss difficult issues within the African American community, such as violence, and how these traits, which began as methods of survival, carry on in different forms when the structure threatening one's existence is removed: "The fact that you have Doro, who has kidnapped a bunch of people and bred them and used them, and after a while, when they're strong enough, they do nasty things to him. But they also do nasty things to everybody else, because they've learned that's how you behave if you want to survive" (Fry 129). Indeed, after the fall of Doro's colonial empire, Mary usurps his position, but rather than creating a more equitable world, simply reconstructs Doro's structure, placing 'mutes' on the bottom of the newly organized hierarchy.

Butler's stories are often situated in a colonialist structure (*Dawn, Adulthood Rites, Imago, Patternmaster, Mind of My Mind, Wild Seed, Clay's Ark, Survivor, Bloodchild*). As the characters in these stories resist these structures, like Mary, they often find themselves

formulating competing or alternative systems of organization. Eli and the others infected with the Clayark disease attempt to isolate themselves as their altered biology asks them to rewrite their social codes. Colonization in this example takes the form of a disease that is itself the explorer/invader and through altered biology imposes its will and organizational structure on the infected. Alanna of *Survivor* struggles against not only the organization of the missionaries who are attempting to colonize the alien world, but also against the Garkohn, an indigenous people, who have their own plans for the subjugation of missionaries, adopting instead the customs and culture of the Tekohn. Mary in *Mind of My Mind* forms the pattern and ultimately displaces Doro, the being who had spent centuries breeding people as part of his plan to create companions (and food), as the center of power. However, just as former colonies in Africa have emerged from colonial rule and found one cause for concern in the reordering of society to be the creation of a system which did not simply reconstruct a system as inequitable as that which existed under the colonial power, Butler's novels explore this same concern in her fiction. What these novels make clear is that the struggle to power and the desire to replace one flawed system with another leads to questions of whether or not the new structure does not simply recreate the power structures of the original. This is particularly true in both *Mind of My Mind* and *Parable of the Talents*.

The second of the Patternist series, *Mind of My Mind*, centers on the emergence of the first pattern and the beginnings of Patternist culture and communities at what appears to be the latter half of the twentieth century. The first Patternmaster emerges from Doro's community of actives and latents to take control of the most powerful of the actives. Doro appears for the first time in the series, only to die at the apex of the novel. We learn the story of his life before the creation of his "people" and his desire to create a race unlike any other the world has seen. Doro

was born as a Nubian in Africa sometime early in recorded history. Like the pre-transition latents, he began to hear voices and experience the pain of others around him at the onset of his transition. Unfortunately for those around him, like those transitioning who do not have a “second,” or an active to help guide them through the process of transitioning, Doro dies during this psychically and physically painful experience. However, equally unlike those who would come after him, he does not cease to exist. Doro simply moves from one body to another body, possessing it and extinguishing the life within. Doro travels for two hundred years before becoming interested in what would become his life’s work—breeding humans who “taste good.” Mirroring the breeding of animals to reveal new configurations Doro had witnessed taking place, he begins to bring these humans together to breed so he might continually have pools of people to feed from. Through the course of his “experiment” his goal shifts from simply creating pools of people from which to feed to seeking to create a race of people similar to himself with whom he might seek companionship, looking to form a community of actives with which he might be a part. At the beginning of *Mind of My Mind*, we see him at the peak of his creation, collecting the best from his various lines and bringing them together for what will ultimately be the first successful union of actives.

His organization represents a colonial power which replicates many of the facets of eighteenth and nineteenth century colonial regimes. Indeed Doro’s colonizing power extends not just to the lives he controls through his breeding program, but is visible in his own movement from body to body, colonizing each, depleting it of natural resources before moving to the next. His power and purpose, despite his desire to live among them, arise from subjugating those under his control. Similarly to trends in American chattel slavery, he disrupts marital unions, claiming sexual access to each member of his community, forcing humans to breed like animals

and destroying those who do not cooperate. While his own origin as a Nubian and (in his case, voluntary) migration to North America implicitly references this form of slavery, Doro's body-shifting over the course of hundreds of years causes him to lose his attachment to African identity and simultaneously suggests that African identity or racial allegiance alone is not enough to insulate one from the destructive replication of oppressive power structures. In the U.S., black women connected with the black nationalist movement have leveled these same accusations in critique of the movement's insistence on asserting a patriarchal structure similar to the model used in the white mainstream. Jacquelyn Grant, directing her critique towards black liberation theologians makes a similar claim: "The important point is that in matters relative to the relationship between the sexes, black men have accepted without question the patriarchal structures of the white society as normative for the black community" (Grant 629). Just as Grant demonstrates, with Doro's allegiance to his identity as a Nubian from the Nile valley having long since vanished, what remains is a testament to the ways in which those who are colonized can easily take on the mantle of colonizer. Indeed, Doro represents a fictionalized version of European history which, in claiming the Mediterranean world as the cradle of civilization, divorces North Africa from any connection to peoples of color and envelopes its history into the origin myth of the colonizing forces.

The main character of the novel, Mary, is the "truest daughter [Doro] has ever had" (Butler *Seed to Harvest* 334). She enslaves many people, but, unlike Doro, lives in a symbiosis with them in a way Doro can never truly achieve. As mentioned in the previous chapter, her relationship with the other members of the pattern is one through which empathy and healing emerges. She feeds on their energy, but gives them peace of mind and security in return. As she reaches the end of latency, she forms the first "pattern," taking on very proprietary feelings about

her pattern and those in them. She comforts herself with the knowledge that she lives symbiotically, but must concede that she is more similar to Doro than she wishes she were, ultimately recreating the same patterns of oppression from which she had fought so hard to free herself and others. Again, Butler demonstrates that allegiance to an oppressed group, as Mary was “one of the owned” before her transition, does not indicate a commitment to social justice or liberation.

Indeed, while much discussion is given to the discomfort of those under the control of Doro, mere pawns in his colonialist project, and Mary exhibits excitement at her newfound role as holder of what she calls the “pattern,” her organizational structure finds itself dangerously similar to that which Doro designed. Indeed, the division between telepathic Patternists and non-Patternists, who have been designated as “mutes,” becomes a clear indicator of the ways in which Mary’s pattern is built upon the backs of those who fall outside the system of power. A conversation between Emma and Doro explores the growth of the Patternist community and their appropriation of minds and bodies as well as property:

“They’ve completely taken over the best section of town. They did it quietly, but still Mary thought it safest for them to control key mutes in city hall, in the police department, in—“ “Mutes!” He looked annoyed, probably with himself. “It’s a convenient term. People without telepathic voices. Ordinary people.” “I know what it means, Doro. I knew the first time I heard Mary use it. It means niggers!” “Em—“ “I tell you, you’re out of control, Doro. You’re not one of them. You’re not a telepath. And if you don’t think they look down on us non-telepaths, us niggers, the whole rest of humanity, you’re not paying attention.” (*Seed to Harvest* 395)

Although race is not a division by which power is accorded in this new system, indeed, Doro's communities had always been racially and ethnically diverse, Mary's system finds new ways to differentiate and distribute power. And those who find themselves deficient in this new system are very quickly co-opted, just as Emma notes. This is again clearly referenced in a conversation between an active telepath, Ada, and Page, a young woman about to leave her school in the care of mutes and transition to active status:

“But...they're not like you. I can tell that much. I can feel a difference.” “They're not telepaths.” “They're slaves!” Her tone was accusing. “Yes.” Page was silent for a moment, startled by Ada's willingness to admit such a thing. “Just like that? Yes, you make slaves of people? I'm going to be part of a group that makes slaves of people?” “Page—“ “*Why do you think I tried to die?*” “Because you didn't understand. You still don't.” “I know about being a slave! My parents taught me. My father used to strip me naked, tie me to the bed, and beat me, and then—“I know about that, Page” “And I know about being a slave.” The girl's voice was leaden. I don't want to be a part of anything that makes people slaves.” (*Seed to Harvest* 416-417)

Evident in this exchange is how quickly Mary's social organization has defined positions of power and how closely they resemble not only the subjugation of Doro's people but also the racial and ethnic divisions that so clearly mark American history and contemporary society. Additionally, Ada herself exhibits a comfort with the organization that she attempts to impart to Page as she nears the moment in which she will enter a position of power within the structure. The exchange is reminiscent of a white child growing up under slavery who shares a kinship and familiarity with the slaves only to grow in adulthood into a new relationship which places the

adult in a position of authority over those he or she previously called companions and caretakers. Butler explores this idea more concretely in *Kindred* through the childhood and early adulthood of Rufus, Dana's slaveholding ancestor. Rufus, whose childhood is spent under the care of his family's slaves, finds himself in a curious position as he reaches manhood, but has not yet assumed control of plantation life. In this space between child and adult, Rufus downplays his own position of authority on the plantation in order to curry favor with the slaves, particularly with Dana and Alice. He frequently denies his own role in the maintenance of the system of slavery, displacing any blame he may share onto his father, and even after his father's death continuing to lay blame at any feet other than his own as he becomes increasingly cruel. This infuriates Dana, the stand-in for our contemporary voice, who recognizes Rufus's position of authority and culpability in the perpetuation of the system. Dana repeatedly tries to make Rufus understand his actions and illuminate alternatives, but her pleas fall on deaf ears. Indeed, we see a similar situation between Ada and Paige in *Mind of My Mind*, as Paige, an outsider on the brink of acceptance into a world of authority is aware of the inequities of the system and calls attention to them, while Ada, simply passes the buck, attempts to sympathize with those enslaved and reiterates the necessity of the enslavement of "mutes" if the Patternist society is to survive.

Indeed, both Ada and Mary's contribution to the recreation of the very colonialist structures from which they are attempting to gain liberation speaks to the ways in which political movements are corrupted when they ignore difference. This mirrors the black feminist critique of second wave feminism. Just as black women critiqued black nationalism for its emphasis on confronting racism to the detriment of sexism, so too have black feminists critiqued white, middle-class feminists' dismissal of race and class as categories of difference that alter women of color's experience of sexism: "The idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt

platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality" (hooks 44). Despite this criticism, hooks and other feminists of color were not concerned with abandoning the notion of sisterhood, but rather looked to implement a differing model: "Women are enriched when we bond with one another but we cannot develop sustaining ties or political solidarity using the model of Sisterhood created by bourgeois women's liberationists" (hooks 45). Instead, like hooks, Butler demonstrates that a commitment to power and not unity across difference, seeing oneself as the perpetual victim, disavows the ways in which race, class, and other categories of difference work to oppress some while privileging others, and ultimately does little to resolve the larger issues at stake and even in the case of wide-scale revolution, simply recreates the problematic aspects of the previous system under a new name.

The first novel of the Patternist series, *Patternmaster*, demonstrates this very concept in the evolution of Patternist culture. This culture, which began in the prequel *Mind of My Mind*, evolves from a story of a liberation movement to that of a feudal system in which the mutes are further enslaved, but whose history and historical contributions, much like Africans and African Americans, are not only lost to the mutes themselves, but also are questioned by the Patternists. Patternists are so entrenched in their belief of superiority and the inherent inferiority of mutes, that they find it difficult to believe that before the development of Patternist society, non-telepathic humans had created a highly technological world. This is again reminiscent of the historical amnesia that caused Europeans to forget North Africans role in the development of early civilization and to discount contributions to medicine made by Africans, such as smallpox inoculation. It follows patterns of colonization in which colonization "turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon *Wretched of the Earth* 170).

As previously stated, revolutions have long faced the problem of how to restructure in a manner that does not replicate the problems of the previous regime. A key question in this issue is memory and how to escape the oppressions of the past. Franz Fanon notes both the desire for and the difficulties with this process in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*: “It is not inconsequential that Fanon begins his conclusion of *Black Skin* with a long epigraph from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, of the need for revolutions to strip themselves of the past, for it was precisely this suffocating, corrupt nationalist bourgeoisie that became the problematic of *Wretched*” (Gibson 3). Butler herself notes that the memories of the “nasty things” Doro imposed on his people and tactics for survival they developed hindered the creation of a new, more equitable society. Indeed, memory and adaptation are intimately linked in her works. In order to prepare for change, one must be willing to release the past and embrace new challenges.

Butler not only examines how memories of survival under Doro’s regime caused similar issues of subjugation in the new system, but also calls upon the hindrances of memory and the failure to adapt to new situations in several novels. *Parable of the Sower* demonstrates this in fall of the Robledo neighborhood, Lauren Olamina’s walled community, and the actions and words of her father and stepmother in particular who seem to be mired in an historical moment which they feel confident will return. Faced with the changes in the cultural landscape and the realities of the survival that face them in the new era, this community is unprepared to deal with change and is ultimately destroyed as a result.

Similarly, the missionaries of *Survivor* cling to their beliefs of racial and species domination on the alien planet they had begun to colonize, an act that threatens their autonomy as the aliens they had understood as mere animals had, in fact, been secretly enslaving them. Alanna, the only character whose personal history includes major paradigm shifts—she was orphaned at an early age and grew up nearly feral to be later adopted into a strict missionary family—is capable of accepting change without crippling amounts of resistance. Discussing the ways in which Butler’s stories reveal moments of “becoming” which destabilize the categories of human and animal, Sheryl Vint notes that this ability to adopt a fluid cultural identity is the key to escaping the recreation of the problematic aspects of colonization: “To be open to difference, to accept seductive new channels for desire and new modes of being, is essential for social transformation in both Butler and Deleuze and Guattari” (Vint 292). Gloria Anzaldúa makes similar claims in her discussion of the *mestiza*: “The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...She has a plural personality, she operates in pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 101). While this fluidity offers a means of social transformation, we must consider the limits of fluidity, particularly as it relates to the retention of memory that is necessary for avoiding the pitfalls of postcolonial regimes’ replication of colonialist and imperialist structures.

Butler’s attention to memory allows for a further examination of cyborg theory and the need to incorporate postcolonial theory for a more complete analysis of Octavia Butler’s oeuvre. The potential of the cyborg as a means of reconstructing social order is a fruitful site of inquiry. However, memory is a site where cyborg theory breaks down. In order to move toward a more

equitable future, we must embrace the proceeds of technology that come to us from dubious sources—the military complex. The bastard offspring may be unfaithful to the father, but still finds himself a beneficiary of the work of the father. His unfaithfulness requires a disavowal of the father, an amnesia of sorts that refuses its roots. We can only embrace the memory of oppression in moments in which the “dream-like quality” of the cyborg awakens to countenance the literal oppression of women within the “integrated circuit.” It is in this moment that we find that we, as the bastard children, are not the sole inheritors within this metaphor, which depends on the death of the paternal figure, or the ‘old guard,’ and discover that his legitimate heirs continue the family business.

Octavia Butler’s work does not lapse into moments of celebrated unconsciousness. These moments present themselves as entirely too dangerous. In the brief moments her characters lose their focus on the doings of these ‘legitimate’ heirs to patriarchy and white supremacy, they face the loss of all they have worked towards. The destruction of Acorn in *Parable of the Talents* is the most vivid example of this. Asha Vere notes her mother’s refusal to recognize the implications of world events that would affect her most: “My father called her immature, unrealistic, selfish, and shortsighted. Shortsighted of all things! If there are sins in Earthseed, shortsightedness, lack of forethought, is the worst of them. And yet shortsighted is exactly what she was” (*Parable of the Talents* 137-8). The moment Olamina shifts her focus to the growth of Acorn and Earthseed solely, she loses sight of the machinations of Jarret’s political and religious organizations creating an opening for the destruction of her own liberation movement.

We always inherit the proceeds of problematic environments, not to do so suggests radical separatism, a point that neither Haraway nor myself is advocating. However, the difficulty of the cyborg where it concerns memory arises in the space between the literal and the

figurative, the slippery space that Haraway and her figure occupy. The cyborg can never be pinned down and moves effortlessly between the two, and while I find this sort of fluidity intriguing, I, like Butler, am concerned with how one can operate in a political system which requires pinning down, a quasi-static location, in order to effect change. It is in her postcolonial merging of reason and religion that Butler finds a solution to the dilemma.

Butler encodes her theory into religious dogma—for her the effortless shifting of the nomad is only useful for those at the margins. When facing the destructive power of raids and competing worldviews and religions, the nomad becomes a useful political tool. Olamina travels from site to site, planting Earthseed in as many locations as possible, never with a fixed “home.” As the leader of Earthseed, Olamina herself remains a nomad, but her ideas crystallize in a very real sense. They form a religion around which others organize themselves very concretely. About her use of religion, Butler remarks, “Lauren uses religion as a tool. So I use that tool as something that she can use to help those people who follow her and those who are influenced by them, to save themselves” (Mehaffy & Keating 112-3). The tenor of this dogma is the embrace of eternal fluidity. However, Butler understands that ceaseless fluidity alone does not speak to the needs of those suffering under existing paradigms. This forms a break from her use of Braidotti’s nomadic subjectivity. There must be a moment, a system of interface, which allows the two concepts—the fluid and the static—to coexist. Religion, itself a means of maintaining a status quo—becomes the structure that allows this interface to occur. I am hard pressed to think of another social structure which has endured as long as the world’s major religions—even with their share of schisms, syncretisms, and evolutions. Religion, when united with reason and scientific inquiry, as discussed in the first chapter, becomes a way of moving from the margins to the center in a way that retains a dynamic fluidity. Butler’s use of religion is not a means of

encoding specific knowledges and excluding others, like the approach taken by Church of Christian America. The CA's approach leads to a certain inflexibility in the calcification of tradition. Rather than dictate particular knowledges, Butler's use of religion seeks instead to dictate the *uses* of knowledge. Knowledge is to be critiqued continually, to be shared. In this way, religion provides a solid framework, an interface that gives some structure to the dynamic fluidity that prevents the ossification of specific knowledges or the legitimization of only particular knowledge producers. Earthseed espouses continual change, while retaining a static structure that allows for an engagement with a political system that necessitates a certain inertness.

The body forms another site upon which the confrontation between the fluid and the static required for political engagement is played out. Butler and other postcolonial authors such as Assia Djebar locate the inheritance of past racial injustice in the trauma of the body (Donadey 66). *Kindred* demonstrates this very clearly in Dana's loss of her arm as a result of her traumatic engagement with the past. To present a continually changing body represents a body without a past. Scars that disappear no longer carry the record of the body's trauma. However, Butler, who routinely incorporated shape-shifting figures into her novels via such characters as *Wild Seed's* Anyanwu and *Imago's* Jodahs, situates the trauma not directly upon the mutable flesh, but in the increased longevity and mechanisms of memory of these characters. The fluidity that threatens to erase connections with the past among the Oankali is reconciled using not only the Vashi, the organelle which contains samples of all the collected genetic material from the species entire history and defines ooloi identity, but also in the social and genetic structure of the species which retains a certain amount of stasis. The continual change in which the Oankali are engaged is brought about by an evolution process that requires a genetic exchange between themselves and the various groups they encounter. However, the static, the unchanging, very much plays a

role in both the structure of their evolution and their society. Divided into three groups, the Toaht (a group that participate in the newest genetic trade, but remains with the ship), Dinso (a group that participates and settles the planet in order to begin growing new ships), and Akjai (a group that does not participate in the newest genetic trade), the Oankali retain a form of themselves at each moment of evolution in the form of Akjai. The memory of what they were lives on in the bodies of those Oankali, and literally within the bodies of ooloi, retaining a connection to the past even with vast distances between themselves and newly evolved incarnations. These connections with the past carry with them lessons learned and, in a postcolonial framework, reveal a recuperation of one's history from the forces of colonization that distort and destroy it. Thus they are necessary for forging a political mechanism that seeks to end oppression and move to the center of discourse.

With this being said, Butler's characters continue to embrace a healthy skepticism of those moving from the margins to the center. In the *Parable* series, she focuses this critique on fundamentalist religious leaders who dominate the remaining political structure. In a move that does not indict all of Christianity— indeed, Butler notes that Lauren's father was “neither a fool nor a hypocrite,” the followers of Christian America are routinely posited as dangerous in their foolish and hypocritical stances. Butler seems to be drawing a line distinguishing the kind of small-scale religious leaders and churches from large-scale politicized religions, their leaders, and institutions. This distrust of larger groups extends to Earthseed, even as it moves to the center, as Olamina herself posits that smaller groups are necessary for the type of grass-roots community building Earthseed produces.

“They should be small communities,” [Lauren Olamina] said. No more than a few hundred people, never more than a thousand. A community whose population

grew to more than a thousand should split and “parent” a new community. In small communities, she believed, people are more accountable to one another. Serious misbehavior is harder to get away with, harder even to begin when everyone who sees you knows who you are, where you live, who your family is, and whether you have any business doing what you’re doing. (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 170-1)

Butler’s discussion of small communities as more effective in creating engaged and responsible individuals speaks to Alberto Melucci’s notion of collective identity. Melucci notes three closely interwoven and fundamental dimensions in the process of creating collective identity: “formulating cognitive frameworks concerning the goals, means, and environment of action; activating relationships among the actors, who communicate, negotiate, and make decisions; and making emotional investments, which enable individuals to recognize themselves in each other” (Melucci 35). While the larger religious framework of Earthseed ensures the first two dimensions, Earthseed’s insistence on small communities allows for the maintenance of the third, emotional investment among its members. The lack of these emotional connections in larger institutions seems to fuel Butler’s suspicions of these organizations.

Certainly, this suspicion of institutions is apparent throughout both novels of the series. The police are corrupt, more likely to charge exorbitant sums as “fees” and find easy targets to pin crimes on than they are to ameliorate a situation or bring actual criminals to justice. Fire stations have been privatized in her novels, also charging heavy fees for their services and use of water. Finally, company towns have reemerged in her novels, drawing their inhabitants into debt slavery by underpaying residents/workers in company script and overcharging for housing and

supplies. Just as these institutions are flawed, so is the church of Christian America, created and brought to power by its founder, Andrew Steele Jarret.

This skepticism leads Butler to suggest that working from the margins is an ideal approach for beginning social change, invoking suspicion of even Earthseed as it moves from the margins to the center. At the margins, one can move undetected, making changes until the time for larger moves arrives. Butler posits that living in the margins is a form of survival for Lauren's budding Earthseed religion, suggesting that it was only through "good luck" that her organization was so much smaller that it was beyond the perception of Jarret. "She was just an ant that he happened to step on. If she had been anything more than that, she would not have survived" (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 354-5). It is the very "shadowy" existence that allows Olamina to survive the rise to power of Jarret and his Christian America and rebuild her community of followers. Indeed, this ability to wait patiently on the sidelines, watching, learning, and looking for weaknesses, provided a useful means of preoccupation, hope, and ultimately protection and escape when the Acorn community found its inhabitants imprisoned and the community transformed into Camp Christian.

This notion that the oppressed women have a vantage point that allows them to see the machinations of the ruling class in ways not readily visible to those privileged by this same class is one shared with bell hooks. As hooks notes in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, "Black women with no institutionalized 'other' that we may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress often have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology" (15). Indeed, the women in Camp Christian find themselves without an 'other' onto whom they might shift their anger, and as Olamina suggests

throughout their imprisonment, they must not look to create one. Remaining cognizant of one's true oppressor is vital to the women's survival and their ultimate escape from the camp.

While these techniques did little to protect the Acorn community from the brutality of life in the camp, it allowed for the prisoners to retain a glimmer of hope that their guards, torturers, rapists, and 'teachers' had an exploitable weakness that would lead to escape. This use of the marginalized standpoint as site from which to observe and organize, all the while being discounted as a potential threat to the prevailing power structure, was an act of survival similar to the events undergone by many of Butler's other characters, the painful means by which Dana survives slavery in *Kindred*, the frustration of Lilith as she searches for a means to survive in hopes of escaping the Oankali in *Dawn*, and finally, the conflicting feelings of love and hatred Anyanwu feels for her captor/partner, Doro, in *Wild Seed*.

As the movement gains strength, Earthseed begins to engage in political activism and incorporates itself into existing scientific, political, and social institutions. Olamina's own daughter, Asha Vere, acts as the voice of skepticism concerning Earthseed's growth toward the center. Despite her own indoctrination of Christian America dogma through which she finds fault with Olamina as a maternal figure as I discussed in the first chapter, Vere's continued questioning of the role of Earthseed and its growing power carries with it a suspicion of the organization that moves from the margins to the center, indicating that we too must continually critique power structures, even those of our own creation.

This critique of power structures and Butler's own inclusion of women of color as central figures, again allows for a reflection on the need for more than cyborg theory to understand the theory that Butler proposes. Feminist science fiction scholar Patricia Melzer notes how the standpoint of women of color allows for a particular critique of power in *Alien Constructions*:

It is the epistemological standpoint that [Butler's female figures] acquire in their social position as black women or women of color that sets them apart from their environment and gives them specific ways of knowing and understanding situations of conflict and of power... They are characterized by their strong will and ability to adapt to situations forced upon them. It is their perspective from the margins, disconnected from positions of power, which enables them to shift boundaries and which makes them so valuable to the creatures inhabiting these shadowy territories. These women exist in a constant state of negotiations with their environment; as survivors, they test limits and set limits for those in power. (Melzer *Alien Constructions* 96)

Melzer notes above how the history of oppression specific to women of color gives Butler's central characters an understanding of power relations that others do not possess. This marks a departure from cyborg theory which fails to recognize the particular memories of oppression black women carry with them.

In this critique of cyborg theory, I stand with Elizabeth V. Spelman's acknowledgement that white feminists often view race through the critical lens of "additive analysis:" "An additive analysis treats the oppression of a black woman in a sexist and racist society as if it were a *further* burden than her oppression in a sexist but not-racist society, when, in fact, it is a *different* burden" (Spelman 43). While much progress has been made in addressing this issue among feminist theorists over the thirty years since Spelman's piece was published, as Malini Johar Schueller notes, the practice continues under a new guise—that of analogy. Analogous comparisons of race to sex/gender operate to co-opt identities of women of color, emulsifying difference between them, and possessing them in neocolonial gesture that demonstrates "the

need to locate a homogenized non-Western other onto which fantasies can be projected, precisely in order to subvert the hierarchies of Western metaphysics” (Schueller 80). Haraway’s implication in this practice is demonstrated by her association of women of color across the boundaries of class and geographic location. As Schueller argues,

Haraway’s women of color include ‘unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia,’ women in the Silicon valley, ‘young Korean women hired in the sex industry,’ and the ‘real-life cyborg (for example the Southeast Asian village women workers in Japanese and US electronic firms described by Aihwa Ong)’.

Of course one must praise Haraway as a feminist for drawing attention to the most oppressed of workers within the circuit of multinational capitalism. It is also scintillating to have these workers brought together in a subversive, oppositional moment with U.S. women writers of color. But juxtaposition does not translate into a connection or a relationship. (Schueller 80)

It is indeed a provocative move to bring these varied groups together, but it does belie a problematic erasure of class differences as well as overlook the locatedness of the women in these different groups. The women working in Silicon Valley and the “antinuclear demonstrators spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail” (Haraway *The Haraway Reader* 81) are beneficiaries of a colonialist power structure that affords them the privilege of revolt whereas the Asian women laborers who work so that they might provide for the immediate needs of the family may not join in protesting the multinational hand that feeds their families. This critique is based on Haraway’s own call for situated knowledges, a point at which the homogenization of women of color at the margins in her cyborg theory misses the mark.

The situatedness denied the homogenized subjectivity of women of color as it is deployed in Haraway's theory is clear among Earthseed members. While there is a large amount of interracial coupling and interactivity, this does not suggest an amalgamation that precludes racial difference. There is not the push towards homogenization of difference that we see in the margins of cyborg theory; indeed, racial and gendered meanings are not separately critiqued. In *Parable of the Sower*, as Olamina, Harry, and Zahra trek north after the fall of their Robledo neighborhood, Lauren's decision to dress as a man becomes an equally important consideration in their survival as the racial makeup of their group—Lauren and Zahra are both black and Harry is white, an interracial group which is both rare and makes them a target for attack. There is, however, a push to unite along lines of affinity as seen in the following Earthseed verse:

Embrace diversity.

Unite—

Or be divided,

robbed,

ruled,

killed

By those who see you as prey.

Embrace diversity

Or be destroyed. (*Parable of the Sower* 196)

Those who operate in the margins need not be compiled into a large nameless, faceless group. Indeed, the very structure of this verse reveals this. Each line remains distinct, and yet the meaning of the poem can only be deciphered through the union of these discrete words and phrases. While uniting forces in order to withstand attack is necessary, social and historical

differences are continually noted for Butler's interracial Acorn community. In suggesting this form of duality, this verse demonstrates both the individual and the collective at work in the medusa figuration. As an act of information dispersal, the verse itself is as a means by which the cloud of the medusa figuration draws observers into its framework and demonstrates the ways in which individuality and difference are maintained through decentralized knowledge production.

This type of dueling nature between the collective and the individual, and the neediness for difference is similarly explored in the *mestiza* consciousness: "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...She has a plural personality, she operates in pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 101). The contradictions and ambivalence of the medusa figuration become a means of connection not just for knowledge production as the last chapter demonstrates, but, as the verse demonstrates, also becomes a means of surviving the structures of oppression and, ultimately, an opportunity to build "something else."

However, while Butler's work frequently positions her characters outside the system of power allowing for fertile critiques, a point which Melzer and others have celebrated in noting Butler's characters as black women working from the margins, we must account for *Parable of the Talents* as site in which her characters embrace the central power position as a means of effecting social change. This novel breaks from the Butler's own pattern of using the shadows as a place to organize and grow strong. It is the first in which her characters occupy a central position of power by the novel's conclusion. Indeed, the central figure, Olamina, is criticized by her daughter, brother, and husband for seeking out power. Where characters such as Lilith Iyapo

of the Xenogenesis series have found themselves uncomfortably allied with those in the position of power and often desperately seeking to break free from this relationship, Olamina does not wish to be left alone to pursue her own destiny. Her Destiny, to inhabit alien worlds, is not a destiny for her alone or the few that would follow her, but rather acts as a dream to spread humanity throughout the stars.

While Lilith finds herself making equally large decisions for the remnants of humanity in *Dawn*, it is important to note that Lilith is removed from the position of central character in the second and third novels of the series. Her hybrid children become the spokespeople for humanity. In these novels, Lilith has resigned herself to her life among the Oankali, acting in support only of her children's desire to see an Akjai division of humanity that remains as it was before the destruction of the planet. Her position differs greatly from that of Olamina, who in the second novel of the *Parable* series actively seeks engagement with the existing political structure and extends her religion to all aspects of scientific and artistic development.

Butler's departure from the margins to the center in the *Parable* series returns us to the fear that occupying the central position in postcolonial regimes will only act to recreate problematic power relationships. Where previously Butler's novels made the case for these difficulties, *Parable of the Talents* suggests a means to bring about a successful paradigm shift that retains fluidity and invites active critique, while at the same time effects concrete amelioration of the lives of those who suffered under the previous power structure. As I have argued, it is through her marriage of the fluidity of the nomad and the cyborg to the concreteness of religion that Butler achieves a successful engagement with political action. This is a major facet of the grounded theory that Butler proposes.

In a conversation with a friend about the applicability of Butler's novels to everyday life, she commented, "When the shit hits the fan, I'll know what to do." This colorful description of *Parable of Talents* describes the role of the second novel of the series, and what I see as a sustained argument that evolves throughout the course of Octavia Butler novels: a praxis that provides insight for not only how to survive the breakdown of society, but also how to rebuild and plug the reconstructed society into the remnants of the old. How can we employ her lessons about how to survive racism and (re)build community and systems of support outside of the confines of her novels? What does Butler's *Parable* series teach us about how to survive in the world in which we currently live?

Discussing her work, Butler notes that she wrote the novels of the *Parable* series as "warnings" about not only climate change, but "the dangers of fundamentalist religion-driven national politics, as exemplified by Pat Robertson's 1992 run for the U.S. presidency" (Mehaffy & Keating 121). Published in 1993 and 1998 respectively, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* provide a snapshot of possible outcomes if the world continues to develop in the same way. Indeed, the world of 2011 certainly does suffer from many of the difficulties Butler suggested would occur if various issues were not addressed and corrected. Among these are the economic problems that cause an increasing division between the richest and the poorest as well as the disappearance of the middle class, the environmental shifts brought about by climate change and the fallout climate change would bring in terms of access to clean, potable water, and food. Additionally, the economic collapse in Octavia Butler's novels causes a near complete breakdown of American government. It remains in name and occasionally exercises powers such as mobilizing the military, but public education, and many of the basic rights and freedoms such as those guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Thirteenth Amendments to the Constitution have

“been so weakened by custom, by Congress and the various state legislatures, and by recent Supreme Court decisions that they don’t much matter” (*Parable of the Talents* 40). While the difficulties we face currently are nowhere near as devastating as those within the *Parable* series, we are decidedly closer to Olamina’s world now than we were in 1998. As erratic weather patterns cause drought in some areas, and excessive rain and flooding in others, food prices have risen as crops suffer or fail. Tornados and hurricanes have increased in frequency and strength, increasing the number of areas and populations whose homes and towns are destroyed, stretching diminishing federal funds even further. As the “economic downturn” of 2008 continues and is now dubbed “the Great Recession,” unemployment has risen to 9% and to even higher rates among minorities.

As the chaos grows in Octavia Butler’s world, so do two intertwining desires: the desire for a strong leader “who will fix things now” and a growth in religious sentiment. These desires become intertwined in the figure of Andrew Steele Jarrett. How can we avoid this future is certainly one question that arises. Beyond this literal translation of her books as indicators of our future, or mere “forms of futurology, narrow prognostications of technical or social developments to come” (Wegner xix), these books provide a structured contingency plan that is workable under nearly any conditions of want. Butler’s is a grounded theory that not only suggests means of escape from Jarret’s America as well as current racist and sexist regimes, but also a theory for avoiding the pull towards fascism that continually threatens. Lauren Olamina loses everything through the course of the first novel, but manages to rebuild. We can look to her course of action to discover how readers who have not lost their families and homes might proceed in difficult times. Hers is theory that not only considers the roots of our turmoil, but also suggests a means of progress. What follows is a list of the distilled components of this theory.

- Education is not simply a process that occurs through institutions of learning. Opportunities to educate oneself happen at nearly every moment and anyone can be a teacher with a valuable lesson.
- Religion can be useful in focusing on long-term goals. Butler is clear to demonstrate the potential dangers of religious fervor and is sure to note that religion must be married to reason, community, and a continual interrogation of its goals and power structures.
- Through this continual interrogation we might side-step another of the potential pitfalls that arise in periods of crises: grasping for any political leader who proposes a strong policy that cannot and should not be interrogated. This way leads to fascism and corruption.
- Be Kind. “Kindness eases change” is one of the bedrock tenets of Earthseed. In a theoretical proposition that echoes Sandoval’s “political revolutionary love,” Butler’s theory argues that can confront the difficulties of change by listening, teaching and caring for one another.
- Find security in communities and allies. Forming communities and finding allies across communities provides not only a safety net that allows for one’s own protection from the vagaries of the day, but provides a base for political and social strength.
- Make small changes. We must do what we can when we can. One may only be able to save one starving child, but not be strong enough to take on larger systems or groups all at once. Recognizing one’s position within larger power structures not only provides a means of combatting those structures, but also provides an awareness of moments when caution is necessary, when the community needs to regroup to find a more stable position

of power from which to act. This does not preclude action, however. Agency can occur at any moment under all forms of oppression. Take action when the moment presents itself and do whatever one can, even if these moments seem too small to make a larger impact.

- Be aware of one's environment. Keep watch to protect oneself and one's allies. This extends from awareness of political maneuverings to actual physical threat. One's environment consists of things both small and large. Immediate danger and less immediate danger are both important things of which to be aware.
- Education is not simply an act of acquiring knowledge for knowledge's sake. It requires an active commitment to spreading the knowledge gained through teaching others. This strengthens not only one's own position, but the community as a whole.
- Plan ahead. Setting goals is a key element to enacting change, but one must also consider one's own actions and their consequences.

Butler's model for surviving the collapse of society is a practical one. She begins by noting that all systems must meet the needs of their constituents lest they fall and it is only by reunification that we can save the structure: "Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation. Civilization, like intelligence, may serve well, serve adequately, or fail to serve its adaptive function. When civilization fails to serve, it must disintegrate unless it is acted upon by unifying internal or external forces" (*Parable of the Sower* 101). This Earthseed verse demonstrates the need for community and its pooled intelligence, but also carries with it the understanding that not all pooled intelligence is equivalent. When it fails to serve its function, it must change. And indeed, her novels provide a map for creating those unifying forces that can

fuse people into supportive communities, however, before one can rebuild, one must first survive the collapse.

The second of Butler's suggestions for survival and, arguably the most important, is to learn. One must learn as many practical skills as possible while in an environment safe enough to devote time to sustained study. While education remains an important piece of the adaptation puzzle in Butler's novels, time to read, study, and record one's thoughts can only happen in the comfort of a safe position. For Lauren Olamina, this happens within the walled community in which she lives in Robledo wherein she has access to books, plants, and the knowledge of her family, friends, and neighbors. She spends countless hours preparing herself for skills she might need in the event her community is destroyed. She uses the skills of those around her, learning as much as she can, whenever she can. From her neighbor who raises rabbits, she learns how to skin, prepare, and cook the animals she may one day need to subsist upon. From the books in her father's library, she learns the uses of various plants that grow in the area and how to identify them. She learns her stepmother's cooking skills and how to prepare those substances which are edible but are oftentimes overlooked, such as acorns. Olamina makes her education of the practical a priority with the notion in mind that her life within the walls of the community is continually in a precarious state. We need not be in preparation for the apocalypse to make use of this suggestion. Learning from those around oneself is not only a way to prepare for the future, but is also a handy way to shape relationships with those in one's periphery.

Anzaldúa echoes the importance of multicultural movements and education precisely at the moment that these movements begin to come under attack: "We are creating ways of educating ourselves and younger generations in this mestiza nation to change how students and teachers think and read by de-constructing Euro-Anglo ways of knowing; to create texts that

reflect the needs of the world community of women and people of color; and to show how lived experience is connected to political struggles and art making” (Anzaldúa *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 205). The deconstruction of the “laboratory” that creates “gentlemen-scholars” and endows them with the sole ability to speak authoritatively in knowledge production is precisely what both Anzaldúa and Butler seek. Survival for both in this case refers to the ways in which we might protect fledgling social movements from onslaught and how we might find value in the lived experiences of all members of society. What the *Parable* series provides is a framework for bringing this vision about. Anzaldúa’s comments about reflecting “the needs of the world community” brings us to the next principal tenet: forming community.

While on the road in *Parable of the Sower*, the luxury of safety can only be secured by trusting and being trusted by others. In order to record her daily thoughts, study life around her, and to process the events of the day that have taught her the brutality of life outside the walls, Olamina must rely on her companions to guard her, protecting her from approaching strangers or any of the other dangerous elements of life on the highway. The precious moments which become practical as a means of reflecting on and learning life-threatening lessons become vital to her survival. So while education is a luxury of safety, it is also, in many ways, vital to survival. Community and trust form the bedrock of providing this safety.

Rebuilding one’s life might mean finding a stable environment, finding a source of food, clothing, and shelter, or a source of income, but for Butler’s characters, rebuilding means recreating a community. Indeed, Butler remarked on the way in which the need for community infects all of her characters. “All of my characters are either in a community like Lauren in *Parable of the Sower*, or they create one; she does that, too. My own feeling is that human beings need to live that way and too often we don’t” (Mehaffy & Keating 112). Olamina, as she walks

the highway, cannot help but begin gathering people to herself and towards Earthseed. Her companions, and the only known survivors of her walled community, question this decision and the safety of approaching travelling strangers continually. Yet Olamina feels that rebuilding without forming a community is simply surviving at a rudimentary level. On a practical level, without community much of one's energy is spent protecting the few scraps one had been able to gather together. Community provides protection and the comfort and ability to have a more complex division of labor. More importantly is that the combination of skills and increased adaptability of a community provides an increased ability to "shape God" or, in other words, to manage change. If Earthseed suggests we are to shape change, then in order to do this as fully as possible, we must work with others, we must form communities and, through which, our collective skills and experiences provide a fuller understanding of the possibilities of change, positive as well as negative.

In forming communities, Olamina reaches out to those she finds in need. She creates an essential idea in Earthseed in doing so, that "kindness eases change." Many of her companions question Olamina's decision to trust others, to recruit others, but ultimately, she understands that in order to create a successful and just movement, that movement must arise from the treatment of others that is dignified and itself just. Communities must be built on caring, sharing, pooling resources, admitting what one does not know and committing to learning or improving. These communities must be shaped through attentiveness to actions and their consequences. The needs of the community alone must not shape it—it could easily dissolve into gang-like behaviors—"to be robbed, ruled, or killed" (Butler *Parable of the Sower* 196). The community must have a strong moral center as defined by caring and have purposes that guide it. For Earthseed, this purpose is the Destiny. However, once gathered, Butler notes that communities' ties to each

other and among each other must be maintained. Within smaller communities this done with weekly assemblies: “Once or twice a week each week A Gathering of Earthseed is a good and necessary thing. It vents emotion, the quiets the mind. It focuses attention, strengthens purpose, and unifies people” (*Parable of the Sower* 214).

Intimately linked with education and community-building in Butler’s novels is adaptation. Indeed, so central to Earthseed is change that God is transformed from a personified deity to a force: change. Awareness that change is eternal and that all situations are temporary inform the need to learn, teach, and the ability to employ the knowledge gained. In addition to learning the skills of those around oneself and teaching the skills one possesses, one must be aware of the surrounding political, economic, and social situations, each of which figure heavily in education and adaptation. Planning as one can for change should direct one’s education and growth. With this in mind, one must have a purpose to give oneself a sense of focus amidst the storms of change. Earthseed’s purpose is The Destiny “to take root among the stars.” It provides the long-term goals necessary to unite an organization or a community, while its encoding within a religious system allows this long-term goal to take a central role in a community member’s life.

Planning, creating, doing, learning, teaching, and reaching are the means by which God is worshipped and attended to. Worship for Butler is not simply devotion or inactive prayer. It is the active attempt to better one’s community and one’s self through teaching and learning. She holds no illusions about ameliorating global economic, social, and political dysfunction in one fell swoop. While Butler notes that the world would be a better place if people acted on the principles of Earthseed or at least “police ourselves” without the “massive power of a Big Policeman in the sky” (Harrison 8), her goals are much more immediate—focus on the community first and make a longer-term project the second priority.

Butler's theory of practicality is translated into the social and political work carried out by Olamina in these novels. Olamina is not interested in "mystical confusion." She seeks clarity of intent and purpose so that her words are not misinterpreted, while acknowledging that the time will come when Earthseed will change through the reinterpretation of scripture, a moment that inevitably arises in all religions. However, she seeks to guide this change as much as she can while Earthseed is in its infancy to be what she believes is true. "The verses are short and they mean what they say, although that may not be all that they mean. Read them and think about them. Then you can begin asking questions" (Butler *Parable of the Talents* 77).

While this system is designed to serve the needs of the moment, it is by no means a permanent solution to society's ills. Indeed, the system, codified in religious practice, will necessarily change, a point that Olamina recognizes. While this theory is most apparent in the *Parable* series, we can trace other aspects of caring and community-building within Butler's other novels and short stories. It is these aspects of caring that join Butler's methodology to what Chela Sandoval terms "revolutionary love." Sandoval's book, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, gathers the work of feminist, postcolonial, and particular postmodern voices together under the umbrella of oppositional consciousness. Her discussion of revolutionary love is a particularly useful tool in mapping of Butler's work in relation to postcolonial theory as well as cyborg theory. It is in this notion of "evoking and puncturing through to another site, to that of differential consciousness" (Sandoval 139) that the unification of Butler's contributions to the postcolonial project and cyborg feminism unite. Sandoval unites theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Franz Fanon who "understand 'love' as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social

movement” (Sandoval 139). Butler’s emphasis on kindness and care in community-building suggests that she too believes that love is a framework which allows for oppositional consciousness to take hold. Indeed, that learning, a vital force of social change in the *Parable* series, can only occur in the relative safety of protective community, suggests that love itself forms the bedrock from which “technologies of method and social movement” might spring.

Romantic love is one way in which entry into the differential mode of consciousness is achieved and decidedly finds a home in Butler’s oeuvre. Miscegenation appears repeatedly throughout Butler’s novels expressing a form of revolutionary love which occurs in part through romantic love of the Other. Romantic love is transformative in these relationships, producing the unexpected bodies of the cyborg; at the same time power dynamics are never invisible within these relationships. Although Butler found her premise that humans and aliens might mate immediately in *Survivor* to be one of the most embarrassing elements in her writing, she continued to incorporate cross-racial and cross-species relationships in a variety of stories mostly notably found within the hybrid children of *Clay’s Ark* and the *Xenogenesis* series.

However, hybridity is not the sole expression of romantic love and the transformative power it bears. Sandra Y. Govan argues that the romantic love between Anywanwu and Doro in *Wild Seed* offers another site in which the oppressed figure finds a means of disturbing the system of power: “Anyanwu moves to sever their linkage by taking her own life. Her resolve makes Doro reckon with a will he cannot control. Anyanwu forces him to recognize love, to reveal love; through love, she forces him to change. He cannot stop killing, but he will be more selective...Anyanwu makes Doro [feel] what humanity he has remaining, and that is no small victory” (Govan 83). By forcing Doro to reveal his love for her and alter his method from killing indiscriminately to allowing those who served him to live out their lives unmarred demonstrates

a moment of agency in which love made, although not a radical change in Doro's system of power, a change that altered the nature of Doro's relationship with those he enslaved.

While Octavia Butler utilizes both romantic, familial, platonic, and even, at times incestual love across her oeuvre— and in many ways these loves are revolutionary to the extent that they bring great change to social and political relationships— her use of love differs from that which Sandoval describes in one significant facet. Sandoval positions oppositional consciousness as necessarily marginal, as a “haunt[ing]” presence in any binary structure, as the “punctum” that pierces the binary to reveal a third meaning or “abyss” that hovers just beyond ordinary grasp (Sandoval 143). As I have already described, Butler's use of power and opposition to standing power structures is not content to remain at the margins “haunting,” remaining an immaterial presence that both is and is not. Olamina's movement from a marginal figure to the center of the discursive field in *Parable of the Talents* indicates a presence that is very much material in effect.

I am placing the *Xenogenesis* series and the Oankali as role models side by side with Earthseed's commitment to teamwork, kindness, and community-building. When we place Butler's negative models of what not to do, Mary and the Patternists, recreating the violent and oppressive characteristics of Doro's regime, alongside those structures that are successful, the Oankali and Earthseed, we find her oeuvre forms a maze in which many possibilities are explored, most of them ending in dead-ends, but each avenue explored represents a lesson learned. Through community-building, changing our relationship to nature and technology, and using technology to shape ourselves, Butler proposes a grounded theory that shares many characteristics with cyborg and postcolonial theory, bringing with it aspects of nomadic subjectivity and the border-crossing of the *consciencia de la mestiza*, however, it is not solely

any of those things. But like each of these theories, her theory shares a desire for enacting revolutionary love.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of this project I have examined Octavia Butler's stories to trace her various engagements with and contributions to postcolonial recuperations of indigenous religion and the ways in which technology figures in her novels to alternate means of conceiving communication and what it means to be human, animal, and machine. I brought these ideas together in the final chapter to study a practical method for bringing about social change even under severely limiting conditions and how to survive the ravages of a racist and sexist world. I believe my successes in this endeavor feature most heavily in the area of cyborg theory, primarily what I have termed the models of the medusa figuration as they impact our understanding of knowledge production. Indeed, it is in this area that I feel this research could continue to grow.

Marilyn Mehaffy's comments that "[b]ody-knowledge could, possibly, dehierarchize, or maybe re-hierarchize, social and political relations" (Mehaffy & Keating 110), return us to a powerful convergence of ethics and knowledge production within the Medusa figuration. The Patternist model of connection between telepaths results in empathy and desire to improve the lives of others. Knowledge production in this model is linked with an ethics of care along the lines suggested by Carol Gilligan. While feminists such as Sandra Lee Bartky have dismissed the ethics of care as a model which reifies traditional gender roles, the Oankali variation of the Medusa figuration questions those roles in caregiving by rewriting the ways in which humans are able to provide care for each other.

Enveloped within Medusa figuration, in the case of the Oankali model, once one has been "touched" by the sensory arm of the ooloi, one is physiologically altered in a way that changes

physical intimacy between humans. Humans who have been altered in this way can no longer touch each other without feeling extreme revulsion. They are temporarily bonded in a triunity in which contact must be facilitated by the third party. The temporary nature of this bond is of particular importance as this series which, despite the importance it places on the body as a method of communication, puts a premium on the permeability and fluidity of that body. While particular aspects of heteronormativity remain unchallenged in the union of man, woman, and ooloi, the Oankali intervention in heterosexual pairing results in the formation of new means of comforting and connecting with each other. The knowledge of our bodies as depicted in this model changes how we relate to these bodies and to each other with our bodies and is shown to have great power in re-organizing human relationships and how we understand the division of labor. As such, it figures heavily as an additional vector of analysis in the continuation of this project.

An additional avenue of engagement that I have already begun to explore in a recent conference presentation emerged from the third chapter: how memory intervenes in the reproduction of racist and sexist discourses in postcolonial liberation movements. In *Mind of My Mind* and *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu's voice acts as a reminder of the cyclical nature of oppression and represents both a connection to the past and the potential for liberation from these structures of domination at a critical moment in the creation of a new governing system.

The role of Anyanwu's memory in this moment of liberation from an imperial regime requires an examination of how we embed memory alongside official histories. Seeing positivist history as static and memory as dynamic, French historian Pierre Nora suggests that the postmodern fracture of unifying history and the tension between the two disparate modes of remembrance has caused a rupture into which we have inserted *lieux de memoire*. Museums,

memorials, statues, reunions, eulogies, and the like inhabit this space as the “quest of history and the privilege of authenticating memory [has shifted] to everyone” (McKay 262). These *lieux de memoire* operate outside of the canon of official history and allow a multiplicity of memories and histories to find expression. I develop this idea by drawing on Nora’s notion of *lieux de memoire* to examine Butler’s discussion of the role of embodied memory in moments of liberation and the importance of their intervention in the development of new cultural and legal structures. Indeed, in these two novels it is Anyanwu who functions as a “lieu de mémoire” that defies historical amnesia and acts as a voice of resistance to Mary’s recreation of Doro’s imperial/colonial forces in a post-colonial context. It is my hope that examining the interplay between Mary and Anyanwu in these texts might provide a framework for understanding the importance of memory in postcolonial political movements.

Finally, what I believe to be one of the most challenging, but ultimately, fertile areas of research in relationship to Octavia Butler is the question of exploration without conquest. The desire to explore the universe and seed various worlds with humanity figures heavily across Butler’s oeuvre. *Survivor* features missionaries escaping the spread of the Clayark disease on Earth and settling on a new world. The third novel in the *Xenogenesis* series sees humans recreate Mars as a site of continued human ‘Akjai’ development while the humans with Oankali mates and their hybrid children prepare to explore the universe. The short story, “Bloodchild”, features human explorers who have made an arrangement with the Tlic to house their young internally in exchange for existence on the alien world.

Migration features heavily in this discussion and is an area covered by scholars such as Patricia Melzer. “[I]n both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, migration becomes the metaphor for not only of resistance but also of survival. It is inherent in the aspirations of the

protagonist, Lauren, to fly her people to the stars in order to evade the destructiveness of people on Earth, and it is deeply ingrained in the novels' narrative form (particularly in *Sower*) as the journey of a journey" (97). She relates this to histories of migration among black women authors as part of what Melzer believes to be an intrinsic style of black writing. Additionally Melzer is linking migration in these stories with the kind of boundary crossing present in feminist theories such as *la consciencia de la mestiza*, cyborg feminism, and nomadic subjectivity. I would go further to link her use of migration as a means of exploration without imperialism—that this migration presents growth via encounters with the other in a way that would allow us to explore without imposition on intelligent life in our galaxy—a kind of species adolescence, a move towards species adulthood. However, the question of whether or not we can explore the universe without imposition of culture or hierarchy presents some serious difficulties. One of these is the problematic of extraterrestrial exploration itself. While Butler may suggest that it is possible to explore without conquest of intelligent life, the conquest of non-intelligent life remains a necessary piece of living on another planet. Butler recognized this difficulty and remarked upon it in an interview with Mehaffy and Keating. "The other ambiguity here is that if humans are, as Lauren believes, and as I believe, a part of Earth in significant ways, then perhaps we can't, or shouldn't, leave and go to another world. The system of Earth is self-regulating, but not for any particular species, in the same way that the human body has its own metabolic logic" (121-2).

As noted in the epigraph, Octavia Butler saw the future as a very similar place to the world of the present. While she took a rather pessimistic view in our ability as humans to overcome our struggles with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression without some sort of biological intervention, she continued to express a "post-apocalyptic hoping." This hope suggests that even in the most oppressive of conditions agency remains intact. As I have argued here,

perhaps by utilizing the modes of communication and social organization her work provides, we might find a way to create a world that works more holistically towards ending these modes of oppression and creating a world in which the possibilities of subjectivity are infinite.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Third Edition. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.
- . *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Bloodchild and Other Stories*. 2nd Ed. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.
- . *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.
- . *Lillith's Brood*. New York: Warner Books, 2007.
- . *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Warner Books, 2007.
- . *Parable of the Talents*. New York: Warner Books, 2007.
- . *Seed to Harvest*. New York: Warner Books, 2007.
- . *Survivor*. New York: New American Library, 1979.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Laugh of the Medusa" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 1.4 (1976): 39-54.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1993.
- Donadey, Anne. "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sepulture*." *Research in African Literatures*. 39.3 (2008): 65-81.
- Donaldson, Laura E. "The Breasts of Columbus: A Political Anatomy of Postcolonialism and

- Feminist Religious Discourse” *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*. Eds. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-Lan. New York: Routledge, 2002. 41-61.
- Dubey, Madhu. “Becoming Animal in Black Women’s Science Fiction.” *Afro-future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New-Wave Trajectory*. Ed. Marleen S. Barr. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008. 31-51.
- Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1952.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963.
- Fry, Joan. “Congratulations! You’ve Just Won \$295,000: An Interview with Octavia Butler.” *Conversations with Octavia Butler*. Ed. Consuela Francis. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 123-133.
- Gibson, Nigel C. *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003.
- Govan, Sandra Y. “Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler’s Science Fiction.” *Black American Literature Forum*. 18.2 (1984): 82-87.
- Grant, Jacquelyn. “Black Theology and the Black Woman” *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Jennifer Burton. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010.
- Haraway, Donna J. *The Haraway Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . *How Like A Leaf: An Interview with Thyzra Nichols Goodeve*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- . *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- . *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern*

- Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Second ed.
London: Free Association Books Ltd, 1991.
- *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
2008.
- Harrison, Rosalie G. "Sci-Fi Visions: An Interview with Octavia Butler" *Conversations with Octavia Butler*. Ed. Consuela Francis. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 3-9.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Jesser, Nancy. "Blood, Genes, and Gender in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn*" *Extrapolation*. 43.1 (2002): 36-61.
- Lavender III, Isiah. *Race in American Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Littlefield, David. *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Lykke, Nina, Randi Markussen, and Finn Olesen. "Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations and There are Always More Things Going on Than You Thought! Methodologies as Thinking Technologies." *The Haraway Reader*. Ed. Donna Haraway. New York: Routledge, 2004. 321-342.
- McCaffery, Larry and Jim McMenamain. "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler." *Conversations with Octavia Butler*. Ed. Consuela Francis. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 10-26.
- McKay, Nellie Y. "The Journals of Charlotte L. Forten-Grimké: *Les Lieux de Memoire* in

- African-American Women's Autobiography" *History and Memory in African American Culture*. Eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Mehaffy, Marilyn and AnaLouise Keating. "'Radio Imagination': Octavia Butler on the Poetics of Narrative Embodiment." *Conversations with Octavia Butler*. Ed. Consuela Francis. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 98-122.
- Melucci, Antonio. *Nomads of the Present*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Melzer, Patricia. *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
- Menne, Jeff. "'I live in this world too': Octavia Butler and the State of Realism" *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.4 (2011): 715-737.
- Miller, Jim. "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision." *Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 25 (1998): 336-360.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*" *History and Memory in African American Culture*. Eds. Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Page, Lisa. "Kindred Spirit: Science Fiction Author Octavia Butler" *The Crisis* May/June 2006: 44-45. Print.
- Potter, Elizabeth. *Feminism and Philosophy of Science: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Rabasa, Jose. *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.
- Ramirez, Catherine S. "Cyborg Feminism: The Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler and

- Gloria Anzaldúa” *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture*. Eds. Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.
- Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Schueller, Malini Johar. “Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body.” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*. 31.1 (2005): 63-92.
- See, Lisa. “PW Interviews: Octavia E. Butler.” *Conversations with Octavia Butler*. Ed. Consuela Francis. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. 38-42.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. “Theories of Race and Gender: The Social Construction of Whiteness.” *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 5.4 (1982): 36-62.
- Strong, Josiah. *Our Country*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Suvin, Darko. *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology*. Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.
- . *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Thrall, James H. “Postcolonial Science Fiction?: Science, Religion, and the Transformation of Genre in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*.” *Literature and Theology*. 23.3 (2009): 289-302.
- Tiffin, Helen. “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse.” *The Post-Colonial*

- Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Troche, Ursula. "Making Links between Others' Oppressions." *Gendering Global Transformations: Gender, Culture, Race, and Identity*. Edited by Chima J. Korieh and Philomina E Okeke-Ihejirika. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Vint, Sherryl. "Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler's *Clay's Ark*." *Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 32 (2005): 281-300.
- Wegner, Phillip E. "Preface: Emerging from the Flood in Which We Are Sinking: Or, Reading with Darko Suvin (Again)" *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology*. Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010.
- West, Traci C. "Spirit-Colonizing Violations: Racism, Sexual Violence and Black American Women" *Remembering Conquest: Feminist/Womanist Perspectives on Religion, Colonization, and Sexual Violence*. Eds. Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis and Marie M. Fortune. New York: Haworth Press, 1999. 19-30.
- Yaszek, Lisa. "'A Grim Fantasy': Remaking American History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*" *Signs* 28.4 (2003): 1053-1066.