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Conclusion

Clandestine Praxes

In 1993, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* was first published. The novel is the first in a series of speculative fiction that follows a fifteen-year-old Black girl named Lauren as she embarks upon a journey that is both oriented away from and toward: away from devastation and toward the uncertain. The devastation reads as possible to me: social, political, and economic ruins that result from increasing economic inequity and the destruction of the climate. The uncertain reads as less so, but in part because what was once far away is now near—the book is set in 2025, now only four years away from the moment in which I write—but it is also a future that unravels as Lauren moves about herself. Butler builds a world in which, when faced with death, of the self and of those with whom Lauren has formed all kinds of intimate relations, Lauren also faces possibility. She wanders away from her family, her friends, her lover, her home, with only a knapsack, seeking little but survival. The “little” is important, though: it is a hint, a feeling, of a new form of understanding that is borne out of Lauren's uniquely empathetic wiring, or hyperempathy (she feels for herself the actual pain and pleasures experienced by others along with them), and her emergent beliefs about the nature of existence. Experienced together, Lauren imagines Earthseed, the name she gives to her set of beliefs. Earthseed is presented less as universal than as always in the process of becoming and holds fast to this core expression:

All that you touch
You change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
is Change.

God
Is Change.

As Lauren moves further and further away from her past life, she experiences all kinds of change, interacts with all kinds of agents, and is changed, herself, along the way. She forms relations of all kinds, too, many of which amount to forms of intimacy that are currently impossible, at least within a world tethered to its white, capitalist, and settler heteronormative assumptions about truth and goodness. A young, full, complicated Black girl offers us a glimpse at a future that is beautifully different.

Just over twenty years later, in 2015, Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* was published. *Binti*, the first in a speculative trilogy, follows its protagonist, a young, female Himba (a human group inspired by the real Himba tribe that is indigenous to what is now Northern Namibia) girl named Binti, who also comes to us from the future. For Binti, the journey to be taken is one across space and time and less for the sake of physical survival than a sort of psychic survival: an educational one. Binti, after taking a series of planetary exams in Mathematics, has been identified as highly intelligent and immediately admitted into Oomza University, a university elsewhere in the galaxy. Further, if she accepts the admittance, she will be the first Himba human to attend. However, she says that "No matter what choice I made, I was never going to have a normal life, really."¹ The lack of a so-called choice is a result of her own unique differences, and not just as the first Himba human to embark on this journey. She is, we learn, a "harmonizer," who is described as having the ability to communicate with bodies and spirit flows in unprecedented ways.² She is already so different from others, and yet it is this difference that leads her to accept more uncertainty, more unfamiliarity. She decides to go because "I wanted . . . I needed it."³ Binti makes the leap, leaves without saying goodbye to her family ("Death. When I left my home, I died."⁴), and boards the ship "Third Fish," an amphibious technological life-form that acts as a form of intergalactic transportation. As she moves further from home, she, too, learns more about herself than she ever could have otherwise imagined, forms relationships—across species—that she never knew were possible, and learns to enact community across differences in ways that certainly seem impossible now. Again, a young, full, complicated African girl offers us a glimpse at a future that is beautifully different.

Parable and *Binti* do *not* offer the same story; it is clear from the first words that each author tells an exceptionally unique story about incredibly distinct girls and build dazzlingly different worlds in the process. But what they share, the iterations of possibility that they enact when put alongside each other, are nonetheless powerful in their own respects. They both are different *because* they have a mostly clandestine, not fully understood capacity to connect with others. These capacities are not ones that appeal to contemporary neoliberal conceptions of ability, either; in fact, they are arguably capabilities that purposefully destabilize the concept of the ability itself. Further, these differences make them suspicious and even dangerous to some as they continue their journeys. They are threats to and therefore threatened by those who do not understand them, or who see no value in their lives other than as material to be consumed in various ways. They both witness murder, and experience starvation and alienation, too. But in the process, they also learn more about themselves and discover the depths of their own capabilities around communication, coalition, and communion. They are full of impossible possibilities that have import for them but not *just* them. They travel away from the most likely future and into a new, seemingly unlikely, further future, where new ways of being and learning and loving come into fruition.

Both of these stories, both of these Afro-futuristic dreams, hold so much possibility, and it matters that the possibilities are ultimately left undefined by the end of their respective journeys. Both characters experience desirous sparks given their own situatedness and senses of self that expose cracks within the given and make possible an impossible future that, among many other things, exposes its readers to cracks in their worlds, too. They certainly did—and continue to, every time I engage or teach with them—for me. They enact a tension, too, between the desire to hope for changes to what is and the desire for something that is not currently here. There are drastic steps to be taken. The costs are high. But they are never higher than the cost of staying still. Caught between choices that are not really choices—to live or to die; to stay or to grow—Lauren and Binti offer a different option. Borne of the belief in the magic of the excess, they point those willing to notice toward the refusal of the choice itself. They point to something beyond mere survival, beyond mere change, beyond mere settling. They choose what is otherwise depicted itself as impossible: to grow, to create, to live out and as something different. Of course, when I

read and reread these stories, I know that I cannot, by virtue of my own existence as a white woman, lay claim to much, and I even know that they might not be for or about me. But they still make me feel both fired up and ferocious, and maybe that is an additional sign of their power: to do that for those who desire something else. They show what it might look like to refuse in a way that is life-opening and -expanding. As I reflect on the ways I benefit from what they know is life-closing, I also recognize that they make it possible to imagine a world in which saying what I will now say is the most realistic, possible, rigorous, caring, concrete thing to say: *This is not the world for me.*

So, to the limits placed on theorizing by the present state of sex education, including those who work rigorously to reform and revitalize the role of sexuality education in schools, I therefore say, “not this.”⁵ Confronted by an overwhelming failure to address the violence smuggled into education, and public schools in the United States, through federally funded sex education for over 100 years, by virtue of its refusal to do anything other than delineate human life through the promotion of exclusionary and marginalizing conceptions of knowledge and rationality, I shall, following Sara Ahmed, offer a swift, disinterested eye roll and instead, allow myself to be distracted by what is aligned with my desires for something different, knowing that this desire is always only possible for me because of the impossible things that have been done by these nonwhite, deviant, out-of-this-world girls.

There is so much to learn from those who distract us from the confines of what is possible. Left to linger, these desires, these ways of being, in their full, complicated existence, can alter our educational habits and might even provoke glimpses into what I am calling the clandestine: secretive, often illicit, covert, hidden, subversive, deceptive, surreptitious, quotidian practices, epistemologies, communing, and laboring that causes cracks and breaks. They overlap and are interdependent and mutually constructed and sometimes contradictory to each other. They also far exceed the glimpses offered here. They are the excess that federally funded education cannot contain and therefore ignores. But their lessons are lying in wait. The very least I can do is acknowledge their beauty, betray what is now itself ugly, and surrender to the educational experiences they offer. Who are the “they”? Them:

The criminal: *"Hustling is a tool of survival for the dispossessed. Yet in putting their sexualities to work, [Black women sex workers] may have seen this tactic as open to revision, mediation, and other worlds of imagination."*⁶

—Mireille Miller-Young

The dependent: *"But a struggle to survive cannot lead to suicide: Suicide is the opposite of survival. And so we must not conceal/assimilate/integrate into the would-be dominant culture and political system that despises us. Our survival requires that we alter our environment so that we can live and so that we can hold each other's hands and so that we can kiss each other on the streets, and in the daylight of our existence, without terror and without violent and sometimes fatal reactions from the busybodies of America."*⁷

—June Jordan

The sentimental: *"I have to remember that no one knew that things would get better, and that even people who were working to make it happen had to live with oppression every day. I read your writing and the writing of your other comrades from that time and I feel grateful. It seems like maybe you knew about us. It feels like you loved us already."*⁸

—Alexis Pauline Gumbs

The fugitive: *"We are the general antagonism to politics looming outside every attempt to politicize, every imposition of self-governance, every sovereign decision and its degraded miniature, every emergent state and home sweet home. We are disruption and consent to disruption. We preserve upheaval. Sent to fulfill by abolishing, to renew by unsettling, to open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual area, we got politics surrounded. We cannot represent ourselves. We can't be represented."*⁹

—Stefano Harney and Fred Moten

The dreamer: *"Trans women are free to live in their skin and not feel like they have to deal with transmisogyny. Life would be so simple. People wouldn't have to worry about moving or missing a meal or if they're going to have to do this or that. We will have everything that we need. Everyone will love each other and we will smoke lots of weed."*¹⁰

—CeCe McDonald

The demon: “. . . the demonic invites a slightly different conceptual pathway—while retaining its supernatural etymology—and acts to identify a system (social, geographic, technological) that can only unfold and produce an outcome if uncertainty, or (dis)organization, or something supernaturally demonic, is integral to the methodology.”¹¹

—Katherine McKittrick

The whore: “Girls, girls, get that cash/If it’s 9 to 5 or shaking your ass/Ain’t no shame, ladies do your thing/Just make sure you ahead of the game/Just ‘cause I got a lot of fame super/Prince couldn’t get me change my name, papa/Kunta Kinte a slave again, no sir/Picture blacks saying, ‘Oh yes’a, massa’ (No!)/Picture Lil’ Kim dating a pastor.”¹²

—Missy Elliot

The naive: “She asks me questions. Or . . . she comes to me, ‘Mom, my little friend told me her mom was undocumented too. That’s so cool! We both get to spend vacation together [since we can’t travel]!’ She’s so positive.”¹³

—Janet Gonzalez, discussing her children with Laura E. Enriquez

The unrealistic: “All organizing is science fiction.”¹⁴

—Whalidah Imarisha

The confusing: “The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next.”

—Ursula Le Guin¹⁵

The inhuman: “This alternative movement, a transvaluation of the human, will require a change in the underlying structures of Man’s being/knowing/feeling ‘human’ in a manner such that we no longer make any reference to the transcendentalist conception that many are eager to move beyond.”¹⁶

—Zakiyyah Iman Jackson

The profane: “[funky erotixxx is] an acknowledgement that what is profane or obscene has a lineage that exceeds its destructive imperialist mandates within Western patriarchy, and that is sacred.”¹⁷

—L. H. Stallings

The irrational: “In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mis-

sion, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.”¹⁸

—Stefano Harney and Fred Moten

The sick: “Because a sex life depends upon ability, any departure from sexual norms reads as disability, disease, or defect. . . . What sea change in current scientific, medical, political, and romantic attitudes would be necessary to represent disabled sexuality as a positive contribution to the future.”¹⁹

—Tobin Siebers

The immature: “I’m trying to just serve sexy and confident, whore. Slutty²⁰ cougar on the prowl. 3rd rate Faith Hill impersonator. 80% sexy, 20% disgusting.”²¹

—Katya Zamolodchikova

These glimpses, offered generously by others, point to different educative moments and experiences that, somehow, slowly, might create what I imagine to be a kind of bubble, a space in which our own relationships and understandings and feelings with and of sexuality might be deepened in accordance with their general pursuit of an education that honors any latent desire for something else, however unintelligent, irrational, uneducated, crazy, unrealistic, impossible creating such a bubble might be. Then, I hope that someday this bubble pops, and whatever happens is something that is, well, inconceivable.