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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S SOLUTIONS ON TRIAL: RACE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, DISABILITY AND RELIGION REINVENTED

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: science fiction, speculative fiction, Afrofuturism, queer, disability, religion, autoethnography, transhumanism, post-racial, post-identity studies

The overarching aim of this project is to examine the solutions proposed by Butler in the literary corpus proposed: novels *Parable of the Sower* (1993), *Bloodchild* (1995) and the short-story *Fledgling* (2005) to issues related to race, gender, sexuality, disability and religion. The author's transhumanist perspective and the autoethnographic research angle inform our understanding of the offering of these solutions, and their feasibility.

Butler ‘s transhumanist vision springs from a strongly-held belief that, in order to survive and reach maximum potential, humanity needs to redefine, possibly erase, all norms related to race, gender, sexuality, disability and religion. Adjacently, our own beliefs and lived experience of these constructs have beamed a recognition of Butler's own situated self reflected in her protagonists and solutions, thus rendering Butler's fiction as autoethnographically reflective of non-white, queer, disabled and other-than-Christian writers and readers.

Our literature review is organized in five sections: Octavia Butler scholarship, Black and intersectional feminism, post-human vs. posthuman outlooks, religion versus spirituality, and autoethnography.

In the first section of our literature review, we examine some of the key contributions to Butler scholarship by authors in the US and globally, especially those linked to our own research interests. We begin with the more comprehensive tableau contributions, such as Ritch Calvin's 32-page Butler bibliography published in the Octavia E. Butler issue of *Utopian Studies* (Vol. 19, no. 3, 2008) where he inventories 90 articles, 70 book chapters and sections, and 80 theses and doctoral dissertations, or Gerry Canavan's outstanding monograph published in the *Modern Masters of Science Fiction* series with the University of Illinois Press in 2016, where Canavan brings to fruition his 8 months of research immersed in the Butler archive (9,000+ items) at the Huntington in San Marino, California. The *Modern Masters* monograph is a treasure of insight into Butler's vast unpublished work and her outlook on writing and (not) publishing. Canavan's shocking revealings and his respectful analysis may fundamentally change Butler readers' perspectives on her. For example, Butler's first drafts of any book she was writing were incommensurably more pessimistic and gory. Numerous other scholars dedicated attention to the Butler legacy, such as Clara Escoda Agustí, who wrote on community vs. subjectivity in Butler's work and observed the emergence, shaping and re-shaping of subjectivity through cooperation, symbiosis or mutualism; Vincent Williams, who analyses her treatment of Blackness as agency by making her female protagonists rather masculine (sometimes using genderbending). By that, she makes them extra magnetic and attractive, thus deconstructing an old myth about the strength and manipulativeness of Black female slaves, reinventing femininity and Blackness by endowing

all her heroines with a “brutal pragmatism” that not only helps them survive, but also succeed. Aline Ferreira makes an excellent analysis of the biopolitics of hybridity, pointing out the concurrent redundancy and key importance of race/species and gender in symbiogenesis, host and parasite or slave and master linked in interdependence, while Susana M. Morris discusses gender and sexuality in *Fledgling*, observing how it "radically reimagines identity, kinship, and intimacy through nonmonogamous queer human-vampire hybrid families that have a variety of configurations, yet it also troubles any easy notions of a vampire utopia by ambivalently regarding the concepts of free will and symbiosis.” (147). Lewis Call looks into the repeated reversals of power roles in kink scenes, a deliberate deconstruction of slavery and/or stigma: “Postanarchism enables a system of erotic ethics [...] (which) endorses radical relations of erotic power up to and including consensual play-slavery. [...] unlike slavery, play-slavery can be ethical and erotic.” (131). Theri Pickens, an expert in disability studies, notes about Olamina in *Sower* that “From fear, complete vulnerability and internalized stigma to reclaiming it and using it as her key asset in surviving and building a community and entire future for the human race.” (167) David Morris dubs Earthseed the religion which “sacralizes impermanence.” (271), and on the same topic, Kimberly Ruffin notes that science replaces faith as the spine of religion, transformation being possible only in the face of incontrovertible evidence. (Ruffin 91) Ecofeminist theorist Streeby analyses why Butler sometimes dubbed herself a ‘HistoFuturist’ or a “memory worker and historian who extrapolates from the human past and present as well as the technological past and present” (Streeby 72) and decides that these are undeniable strains of ecofeminism on the author's part.

In the second section of our literature review, we focus on the key landmarks in Black and intersectional feminism, as pertaining to Butler's own lens on gender, race, sexuality, disability and religion. Our review is chronological, and our selection is based on commonality of vision between discussed authors and Octavia E. Butler, the aim being to paint a backdrop of fellow Black women writers and theorists with similar outlooks. We discuss Angela Davis’ communist philosophy at the intersection of race, class and gender, then we acknowledge bell hooks' revealings of nationalism and misogyny inside the African American civil rights movement, but also the objectification of Black women in mainstream American society as part of the cultural legacy of slavery in the White collective psyche. Audre Lorde is included as a poet that could be rightfully called autoethnographic, her voice very similar to Butler's own in their ars literaria: “I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself.” (*Sister Outsider* 147); Toni Morrison is reviewed as not the grand dame of African American fiction, but as a theorist whose outlook on femininity is that it is a construct informed by masculinity, and the white gaze on Black femininity must be eliminated as part of the process of femininity construction; Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory could not be overlooked, of course, and Patricia Hill Collins *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) is presented as the huge landmark it is in Black feminist studies, due to her emphasis and henceforth promoting “lived experience as a criterion of meaning.” (x)

The section dedicated to the discussion on post-humanism vs. posthumanism essentially traces the chronological evolution from humanism to antihumanism (post-humanism or

transhumanism) and then pack to humanism as posthumanism. The logic of the traced cycle begins with Julian Huxley and Ihab Hassan, with F.M. Esfandiary (later known as FM-2030) in the middle, all of them concerned with what human(ity) means (any more) in an era where everything seems to have been said, created, repeated already a few times, but sense and balance are yet to be secured. Technology is the big differentiator in this discussion, with transhumanists advocating for the use of it in all possible ways that lead to the enhancement and even immortality of the human being. Science as almost a religion, atheism or at least anti-church attitudes, anti-identity politics, pro-cyborgization or at least pro-hybridization, polyamory and other "unorthodox" outlooks on love and family, these are all to be found in FM-2030's philosophy and Octavia E. Butler's fiction - which justifies our labeling her vision as transhumanist. Moreover, Butler's critique of the church and capitalism could be read as a critical stance to anthropocene and capitalocene, human supremacy being understood critically as the supremacy of cis-hetero white patriarchal ableist hierarchies. In this, Butler's stance meets Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway - who actually noted Butler and refered to her as a source for the cyborg theory she laid forth in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). Humusity (Haraway) and humanimal relations (Grosz) are mentioned in this context too, and Braidotti's four posthuman feminist theses are reviewed extensively as considered very akin to Butler's own view: 1) feminism is not a humanism; 2) emphasis on Anthropos and bios has been decentered; 3) nonhuman life, or zoe, is now the prevailing concept and 4) sexuality is “a force beyond, beneath and after gender.” (Braidotti 21)

The fourth section in the literature review looks at the relationship between religion and spirituality, in search of an answer to questions such as: is there a hierarchy? Is Earthseeed a religion or a spirituality? We begin this exploration with Matthew Arnold proto-transcedentalism and Ralph Waldo Emerson's oversoul, to prepare the ground for Heidegger’s dassein and Amy Hollywood's Spiritual but not Religious (SBNR) theory. Heidegger's dassein is essentially what Butler's theory of shaping self to shape god means. "But man's distinctive feature lies in this, that he, as the being who thinks, is open to Being, face to face with Being; thus, man remains referred to Being and so answers to it. Man is essentially this relationship of responding to Being, and he is only this. This "only" does not mean a limitation, but rather an excess." (21) could easily be summarized as To shape God, Shape self. We end with a brief discussion of Lyotard’s postmodern condition theory applied to religion and we conclude that Earthseed is a metareligion, where any predigested narrative has been replaced with a narrative-in-process where all ends are open horizontally. Thus, we understand that spirituality supersedes formal religion and also that cognition and rationality are key to faith (from whence we may extrapolate that institutionalized spirituality - such as churches, etc. - is corrosive to faith and spiritual wealth: “[modern means] an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth … I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. (xxiii–xxiv)” An important concept in this discussion is SBNR, or Spiritual but not Religious. From the emerging body of scholarship on SBNR, we have selected a Harvard Divinity School researcher, Amy Hollywood, who proposes spirituality as an umbrella term under which religion is sitting in its many denominations along other practices and systems of belief that are not registered as

churches, such as animism, Rastafari, pantheism, Hinduism or significant strains of Buddhism. SBNR scholars like Hollywood note that, while organized religion is losing numbers (churches turned into malls, etc.), SBNR is catching on, proving that spirituality is a more basic human need than religion, and one that people instinctively pursue the satisfaction of, in ways that integrate respect for their identities, whether they be racial, gender, sexual, or different in any other way from formal religious norms.

The final section of our literature review is devoted to laying forth some key tenets of autoethnography. The overarching one is that autoethnographic outputs are anticolonial and decolonizing, through the provision of academic space "to the lived experiences of the under-represented, oppressed and marginalized." (Chawla and Atay 8) Moreover, "The outcome of decolonizing processes is the ability of subjects (both the colonized and the colonizers) to achieve disidentification." (Chawla and Atay 6) Secondly, autoethnographic academic research and writing has a posthumanist end: to dissolve and embrace difference at the same time, in a realization that it is concurrently essential and irrelevant. Autoethnographic reflection can come from a place of in-betweennes: "It is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement of domains of difference-that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated...Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation." (Bhabha)

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Butler's biography, as a necessary background to understanding her writing, especially given our treatment of her fiction as autoethnographic. The chapter is titled after Butler's essay *Positive Obsession* (1989/1995), where she sets to paper what the writing profession means to her, and what young writers - especially Black - may want to consider for authentic and successful writership.

Butler's life and career choice was impacted by several key elements: her race, class, gender, queerness, disabilities and relationship with religion. Born in 1947, she grew up poor. Her father died when she was very little, her mother was a domestic worker. Butler was a very awkward kid, mainly because she was quite big for her age, spoke with a little lisp and stutter and was handicappingly shy. She took refuge in books: as a very young child, her mother would read her stories. She then self-taught how to read and became an avid reader - and very young writer. She started crafting her own stories as early as seven. Butler was never in a relationship, despite going to an lgbt+ community center once or twice. We may assume that she was too shy to pursue anyone, or that she was simply asexual. Her fiction abounds in queer tropes, from the more covert masculine femininity of her protagonists to numerous explicit ones, such as polyamory, BDSM (playslavery and the ambiguity of consensus), interspecies love and reproduction, or male pregnancy. Butler's religion may also have been part of why she never dated, her family being devoutly born-again Baptist. She quietly stopped going to church as a teenager because she heard the preacher comment after reading a Bible excerpt that he did not know what it meant, but he believed it: "I stopped believing in the afterlife when I was about

twelve - although I didn't get up the courage to tell my mother until I was about seventeen or eighteen. What set me off, I think, was going to church one Sunday - I was raised a born-again Baptist - and hearing the minister read a passage from the Bible and then say 'I don't know what this means, but I believe it.'" (Francis 17) This is probably the reason Butler explains and lays forth her religions (in her books, especially *Parable of the Sower*) very clearly and almost pragmatically, so as to ensure that faith is built as an authentic spiritual dialogue (or even cooperation, as in *Sower*), rather than the unquerying submission to a predigested understanding of something that one has not epiphanized upon, but is told they have. In her interviews, essays and articles, Butler shared generously and crudely on her life growing up, or as a young Black woman starting out in a field dominated by white men. Her interviews are collected by Consuela Francis in *Conversations with Octavia E. Butler* in 2010, and in this chapter, we draw on this source extensively. Butler's sincere admission to internalized stigma about her race and class, talking about how she used to be ashamed that her mother was a domestic worker, or her realization as an adult that she was probably 'a little dyslexic' as a kid and that is probably why she absolutely reveled in audio books, all these are humbling and self-revelatory to any other reader coming from a non-white poor background, with a learning disability that was never diagnosed in childhood and which added to the causes of bullying. As an adult, Butler was an urban hermit, meaning she hardly socialized and spent most of her time outside the home at the library. Her MacArthur money and fame could never make up for the strong sense of inadequacy as a masculine very tall Black girl, or the handicapping shyness that years and years of poverty and bullying had cemented in her social self. Protected by the walls of her creative castle, Butler turned her disabilities into superpowers, via her protagonists. Olamina's hyperempathy on *Parable of the Sower*, for example, becomes her key strength after being her greatest vulnerability. Shori in *Fledgling* similarly comes to tap into her 'freaky' otherness as a superpower that saves not only her, but her entire Ina race and their human symbionts. Disability and disease are suggested as constructs that carriers can tap into as superpowers, with the suggestion that perhaps capitalism makes people lose their empathy, therefore it is empathy that will in the end save the day from rampant exploitation and dehumanization through reckless pursuit of personal gratification. Christina Sharpe could be an interesting addition to this discussion, with her focus on crossgenerational (self)marginalization: "Living in the wake of slavery is living the afterlife of property and living the afterlife of partus sequitur ventrem (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother." (15) This applies to all the three protagonists in our corpus, as Olamina, Gan and Shori, all need to break from their mother's non-statuses, or non-wisdoms induced through capitalism and/or colonization. The solution, Butler seems to be suggesting, is to tap into negative differentiators for strength and solidarity, and operate with standards of excellence that are not standards of colonization and subordination. There is also a clear preoccupation on Butler's part to integrate religion in the realm of science fiction: "Science fiction seems more interested in machines than in people. It tends to dismiss religion. I don't think that's wise because religion has played such a large part in the lives of human beings throughout human history." (Francis 9) De-institutionalized, horizontally structured religion, shaped and embraced in cooperation within the community and with godness (our term) is what

Butler proposes for spiritual community, balance and a sense of purpose. Shaping god(ness) and one's faith in dialogue and cooperation thus becomes the ultimate goal, with change and rationality embraced as the only tools of advancement in all spheres of life, including spirituality. The marriage of science and religion cannot escape the Butler scholar as an indubitable trait of her transhumanist vision.

Chapter 3 focuses on Octavia E. Butler's outlook on writing, and is organized in four sections: *Be versus Do, Yes Books versus No Books, Finding One's Own Way,* and *Solutions on Trial*.

The *Be versus Do* section should be read in conjunction with the *Finding One's Own Way* one, as they both discuss Butler's preoccupation with authenticity and work as the two key ingredients of good writing. She did not believe in talent, and she also acknowledges the hard task of a debutante writer entering a scene dominated by people the novice feels they have nothing in common with, but feels compelled to imitate for success: "When I began writing science fiction, when I began reading, heck, I wasn't in any of this stuff I read. The only black people you found were occasional characters or characters who were so feeble-witted that they couldn't manage anything, anyway. I wrote myself in, since I'm me and I'm here and I'm writing." (Canavan, *Modern Masters* 173) This is poignantly resonant of Lorde's "I am who I am, doing what I came to do [...]." (147) Hard work, including repetition and simply copying excerpts one likes, and above all persistence and extensive research would be Butler's advice to young writers. A special place in her way of being a writer is occupied by the library. When the Los Angeles Public Library was set on fire by an arsonist in 1986, Butler wrote this in her diary: "It isn't the first time I've seen a friend—a loved friend—die. But it is the first time I've seen one killed… Friend, teacher, lover, home." (Vi Ha 2019) The emotional load of this entry speaks to her transhuman view on spaces as characters, in addition to how important the library was to her a working space.

The solutions on trial proposed by Butler in her prose must be read from her Yes/No books perspective. "One of the things I was personally surprised by in the archives was the way that optimism [...] was quite often a late or unwilling addition to her novels, something that emerged as she struggled to turn her many swirling ideas into concrete forms she believed would actually sell." (Canavan, "OEB Papers" 49) Butler was not a clairvoyant - just like Orwell or Huxley were not oracles either. She had an extremely keen interest in eco-justice, history, science, medicine, religion - and she pursued this interest with methodical geekiness and chaotic dedication. Her solutions needed to be incorporated in Yes books: if they sold, it meant her solution had convinced readers, that they had read themselves in her book and their mindset was impacted. Therefore, if a book sold, it did not mean that she had managed to write a commercial book, but rather that she had managed to successfully assemble the elements of a solution that managed to inspire readers to correctly see and address current issues (such as the role of politics in science, racial supremacy or any other kind of supremacy. etc.)

The methodological chapter comprises our objectives, hypotheses and methodology. Three objectives inform our pursuit: 1) to review key theoretical contributions in the discussion on gender, race, sexuality and religion, as applicable to Butler's work; 2) to map a comprehensive background to Octavia E. Butler's life and outlook on writing; 3) to analyze the

selected body focusing on our two research hypotheses; 4) to assign Butler to the correct genre(s). Two hypotheses are born from our suppositions regarding our research questions: to what extent does race matter in the scheme of things nowadays? What about gender? Should/can we reinvent our understanding and attitudes to race, gender, sexuality, disability and religion as a way to preserve our humanity? If we use technology to enhance our capacities, or contemplate interbreeding with nonhuman species, does that mean we are still human, or not? What do ethical and moral mean in this context? Is it ethical to use violence (i.e. rape) for one's survival? The first of our hypotheses born out of our intuitive answers to these questions is that Butler uses the body as a political instrument of decolonization, self-realization and survival through queerness, kink and a celebration of (own) otherness, while the second one is that Earthseed is a religious system rooted in the belief that rationality and common sense are essential to authentic faith, institutionalized religion, especially Christianity, being thus criticized. Our methodology starts with an analysis of Butler nonfiction and scholarship, then goes into the literary analysis of the selected corpus, directly and comparatively; finally, we offer some autoethnographic reflection from our perspective as a POC (Person of colour) queer reader and scholar.

Chapter 6 is our literary analysis chapter, divided into two main sections, corresponding to our two hypotheses. In section 6.1. we trace Butler's use of the (human, alien, hybrid) body to steer everyone to salvation. *Bodies at the Helm* is an adequate title for our assertion, since the steering we just mentioned is possible via and due to the natural qualities of those bodies, be they queer, engaged in unusual kink, or differently abled. Bodily satisfaction, fitness and survival seems to be high on Butler's protagonists' priorities list, but this is not due to selfishness or narcissism; it is simply that it makes practical sense to be all right physically, to not overlook your physical essence, to nourish it what it requires - for one to be able to pursue higher aims. An analogy to the safety instructions on any air carrier could be made: before one can attend to others, they need to attend to themselves. Even fresh mothers are advised to secure themselves before they attend to their newborns. Butler does not, however, suggest a hierarchy of physical over spiritual/mental. Our second hypothesis is rooted in Butler's repeated integration of cooperation, sometimes presented as symbiogenesis, where physical and mental/spiritual are in unity, both internally and externally. The title of our second section in the literary analysis chapter does not suggest spirit-over-matter, but simply thinking outside the body, looking at matters spiritual once the physical challenges have been satisfied or overcome. Some physical threads, however, seep into the spiritual - such as sex. After the transactional practicalities of bodies in sexual interaction have been solved, a connection can be established that transcends race, gender, species and even the idea of sexual orientation. Mutuality - or mutual interdependence - breeds this connection, which is a spiritual space of encounter, vulnerability and cooperation. Earthseed is also discussed in this section as religion reinvented, cooperation and rationality replacing all idea of unquestioning faith. Mutuality in faith implies that god(ness) gives shape to the universe as the universe shapes god(ness). The top-down angle is replaced with a horizontal outlook where divinity and believers are partners not making the mistake of taking each other for granted, and thus are able to maintain each other alive.

In Chapter 7 we address the question: what genre(s) would be the appropriate label(s) for Butler's work? For *Bloodchild* the answer could be quite simply science fiction, given the

human-alien interaction trope, perhaps with the added sublabel post-apocalyptic, given the references to a human near-extinction on Earth. For *Parable of the Sower*, however, the answer is more complicated. In our chapter we discuss dystopian literature from two angles, or rather as seen by two gazes: the male gaze versus the female gaze. It may be purely coincidental that the first popular books in the genre were by male authors, but one cannot help notice that *1984, A Brave New World* or *We* do indeed share in what could be described as a misogynist angle on female characters, always secondary to a male protagonist but somehow manipulating him emotionally for a while and leading them to (almost) their downfall. The female wave that starts with Atwood, continues with Lowry and to which Butler aligns herself via *Sower*, is in sharp contrast with the grand male gaze narratives through several characteristics, chief among them not that they do not feature adult male protagonists but rather that they are more constructive and solution-oriented, leaving room for hope and promoting empathy much more directly and persistently. We do a more in-depth analysis within the female gaze territory and put side by side Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* and Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, on one hand, and Lowry's *Giver* and Butler's *Bloodchild*, on the other. This comparative discussion will be of interest to scholars of dystopian literature in general, and will help understand and consolidate our understanding of Butler in a context that is not dominated by white men. The last section in the genre debacle chapter discusses whether Butler is the mother of Afrofuturism or not, and offers a yes and no answer. *Fledgling*, for example, features a lab-engineered black-skinned Ina (a vampire species who have been on Earth for a few thousand years) with incredible physical strength and a huge capacity to absorb information and use it wisely - but to say that she is a face of Afrofuturism would be wrong, since Butler never intended to align herself with the current, and also because Shori is a hybrid being. She is post-racial, post-human, post-vampire. But that Butler's universe is laden with characters that young Afrofuturistic writers such as Nnedi Okorafor, author of best-selling *Binti*, are in copycat awe of is undeniable. What we can rightfully and without fear of overstepping say, as Canavan also suggests, is that Butler's inception of Afrofuturism was rather accidental. During her lifetime, Butler was sometimes put in a position to say whether she was the mother of Afrofuturism, or whether she identifies as an Afrofuturistic writer, but she always declined the merit of starting the current, and she also never said she was part of it. Young Afrofuturistic writers are in her debt for her patient guidance, formal and informal, as well as for the financial support some of them were able to tap into to attend the Clarion, for example, but Butler supported young writers as part of her self-appointed mission when she was young and mentorless that she was going to support young African American writers in the best way she could, as soon as she could.

Chapter 8 lists and discusses Butler's legacy, in particular all the cinematographic, musical and literary work her influence has spawned, but also her impact on popular culture reflected in, for example, NASA naming a landing spot on Mars after her. Most significantly, we lay down our theory of fiction as an autoethnographic two-sided mirror, an interstitial space of encounter where POC, queer, disabled and (post)religious writers and readers meet to 'get themselves' - and each other, through shared vulnerabilities and empowered reflection on solutions illuminated on the page.

Our final chapter presents our conclusions, limitations and further plans. After looking at the three works in our corpus, and analyzing the manner in which Octavia E. Butler incorporates queerness and kind, and how she reinvents disability and disease, we conclude that she uses the body as a political instrument of salvation through decolonization, queerness/kink and otherness. Also, given her pragmatic approach to religion, from which she does exclude rationality - quite the contrary, actually - we are presented with the mind as an obligatory instrument of spirituality, without which authentic faith is impossible. The two limitations of our project are that our corpus comprises only three works, and that we did not have access to the Octavia E. Butler archive. The first was a limitation we embraced in full awareness at the onset, as a larger body would have been cumbersome to operate with; besides, the three works selected are representative of Butler's vision regarding how humanity could be saved, each of them proposing a different angle: perhaps humans could save humanity (*Sower*), or perhaps human-alien cooperation (*Bloodchild*), or perhaps hybrids could (*Fledgling*). The second limitation was alas a financial one, but in the future we hope to be able to secure a research fellowship to spend time immersed in the archive at the Huntington. Besides the autoethnographic exploration of the archive, other plans for the future include a Romanian translation of the present dissertation for a popular queer culture series for Hecate Publishing (who also launched Butler in Romania), and writing on the several research themes branching off this project: taboo as kink, family and maternity norms as a system of social (self)oppression, pedagogy at the intersection of empathy and cruelty.

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