

Telepaths, Social Constructs, and Panoptical Power in Octavia

Butler's *Patternist* Series

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## Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SECTION I: THE ONTOLOGY OF POWER .....</b>	<b>6</b>
FOUCAULT, THE PANOPTICON, BIOPOWER, AND DISCIPLINE .....	6
EUGENICS, REPRODUCTIVE CONTROL, AND COMMUNITY POLICING AS POWER .....	15
MENTAL LEASHES: THE COST OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SECURITY .....	19
THE CARTESIAN SUBJECT: THE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE MIND AND THE BODY .....	28
<b>SECTION II: THE SOCIAL CONFIGURATION(S) OF POWER .....</b>	<b>40</b>
SOCIAL PRESCRIPTIONS ON THE BODY .....	42
INSTITUTIONAL POWER – THE CORNERSTONE OF PATTERNIST SOCIETY .....	53
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>70</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The speculative and science fiction works of Octavia Butler directly examine the ways in which power operates within various social modes. They emphasize the importance of one's relationship with power in understanding the human drives, complexes, and neuroses that arise time and time again in the creation of new social systems and societal configurations. The *Patternist* series, comprised of the individual installments, *Wild Seed*<sup>1</sup> (1980), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor*<sup>2</sup> (1978), *Clay's Ark* (1984), and *Patternmaster* (1976) (listed in narrative order)<sup>3</sup>, is especially concerned with the nature of power as it tackles a variety of social, psychological, metaphysical, and philosophical quandaries manifested from the complex histories of a culturally diverse society.

In an era increasingly progressing towards the post-human, Butler's works offer a postmodern deconstruction of lived experience (both ontologically and socially), questioning what it means to be human, and more specifically, what it means to be embodied. Through the exploration of characters such as Doro, a four-thousand year old immortal who survives through the parasitic consumption of surrounding souls and the occupation of their bodies; Anyanwu, a three-hundred year old shape-shifter whose original form, an elegant, young, black physique, remains intact; and Mary, a psychic amalgam of the two who utilizes telepathy to unify a new advanced race, Butler explores the intersections of identity, embodiment, and power that in

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<sup>1</sup> A brief note on abbreviations throughout the text: (WS) = *Wild Seed*; (MoMM) = *Mind of My Mind*; (CA) = *Clay's Ark*; *Survivor* and *Patternmaster* will not be abbreviated.

<sup>2</sup> *Survivor* is Butler's least favorite book in the series (perhaps explaining why it is generally out of print). According to Brianna Whiteside, "She deemed it her 'Star Trek' novel because of its outer space setting and simplistic plot that coincides with clichéd themes and tropes of sci-fi" (Whiteside 2). As the least significant work within the series, *Survivor* will be given considerably less attention in this essay than the remaining four novels.

<sup>3</sup> This paper uses *Seed to Harvest*, a posthumously published collection of the four canonical texts, *Wild Seed*, *Mind of My Mind*, *Clay's Ark*, and *Patternmaster*. This compilation places the individual works in narrative order, making it the first "complete" collection of the *Patternmaster* series. *Survivor* is not included within *Seed to Harvest*.

reality, obscure the relational nature of self-definition, and thus the arbitrary distribution of power throughout society.

This essay will explore the ontological disposition of power within Butler's *Patternist* series alongside the social configurations through which it manifests. More specifically, it will contend that Butler's *Patternist* series uses the science and speculative fiction tropes of telepathy, body-swapping, and self-transmutation to prove that while the capacity to exercise power is highly constituted by the social positioning of one's body, the desire to occupy such a position transcends demographic differences, such as gender and race. Further, it will argue that Butler's use of telepathy, specifically, as the medium of power within the *Patternist* series, utilizes and revitalizes Cartesian duality to explore the disciplinary measures, such as surveillance and normativity, which are highly complicit in the enforcement of power. The universality of the preference for power (and the inclination towards its abuse) will ultimately reveal the social constructionism upon which gender and race are built. Using Foucauldian Panopticism<sup>4</sup> as its central theoretical framework, this paper will contend that discipline, as enforced through surveillance and normativity (telepathy, within the context of the series), is instrumental to the creation, distribution, exertion, and abuse of power. Further, the application of postmodern feminism, as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir and refined by Judith Butler, will aid in the dismantling of essentialist doctrines and beliefs about existing mechanisms of power.

The existence of power will be examined within the forthcoming essay in two parts: namely through an examination of the ontology of power (which asks questions such as, does power exist? What it is? How does it function?), and of the social configurations through which it is exerted (asking questions like, how does the positioning of the body influence one's relation

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<sup>4</sup> See Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*

to power? How does power function through institutions?). From an ontological perspective, then, this essay will tackle the misrepresentation of power by unraveling the subversive bodies and disembodied minds represented through Butler's supernatural protagonists. Specifically, a discussion of Doro's eugenic project, the "mental leashes" which constitute the Pattern, and Butler's treatment of Cartesian mind/body duality, will demonstrate the artificiality of fixed identity and ultimately reveal the misrepresentation of power as an illusory strategy in maintaining the dominant hegemonic framework undergirding Western society.

With respect to the social configurations through which power is exerted, this essay will pursue two lines of inquiry, taking into account both the bodily inscriptions that determine agency (or lack, thereof) within society, and the means by which certain power relations become institutionalized, over time, into full-scale dogmas and discriminatory caste systems. On these counts, this will be accomplished through an analysis of the intersubjectivity phenomenologically experienced by Butler's body-swapping and self-transmuting characters, and through the examination of the caste systems governing Patternist society. Alongside both the axes of gender and race, Butler examines the composition and permutation of power as it influences symbolically governed bodies (male and female, black and white, etc.).

The *Patternmaster* series successfully examines the relationship between the embodied experience and the occupation of or resistance against power. Further, its exploration of disembodied exertions of power underscores the common human impulses that drive those from all stations to aspire toward its acquisition. While *Patternmaster* was written primarily during the late 1980s, the speculative fiction works of Octavia Butler have remained exceptionally relevant in both imagining speculative models of black existence and female power, and also in providing jarring studies of human nature, challenging assumptions and expectations about what it means

to be human. The *Patternmaster* series explores slavery, both in the historical sense, and through telepathy, in a more theoretical sense, to expose the corruption that often follows power and to explore the individual and collective factors that influence the human desire for power over others. As current social relations in the United States affirm, the battle for power between the races and sexes is anything but over. Claims that power is *not* inextricably tied to social perceptions of race and gender fail to comprehend the mechanics of power and the significance of the embodied experience in determining self-identity and seeking cultural belonging. Given the cultural studies focus of science and speculative fictions, Butler's work seems an ideal instrument for the discussion of power distribution and misuse in real, or speculative, society.

## SECTION I: THE ONTOLOGY OF POWER

Within the *Patternmaster* series, Butler explores ontology, or the study of being, at two distinct levels: the phenomenological and the ideological. Phenomenology, which will be the subject of further discussion in Section Two, can be described as, “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view... Literally, phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomena’: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience” (Smith). Given Butler’s propensity for utilizing varying narratological points of view across the narrative<sup>5</sup>, phenomenology, in the case of *Patternmaster* series, also encompasses intersubjective perspectives, as occasioned by her portrayal of versatile human bodies. Thus, the phenomenological deals in embodiment and is therefore a topic of conversation best suited to the discussion of bodily inscriptions in Section Two. At the ideological level, however, Butler addresses the ontology of the force or relation most commonly referred to as power. The ontology of the concept itself – power – is concerned with the existence of power and the nature of its being. Is it real? And if so, how do we define it? Of what substance or essence is it composed? In a trademark narrative strategy, Butler utilizes imagery of historical, social, and theoretical enslavement to shine a light on power and to define its functions.

### FOUCAULT, THE PANOPTICON, BIO-POWER, AND DISCIPLINE

The ontological nature of power is a subject of ongoing debate within the postmodern and postmodern feminist theoretical communities (if not so called), because the ability to utilize or, on the contrary, to be controlled by, the machinations of power is at the center of all theories

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<sup>5</sup> *Wild Seed* utilizes third person narration. *Mind of My Mind* utilizes the first-person perspectives of various characters. *Clay’s Ark* uses third person narration, but switches between the past and present. *Survivor*, like *MoMM*, uses alternating first-person narration. Lastly, *Patternmaster* returns to third person.



addressing oppression. By its very definition, oppression describes an “unjust [or cruel] or excessive exercise of power” (*Merriam-Webster*), and thus discourses concerning stifling social norms, the truths undergirding society’s operation, and the normative discourses that prescribe human existence are inextricably reliant on the notion that power, or at least its influence, is in some sense, ‘real.’

The discourses on power articulated by Michel Foucault find much common ground with the French feminists who would come to define the postmodern feminist movement and prove especially useful in assessing the *Patternist* series. At their core, Foucauldian discourses of power examine the punitive nature of society and ultimately conclude that power is inescapable, as it forms the very foundations of self-definition and subjectivity itself. Foucault’s view is clarified by his metaphor of the Panopticon<sup>6</sup>, the theoretical architectural design for a prison that utilizes surveillance and normalization to subjugate the prisoner. Describing a “large courtyard, with a tower in the center, surrounded by a series of buildings divided into levels and cells, the latter of which are illuminated by only two windows, one to bring in light, and one to provide a view for the surveyor,” Foucault establishes the effectiveness of the distribution of power through institutions and hegemonic practices (Rainbow 19). The effects of this orientation challenge the nature of power both ideologically and phenomenologically, as the text goes on to describe the inmate who is:

...not simply visible to the supervisor; he is visible to the supervisor alone-cut off from any contact. This new power is continuous and anonymous. Anyone could operate the architectural mechanisms as long as he was in the correct position, and anyone could be subjected to it... If the prisoner is never sure when he is being observed, he becomes his

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<sup>6</sup> Originally proposed by utilitarian English philosopher Jeremy Bentham.

own guardian... this machine is one in which everyone is caught, those who exercise this power as well as those who are subjected to it. (Rainbow 19)

The analogy of the Panopticon firmly characterizes power as a wholly relative and relational force, chiefly dependent on one's positioning within the system and enforced by the threat of discipline. This discussion of the relativistic nature of institutional power structures, which ultimately can be extended to our understanding of interpersonal power relationships on the micro scale, advances the overall discussion of the ontology of power. Within the *Patternmaster* series, the greatest conflicts between individuals *and* between castes can be assessed through this panoptical structure. The allegory articulates the effectiveness of such a design and the ease with which independent beings can become subjugated to these configurations of power, given their ambiguous and misleading misrepresentation.

Butler's characters experience this sort of 'anonymous' surveillance in the form of Doro, a four-thousand year old immortal whose consciousness can consume the essence of others, and in doing so, enables him to take on new physical forms. Doro appears in many bodies, signifying the irrelevance of the specific physical form in the ability to exercise (or abuse) power. He confirms as much, noting of "his people," scattered across the United States: "They know me...I am not the body I wear, Anyanwu" (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 31). From the outset, Doro asserts the facticity of his incorporeal existence, and in doing so, reinscribes the image of the Panopticon into the essence of his "soul." If the Panopticon is effective because it creates a state in which the powerless are controlled by the very fear of surveillance – the uncertainty of supervision and the ambiguous form of the supervisor – Doro's body-swapping functions as a similarly unsettling orientation, which ultimately emphasizes that power is a function of positioning, or relativity. As affirmed by Paul Rainbow in his treatment of Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, "The

exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Rainbow 189)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, while Doro lacks the telepathic abilities that he has nurtured in his descendants, his ability (and need) to take other bodies obscures his immediate presence. His “mental link,” which draws him to psychically gifted people, enables him to track, and thereby surveil, anyone that he desires.

Doro’s unique incorporeality directly demonstrates the dissociation between power and any one, specific body. In other words, Doro’s existence proves that power is not a trait arising from, or essential to, any specific type of physical body. While the physical body is the only medium through which we can experience and interact with the world, and is heavily implicated in determining which bodies may occupy positions of power, power does not emanate *from* physical bodies. Does this not then, we might ask, undermine the agency of the individual actor? In response, the specific importance of the powerful individual actor is ultimately materialized through Doro’s daughter, Mary, the “perfect” telepathic subject who represents the culmination of the former’s ongoing eugenic breeding program. Doro terrorizes “his people” through his uniquely incorporeal form, placing him in the elevated position of the central tower. But Mary, upon realizing her telepathic abilities, displaces Doro as the sovereign head of the Patternist legacy by mentally subjugating him within the Pattern (a network of connected telepathic minds instinctively created by Mary to unite the Patternist race and create unity between otherwise disjointed and mentally unstable individuals). By subordinating Doro to the Pattern, Mary places him within one of the cells looked down upon by the Panopticon’s central tower. During the

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<sup>7</sup> See “The Means of Correct Training” in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*

conclusion of *Mind of My Mind*, the narration reveals, “[Doro] was a member of the Pattern. A Patternist. Property. Mary’s property... She consumed him slowly, drinking in his terror and his life, drawing out her own pleasure, and laughing through his soundless screams” (Butler, *Seed to Harvest* 450-1). While Mary’s callous consumption of Doro may seem cruel or sadistic to those unfamiliar with the narrative, her victory is, in fact, a major turning point in the loci of power within the novel. Before her conquest, Doro succeeded in preventing his prisoners in the psychic Panopticon from toppling his position. But as the last installment of the series, *Patternmaster*,<sup>8</sup> implies, Mary’s ultimate usurpation reveals the power behind the Pattern (the power to bind and control others), and the impermanence of any one leader. Power is revealed to be a matter of perspective.

Thus, the ontological “definition” of power contends that it does exist, but chiefly as a relational force dependent upon social positioning. This fact does not negate its ontological certainty, but it does complicate our ability to comprehend its machinations. As articulated by Paul Rainbow within *The Foucault Reader*,

... microphysics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy; that its effects of domination are attributed not to "appropriation," but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle, rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege," acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions--an effect that is

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<sup>8</sup> Written first, but exploring a chronologically far distant future in the spectrum of the series.

manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.

(Rainbow 174)<sup>9</sup>

While Mary arguably ‘possesses’ power in her ownership of the Pattern, both she and Doro *exercise* power through the occupation of favorable social positions. In direct conversation with essentialist doctrines (namely, those beliefs that contextualize power as an attribute inherently emanating from any given body), Mary’s and Doro’s differing means of exercising power challenge assertions that men or women, African-Americans or Anglo-Saxons, are any more or less innately qualified to ‘hold’ positions of power, or innately more drawn to their allure.

Unsettling the notion of power as a privilege or attribute can often boil down to a semantic distinction (a concern encapsulated by the theory of social constructionism), with various scholars challenging the absolute relativity of social norms as posited by postmodernism (See Markova, 2000; Burke, 2008). But given the role of normativity in the exercise of power, particularly at the macro level, viewing the series through a Foucauldian lens illuminates the constructedness of social reality and summarily undermines claims that posit the objective existence of power outside of the context of human relations. To repudiate the essentialist thinking which views a given social reality for a given set of people as a function of certain innate traits, Butler presents characters who radically break established social modes, not only in their behavior, but also by virtue of their very existences. Where essentialist dialogues posit identities (powerful or powerless being among them) as “belonging” to the subject, instead of positioning them as costumes or roles that can be occupied, and which only take on meaning relative to one another, Butler counters with characters whose complex relationships between the

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<sup>9</sup> See “The Body of the Condemned”; from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*

self and the social directly contradict, on both the macro and micro scales, traditional subjectivity and socially constructed consciousness.

Also within the purview of power's nature, is the utilization of normativity as a disciplinary strategy within the panoptical framework. Within both *Mind of My Mind* and *Clay's Ark*, the desire to be normal – to belong – proves to be a self-regulating process to be attributed not only to “Society,” but also, to the individual process of self-definition. For instance, the desire to be considered human plays a large role in the disciplinary practices of both installments<sup>10</sup>. Revealing more of his back-story, Doro describes his intellectual journey of self-acceptance as a being deemed inhuman by the rest of society. Because his condition manifested during his transition, causing him to ‘jump’ to the bodies of the beings physically nearest to him (his mother and father), Doro first sees his abnormality as a punishment from God. He recalls, “I came to the conclusion that I was cursed, that I had offended the gods and was being punished. But after I had used my ability a few times deliberately and seen that I could have absolutely anything I wanted, I changed my mind. Decided that the gods had favored me by giving me power” (*MoMM, Seed to Harvest* 336). Thus, even Doro, the inhuman monster who savagely divests his victims of their bodies, can acknowledge a time during which he wanted to be normal. Individually, he comes to terms with his abnormality and comes to view it as an advantageous position to occupy. But despite his unfettered exercise of power up until Mary's conquest, he still desires belonging, the source of his impetus in creating a master race of his own. In the words of Judith Butler, “The citing of the dominant norm does not... displace that norm; rather, it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects” (J. Butler 389). Doro's complicated relationship with

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<sup>10</sup> While playing a lesser role in the other installments.

humanity evolves from one of ostracization, to one of sustenance, and finally, to one of control and dominance. But while he is able to suppress his desire for normativity, his ill treatment of the non-telepathic, in particular, betrays the remnants of his original feelings of alienation. He comes to use normativity, in turn, to subjugate the people he encounters, but his relationship with normativity echoes Butler's assertion. The dominant norm (originally humanity), is ultimately repudiated and replaced (by psychic ability), but is repeatedly reiterated in Doro's identification, even if temporary, with human subjects.

In a similar vein, the evolution of the Clayark race (the work of a parasitic alien organism) also depicts abnormal subjects as they wrestle with the machinations of normativity in their struggle to hold onto their humanity in *Clay's Ark*. Eli, patient zero of the Clayark disease, acknowledges the ways in which his desire to be normal often functions as the only barrier between himself and the animal-like behavior occasioned by the disease. "It tempted him by making nonhuman behavior pleasurable, but most of the time, it let him decide, let him choose to cling to as much of his humanity as he could" (*CA, Seed to Harvest* 513). Eli and the Clayarks do not necessarily wish to remain human because the human form is the most optimal for experiencing life. In fact, the enhanced senses, altered by the organism, qualitatively improve the abilities of the organic body. What Eli and the Clayarks are fighting goes beyond the innate snobbery associated with the exaltation of the human form. In the presence of other "normal humans," those who have been uninfected by the virus, their impulses seem all the more inhuman. The desire to preserve human characteristics lies in the desire to be considered normal within the subject's own ideological framework. Because the Clayarks, too, used to be regular people who, consciously or unconsciously, believed in the superiority of the human mind over the animal body (to be discussed further in the section on Cartesian dualism), the Clayarks, Eli

among them, have difficulty accepting their own animal urges as the “new normal.” “Normal” seems fixed for them, rendering them notably *abnormal* in the process. “There is a cost in every identification... the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but that we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely” (J. Butler 385). In the search for self-actualization and the quest for social belonging, normativity serves the same function as does the Panoptical design. By perpetuating the belief that “everyone is this way,” we create an Other that can be marginalized, divested of rights, and shamed into compliance.

While the allegory of the Panopticon is perhaps best used to describe the macro-functionings of power (at the institutional level), on the micro-scale (referred to as microphysics within *Rainbow*), it can be used to clarify one’s understanding of the role of embodiment in the existence and manifestation of power. The *Patternist* series explores power as a micro-force, negotiating the relationships between individuals through explorations of physical and mental slavery, and intersubjectivity constituted by the phenomenology of body-swapping and self-transmutation. Phenomenology, as stated earlier, focuses on lived experiences from the first-person point of view, and therefore deals heavily in discourses of body politics and the minutia of the embodied existence. The social meanings and hierarchies that categorize the embodied experience will be the focus of Section Two, but at the ontological level, we now turn from the existence of power to its nature, inquiring into the specifics of *how* it operates and why.

Butler uses the backdrop of American chattel slavery, and the wider practice in general, to explore the desire to occupy powerful positions on the part of both black and white actors. The examples presented by Doro’s forced eugenics project in *Wild Seed* and the “mental leashes” utilized by Mary in *Mind of My Mind* and Coransee in *Patternmaster*, demonstrate the invisible,



and yet substantial machinations of the force as both a physical and “spiritual” tool for coercion. Further, within the next sections, I will demonstrate how Butler utilizes manifestations of Cartesian ideology to explore power at the most intimate level, that which governs the supposed ascendancy of one part of the self over the other (usually mind and body, respectively).

#### EUGENICS, REPRODUCTIVE CONTROL, AND COMMUNITY POLICING AS POWER

Doro’s eugenic breeding program, a process initiated before the start of *Wild Seed* (which begins in the 1690s) and extending to its furthest incarnation in the far-future<sup>11</sup>, ultimately leads to the evolution of a new race of psychically gifted individuals called the Patternists. Their race is composed of two sorts of psychic subjects: actives, who, after a period of transition, come into their full psychic abilities, and latents, who are individuals born with psychic ability, but who lack the ability to control it. Thus, most latents (before entering the Pattern) are psychologically unstable, frequently hearing voices and struggling to integrate into “normal society.” While the Pattern itself ultimately succeeds (and ultimately necessitates Doro’s death), the politics by which Doro governed his settlements and his actions towards humans that were, first and foremost, breeding stock, supplies a highly physical example of power in action.

The manipulation of bodies through the policing of reproduction is a recurrent patriarchal trope which finds explanation in various psychological frames of reference. Most notably, from a psychoanalytic perspective, critics such as Eva Kittay explain the urge in terms of Oedipal dissonance as male “womb envy,” or the premise that “masculine flouting of phallic power is man’s compensatory move for the child which does not emerge from his own body” (Kittay 386). Proposed as a feminist response to Freud’s notably sexist views of female psychosexual

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<sup>11</sup> Despite its position as the first published installment of the series

development, Kittay's views inform a gendered understanding of reproductive desire. Doro is an interesting subject to contemplate through the lens of womb envy because of his variable identities as both male and female subjects. He notes within the series that he has given birth as a woman, but he clearly identifies most strongly with his role as the patriarch and progenitor of his psychic family. While gender primarily falls under the purview of power's social configurations, it bears mentioning at this point, as Doro's eugenic projects and mental controls demonstrate a physical and psychological assertion of power that seems to address his usurpation of the male and female generative roles. In the series prequel, *Wild Seed*, Doro demonstrates his knowledge of both colonialist and patriarchal enslavement techniques and the psychology of motherhood:

Doro followed, thinking that he had better get [Anyanwu] with a new child as quickly as he could. Her independence would vanish without a struggle. She would do whatever he asked then to keep her child safe. She was too valuable to kill, and if he abducted any of her descendants, she would no doubt goad him into killing her. But once she was isolated in America with an infant to care for, she would learn submissiveness. (*Seed to Harvest* 27)

Doro recognizes Anyanwu's independence as problematic and instinctively resorts to the tried and true technique of patriarchal oppression – control through maternal instincts. Doro knows that he cannot talk Anyanwu into obedience, but realizes that by getting her with child, he will restrict her options. Just as he repeatedly threatens the lives of Anyanwu's children throughout the narrative to curtail her migration, he plans to utilize the constraints imposed by pregnancy to force Anyanwu into submission. In line with Foucault's theories on the effectiveness of discipline as the instrument of oblique assertions of power, instead of asserting physical dominance over Anyanwu through rape, for example, Doro manipulates Anyanwu's desires and

sense of morality to place her in a compromised *position*. Thus, once again, we see positioning as the critical aspect of interpersonal relations that determines control, and thus power.

At the interpersonal level, then, Doro conscripts Anyanwu (as well as countless others) into his genetic breeding program, reserving for himself the exclusive right to choose who will mate and when, and the fate that will come to the children of those unions. Through the threat of discipline not only imposed upon Anyanwu but also to be visited upon her many, many children, Doro controls individual bodies through coercion and reproductive manipulation. On a larger scale, his genetic project represents the transition from disciplinary power to biopower, an amalgam of discipline and biopolitics. “Where discipline is about the control of individual bodies, biopolitics is about the control of entire populations” (Kelly). These two mechanisms of control, taken together, account for both the genesis of a new race (eugenics) and the structured behavior of its created subjects (totalitarian regime). But where most tyrannical dictators only concern themselves with biopolitics (delegating the process of discipline to those beneath them), Doro is intimately involved in both aspects of biopower, handling both the architectural oversight of his institution and the micromanagement of his subjects, personally. Both strategies attempt to manage behavior through subtle threats, inducements, and rhetorical devices and are grounded in the belief that people must be subjugated ‘for their own good.’

Juxtaposed to biopower is the (older) notion of sovereign power, “one that works essentially by violence and by taking, rather than by positively encouraging and producing as both discipline and biopolitics do... When discipline breaks down...the state continues to rely on brute force as a last resort. Moreover, the state continues to rely on brute force, and the threat of it, in dealing with what lies outside its borders” (Kelly). The conflict between biopower and sovereign power is frequently examined throughout the series, with Doro’s eugenics project and

breeding program perpetuating the illusion of a preference for the former against the background of a true preference for the latter. For instance, when Doro “allows” the expansion of the Patternist society in the series’ second installment, *Mind of My Mind*, he purposefully perpetuates the illusion that he controls Mary for her own good, and in doing so, reminds her that he is capable of granting or taking away her freedom. Presenting the Pattern (and their involuntary submission to it) to the “first family”<sup>12</sup> as an altruistic compromise, Doro informs them, “If you survive as a group, you won’t be only seven long. Your numbers are small because I have deliberately kept them small... If you can work together now, you can begin to grow slowly through your own children and through the latents scattered around the country... The seven of you can be the founders and the leaders of a new race...” (*MOMM, Seed to Harvest* 367). In the same breath that he offers the first family the privilege of beginning a new race, he reminds them that it only by his grace that they have even those small condolences. In these ways, he utilizes the rhetoric of persuasion to obscure his sovereign, totalitarian reign.

Still, this illusion of choice falls within the purview of biopower, insofar as it combines the discipline of individual bodies with the institutional magnification to control full systems:

The aim of disciplinary technology, whatever its institutional form-and it arose in a large number of different settings, such as workshops, schools, prisons, and hospitals-is to forge a ‘docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.’ This is done in several related ways: through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. (Rainbow 17)

Thus, Doro combines the creation of docile bodies and the creation of a telepathic race to control both the generation of and the conduct within his society. By assisting Mary in her domestication

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<sup>12</sup> First 7 members of the pattern, including Mary.

of the first family, Doro normalizes both the Pattern and Mary's rule, creating and solidifying a hierarchy of ownership from which Doro himself is ultimately ousted. The creation of a system through which Doro's values and ideals can be enforced without his direct interference expands the power he can exert in the short term but ultimately destabilizes his rule in the long term.

Power here exists in the decentralization of discipline and overt control and the normalization of the Pattern, both of which lead to the subjugation and institutionalization of telepathic subjects in society.

### *Mental Leashes: The Cost of Social Integration and Security*

As compared to the physical and conceptual control implemented by Doro through his genetic experimentation, Mary's creation of the "mental leashes" which define the Pattern provides a more metaphysical parallel. While on one hand, the mental leashes represent telepathic control that can kill, drain, influence, or subvert the will of the subject, on the other, they unite telepaths in a manner previously inconceivable. Because of the psychic sensitivity of most actives (and almost all latents), telepaths before the existence of the Pattern had difficulty interacting with others, especially others like themselves. So where these leashes infringe upon the will (and some might argue, the most intimate aspects of ourselves), they also provide a remedy to the loneliness and isolation so common to psychic entities. In other words, the series balances the desire to be independent with the desire to belong, and in no uncertain terms, establishes the tradeoffs between freedom and inclusion that demonstrate the presence of power at work.

As Mary first goes through her transition (a psychic pseudo-puberty), the period during which 'actives' come into the full force of their psychic abilities, she creates the first successful

Pattern, or neural network, which connects the thoughts and mental energies of various telepaths to one, central figure. As the Pattern comes together, she recognizes them as, "... a shifting pattern of light and color. I had brought them together somehow. Now I was holding them together – and they didn't want to be held. Their pattern went through kaleidoscopic changes in design as they tried to break free of me. They were bright, darting fragments of fear and surprise, like insects beating themselves against glass" (*MOMM, Seed to Harvest* 305-6). Mary's first awareness of the Pattern betrays none of her Doro-like enjoyment of power, but it does demonstrate her awareness of the ways in which she has 'captured' these powerful individuals through a psychic connection with their minds. Through Mary's unique ability (one to be inherited for generations to come) Butler presents a compelling challenge for readers who seek to locate power solely in the machinations of the mind or in the social positioning of the body. Because her mental linkage creates physical compulsions, is capable of extinguishing the lives of rogue telepaths, and enables her to draw from the mental 'life force' of those connected through the pattern, Mary's gift complicates the distinction between physical and mental compulsion – between the self-policing forms of discipline that rely on normativity and perspective and a manner of psychic 'possession,' in which one's free will is literally subverted by an invading force. She is able to, at once, subvert the will of her prisoners (a quality that Mary and Doro share) and also unite them to one another (a quality only she possesses).

As the telepaths lessen their resistance and begrudgingly settle into a group, however, Mary immediately reveals her feelings of ownership over those in the Pattern, a sensation that is seemingly part and parcel with the capacity to control the minds of others. She recognizes "that there was something really proprietary about [her] feelings towards them. As though [she] was supposed to have charge over them and they were supposed to accept [her]. But [she] also

realized that [she] had no idea how dangerous it might be for [her] to hold a group of experienced active telepaths on mental leashes. (*MoMM, Seed to Harvest* 306). Mary immediately conflates the ability to control others with the rightness of doing so, revealing the danger that power (be it physical, mental, or institutional) connotes. Mary's instinct to capture and order the minds of other active telepaths issues challenges to both notions of free will and the essential understanding of the self (echoing Cartesian dualism, which will be the topic of the next sub-section). As expertly articulated by Gregory Jerome Hampton in his monograph, *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires*, "Although the flesh is a large part of ones identity, the essence or non-physical elements mark the performance and agency of an individual's identity. Corporeal consciousness, then, becomes the necessary criterion to connote an identifiable body... Ultimately, the body can be thought of as a collection of consciousness and agency which helps begin a re-figuration of the self" (Hampton 129-30). Thus, if this "corporeal consciousness," so to speak, which defines individuals as complete and separate entities, suggests the necessity of agency in the assertion of personhood, Mary's intrusion serves to subjugate both minds and bodies through the creation of a Pattern which enables the holder to connect and manipulate subjects both mentally and physically.

What then, we might ask, is truly the difference between Mary and Doro? The father-daughter pair share an essential essence<sup>13</sup>, as revealed when the former finally kills the latter through coercing him into the Pattern. In his last moments, he sees Mary for what she truly is, lamenting, "She was power, strength concentrated as Doro had never felt it before... She was like a living creature of fire. Not human. No more human than he was... that body, like his own

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<sup>13</sup> Not to be understood as the promotion of gender essentialism, which posits that the behavior of the genders is determined by innate qualities, attributes, and behavioral differences in biological males and females. This "essential essence" refers to Doro and Mary's shared essence as non-human beings. While they both occupy human bodies, neither of them is truly tethered to any given body. They are both described as sources of energy.

series of bodies, was only a mask, a shell. He saw her now as she really was, and she might have been his twin” (*MOMM, Seed to Harvest* 448). Through this observation, their similarities in psychophysical composition are brought to light, and as she “consume[s] him slowly, drinking in his terror and his life, drawing out her own pleasure, and laughing through his soundless screams” (450-1), Butler suggests that Mary enjoys her triumph over Doro and the process of consuming him much in the same way Doro himself bred telepaths first and foremost, because they “tasted best.” Therefore, on the grounds of essence, the two are indistinguishable. Perhaps, then, their key difference can be attributed to the gendered presentation of ontology, which associates the masculine with the transcendent and the feminine with the embodied.

Doro’s “gifts” are presented as violent, consumptive, and aggressive, while Mary’s *raison d’être* lies in her ability to trigger the transition in latents and assimilate them into the Pattern. In other words, she consumes, but she also provides. Both Doro and Mary need to feed as parasitic entities, but while Doro is driven to expand his eugenic project primarily for his own ends (sustenance and subordinates), Mary attempts to help latents by giving them the gift of control over their own powers. These ‘healing abilities’ are primarily restricted to women within the series, and while offering a positive image of active female embodiment, still cling to essentialist notions that define the likes and desires of women based upon the perception of their gender’s ‘innate’ capacities. In the “Introduction” to her book, *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease*, Gay Alden Wilentz affirms such essentialism, tracing its roots to seventeenth-century Enlightenment and the rise of “Male Reason.” “In contemporary discourse on feminism, there is an underlying principle that women’s culture is nurturing, communal, and closer to the natural world than the world of men. Juxtaposed to this view... is a strong resistance to biological interpretations of gender categories: women as nature itself, somehow dominated



and subdued by the mind of man” (Wilentz 14). In other words, the Enlightenment posited a separation between mind and body, between organized human rationalism and chaotic “*Mother Nature*,” which aligned maleness with the faculties of intellect, rendering them intelligible, and femaleness with the natural and disorderly functions of the body, rendering them incoherent in the male view. While the healers in Butler’s Patternist series, and throughout her oeuvre as a whole, manage to survive primarily *because* of their adaptability, most notably their ability to regenerate or transform, she does not break radically free from the ontological presumption of male as mind and female as body – male as disembodied hunter and female as embodied healer.

Mary differs from the other healers in the series insofar as she can only influence a subject’s mental state, unlike Anyanwu, who can regrow limbs and organs, or Amber, the transient healer in *Patternmaster*, who can cure and kill effectively in equal measures. But her healing translates to symbiosis, where Doro’s will remain parasitic – where he only takes, Mary also gives. Butler scholars have taken notice of this unequal comparison, such as Algie Vincent Williams III, in his Dissertation, “Patterns In The Parables: Black Female Agency and Octavia Butler’s Construction Of Black Womanhood,” in which he observes, “Butler’s women are dynamic and difficult to place in a traditionally gendered matrix and, oftentimes, represent multiple, contradictory attributes. They are mothers and nurturers but they are also comfortable as hunters and murderers” (Williams 14). This binary serves to address and undermine such gender essentialism by blurring the conceptual boundaries between the social image of womanhood and its vast array of phenomenological experiences. Thus, while Butler does not shatter the patriarchal stereotypes governing womanhood, she does address them, and often subverts them. Mary’s desire for power, combined with her ‘healing’ ability, enables her to engage in a symbiotic relationship with the actives in the Pattern. The Pattern comes to be

defined by this symbiosis, a reciprocal form of power, and turns the tides of inheritance within *Patternmaster*.

If Mary is different from Doro not physically, but emotionally, capable of giving where he can only take, how, then, can one distinguish between their different applications of power? I posit that both characters struggle for a single seat within the central tower of the Panopticon, but where Mary also comforts the subjects of her observation, Doro takes in a manner often associated with male force – ruthlessly and without compassion. Both characters are equally power hungry, but it is through Butler’s application of both traditional and non-traditional female attributes that Mary’s parasitism appears more benevolent. “She enslaves many people, but, unlike Doro, lives in a symbiosis with them in a way Doro can never truly achieve... 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” (Jones 96). The moral relativism in play here attempts to soften the abhorrence of subverting free will by focusing instead on what is to be gained from its concession. Here Butler makes a compelling observation about the nature of society, power, and free will. If finding belonging and independently following one’s desires are represented as opposites, it stands to reason that for each gain in one arena, there will be a loss in the other. Most pertinently, the characters within *Mind of My Mind* gain the community, belonging, and security that they desperately desire, but at the cost of their privacy, and their radical free will (much like in the real world).

Mary charges for the comfort provided by the Pattern in energy and control of the Patternists, but her symbiosis does not negate her enjoyment of power. Such assertions conflict, however, with the opinions of scholars such as Ruth Salvaggio, who maintains that “Though Butler's heroines are dangerous and powerful women, their goal is not power. They are heroines

not because they conquer the world, but because they conquer the very notion of tyranny” (Salvaggio 81). While in some senses, Salvaggio’s interpretation of “woman conquering tyranny” in Butler’s work gains purchase, Mary’s innate gravitation towards the power signified by the Pattern undermines the belief that Butler’s women do not desire power as their goal. The desire for psychic power has more to do with physiology than gender, so while Doro occupied the role of the primary antagonist whose villainy provided the impetus to gain power, Mary herself is no less innately inclined to seek out and utilize positions of power for her own ends. On the first post-transition occasion upon which Mary allows her new husband Karl to examine her mind<sup>14</sup>, “He withdrew from [her] thoughts in disgust. ‘You also have some very Dorolike ideas,’ he said. ‘I don’t know how the others feel about it, Mary, but you don’t own me’... I couldn’t help the feeling of rightness that I had about the pattern – about the people in the pattern being my people” (*MoMM, Seed to Harvest* 309). She cannot help but feel that by placing her ‘leashes’ around the metaphysical necks of the active telepaths in her Pattern, she has taken possession of them and they resultantly, belong to her, proving that the position from which one can control others not only determines the use of power against others, but also the ownership of those whom one can control. This is reflected by the pseudo-feudal society present in the *Patternist* novel of the far-future, in which the ability to mentally domesticate others determines opportunities and caste.

Here, Mary’s character serves as a strong symbol of Cartesian dualism at work, because whereas Doro forces his ‘seed’ to mate and controls them through fear of death and for their children’s lives (primarily physical control), Mary ‘possesses’ her subjects through ‘ownership’

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14 Doro forces the white Karl and the black Mary into an arranged marriage, although Karl refuses to give up his mistress until Mary wins him over. When she passes through transition, she develops a mental shield that prevents others (aside from Doro) from entering her mind, and thus, must give Karl permission, post-transition, to access her thoughts.

of their minds. The ironic reversal of power structures (Doro, as pure consciousness, controls through physicality, and Mary, not yet revealed to be like Doro but typecast in the physical and feminine healer role, controls mentally) is perhaps what enables Mary to conquer Doro at last. While physical enslavement and discipline have always been effective means of keeping others under one's control, mental enslavement (malicious or not), which takes away the illusions of privacy, free will, and independent agency, is a much more effective tool of subordination. To reiterate a particularly salient point from *Rainbow*, "The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" (*Rainbow* 189<sup>15</sup>). Mary's mental leashes are the ultimate form of disciplinary observation, for while Doro instills the *fear* of observation in his subjects, Mary *is* observation incarnate, within the minds of her subjects. If anything, it would seem that in *Mary*, Butler explores mind-control as the ultimate mechanism through which power can be asserted.

Similarly, within *Patternmaster*, Coransee and Teray (two sons of the current Patternmaster, Rayal) compete for the inheritance of the Pattern and collide on similar grounds of mental privacy. The social systems governing the far-future Patternist society (to be discussed in depth in Section Two) play a large role in this arrangement, but nonetheless, as individuals, Coransee and Teray's final fight plays out, not on physical grounds, but on the mental battlefield, where one mind must dominate another to gain control of the Pattern. When debating submission to the "mental controls" of his elder brother that will physically prevent him from pursuing control of the Pattern, he tells his old mentor, "I can't do it Joachim. I wouldn't be able to live

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<sup>15</sup> See "The Means of Correct Training" from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*

with myself. A long leash is still a leash. And Coransee will still be at the other end of it, holding on” (*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 689). While Mary’s leashes seemed particularly egregious because she is a woman in a man’s world, Teray is still repulsed by the notion of giving up his mental freedom. If an unstoppable force meets an immovable object, the two must collide. When Beauvoir describes the process by which, “Two transcendences confront each other; instead of mutually recognizing each other, each freedom wants to dominate the other” (Beauvoir 754), she imagines a battle between the sexes – the female wishing to deny the male his transcendence. But in the environment created by the Pattern, one in which there must be only one Patternmaster at a time, no one voluntarily concedes the ability to awaken, “several thousand Patternists by exerting no more effort than another person might use to snap his fingers” (*Seed to Harvest* 629). When one mental force insists upon dominating the other, forcing the other into the panoptical cell, mutual destruction is assured (between males anyway):

With his last strength, Teray swept through the struggling Housemaster’s brain. Coransee had no defense now. He was completely occupied with his injury. Teray swept over him again and again, leaving himself no strength to keep his own body alive. He was killing both Coransee and himself... He realized... that he could not hold onto consciousness much longer. That he must do as much damage as he could while he could.

(*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 757)

Ironically, Teray only beats his stronger, elder brother in this battle of the brains because of his ability to heal, a skill nurtured by the healer Amber. Thus, Butler places the only means of attaining absolute dominance in “female” healing powers, suggesting, if not a tearing down of the tower in the Panopticon, a revolution of “female power” in its central tower.

Thus, throughout the entirety of the series, Butler utilizes unique narrative tropes to challenge assumptions on the way that power operates and exactly how the force itself is to be defined. Through a combination of mental and physical instances of oppression and the blurring of the line between both ‘poles,’ she reveals patriarchal stereotypes, linguistic fallacies, and power structures, which justify their supremacy with gender essentialism and phallogentric myth. It would seem that only through a combination of the “pure mind” of Doro and the “pure body” of Anyanwu’s genetic line, can the ideal telepath Mary subsume male power structures. And only through the incorporation of “female skills” does Teray conquer the psychically superior Coransee. The drive to occupy positions of power is thus revealed to be a trait common to humanity, superseding any artificial gendered ontology, and suggesting the need for an affinity between both body and mind to succeed in its ultimate and large-scale enforcement.

#### THE CARTESIAN SUBJECT: THE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE MIND AND THE BODY

The question still remains, however, of whether or not the mind and the body are truly separate entities, metaphysically, psychically, or otherwise. The *Patternist* series suggests a conflicted answer – both yes and no – as it battles with the Doro/Anyanwu generative myth in *Wild Seed* on one hand, and the ghost-in-the-machine, Mary, and her complex powers, in *Mind of My Mind*, on the other. If the two can be distinguished from one another, two crises arise: the external (and collective) subjugation that attempts to privilege the “male” mind over the “female” body, and the internal (individual) conflict which addresses humanity’s animal nature, and privileges the “power” of the rational mind to subvert the instinctual desires of the animal body. Because of Mary’s and Doro’s circumstances, in particular, they are not the ideal subjects for reflection on dualism within the individual. Their existences, by their very natures (symbiotic

and parasitic, respectively) complicate our definitions of power and our strategies for positioning ourselves to best utilize it. The Clayarks, however, as first the survivors of an alien bacteria (within *Clay's Ark*) and later, the descendants of the infected, who have inherited traditionally animalistic phenotypical and behavioral traits (most notably in *Patternmaster* and *Survivor*), provide the perfect specimen for the examination of Cartesian duality as it was imagined in the era of René Descartes, for whom the concept was named. Positing the mind as consciousness, and therefore, non-physical, Cartesian dualism suggests a difference in substance and nature between mind and body, and under the Derridean view of deconstruction theory, favors the power of the rational mind (to be associated with maleness) over the instinctual and natural urges of the body (associated with femaleness).

During the seventeenth century, European philosophers began to distinguish between and prefer the “cultured” and restrained nature of the rational mind over the chaotic and “savage” nature of the physical body. Later, in the nineteenth century, during the English Victorian era, the idea was revisited scientifically, from the perspective of social Darwinism, and literarily in the form of early science fictions, such as *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) by H.G. Wells, or the gothic *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), by Robert Louis Stevenson. In all cases, the primacy (or lack thereof) of man’s animal nature called into question the authenticity of society, and all of the assumptions implicated by its social and moral dictates:

... [S]ocial Darwinism can employ racial hierarchies to mitigate anxieties about human corporeality— anxieties fostered by the theory of evolution. Darwin toppled "man" from his Adamic role as master of the animals by stressing the striking similarities and the kinship between humans and other primates. Perhaps the perceived indignity of having

fallen to the level of other life forms motivated some middle- to upper- class white Americans to insist upon a hierarchical chain of being in which Native Americans and African Americans occupy the lowest rung. In order to ease their anxieties about being related to a nature they assumed they had risen above, whites interposed the "lower races" to serve as a border zone between WASPs and a debased nature. Social Darwinism, then, takes the Cartesian hierarchy between mind and body and stretches it into a racist and anthropocentric scale, in part by imagining that evolution is teleological. (Alaimo 49)<sup>16</sup>

While Alaimo addresses American history, the attitudes represented by the "middle-to-upper-class whites" of which she speaks serve as a mirror image of British attitudes towards indigenous peoples during their continued Imperial domination. Thus, be it through racialization, or in the case of the Clayarks, animalism, the dominant hegemonic structure frames the "Other," whose differences *and* similarities inspire fear in the patriarchal (or Patternist) subject. They are perceived as lesser – less capable, less intelligent, less 'civilized,' and thereby easier to justify killing. After all, "Humans are those to whom we owe an ethical duty, whom we recognize as kin in Derrida's terms, and animals are those outside this logic, able to be sacrificed as food, used as resource" (Vint 294-5)<sup>17</sup>. Here we see the ways in which hierarchy between binary oppositions is implemented interpersonally and intrapersonally. If one can dehumanize the Other, ethical obligations become unclear.

From the perspective of power, then, we move from the collective and interpersonal images of the Panopticon, which theorize the control of populations and the manipulation of individuals, to a discussion of internal agency and subjectivity, which posits that the 'cultured' actions of the rational mind can and *must* overcome the 'savage' instincts of the animal body for

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<sup>16</sup> See Alaimo, *Displacing Darwin and Descartes*.

<sup>17</sup> See Vint "Becoming the Animal Other".



man to survive. The nature of Social Constructionism, or the artificial creation of society which both receives and imposes its dictates from/upon the people, will be the subject of Section Two. But in view of Cartesian dualism, the savage/civilized binary warrants additional reflection. In the series' third installment, *Clay's Ark*, Butler introduces the entities for whom the novel is named, the Clayarks. As compared to the purposeful and painstaking evolution of the Patternists, the Clayarks arose as the result of a pandemic, an alien microorganism that hijacks the impulse control centers of the brain and usurps any claims to civilization through its relentless drive to reproduce itself in the bodies of healthy (non-Patternist) humans. Patient zero, the sole survivor of a spacecraft returning from another world, is identified as Asa Elias Doyle (hereafter called Eli), a scientist who could not resist the biological compulsion to survive:

To give himself up would be an act of self-destruction. He would be confined, isolated. He would be prevented from doing the one thing he must do: seeking out new hosts for the alien microorganisms that had made themselves such fundamental parts of his body. Their purpose was now his purpose, and their only purpose was to survive and multiply. All his increased strength, speed, coordination, and sensory ability was to keep him alive and mobile, able to find new hosts or beget them. Many hosts. Perhaps three out of four of those found would die, but that magical fourth was worth any amount of trouble. The organisms were not intelligent. They could not tell him how to keep himself alive, free, and able to find new hosts. But they became intensely uncomfortable if he did not, and their discomfort was his discomfort. He might interpret what they made him feel as pleasure when he did what was necessary, desirable, essential; or as pain when he tried to do what was terrifying, self-destructive, impossible. But what he was actually feeling

were secondhand advance-retreat responses of millions of tiny symbionts. (*CA, Seed to Harvest* 451)

Eli is consumed by the organisms' biological compulsion, and finds himself unable to take actions that might save the planet but would subvert their mission. Thus, as he acknowledges the mindless physicality of the alien beings, and their separation from the rational part of his brain (he must use his reason and survival instincts to reproduce), he also draws attention to his 'degradation,' or regression back into a less civilized form of man driven by impulse before ethics or performance.

The power to control his animal instincts is the quality that sets Eli apart from his infected posse and renders him indispensable to the mission of retaining some semblance of humanity. Through sheer force of will, and by the ethical and normative standards established by society, Eli manages to rein in the urges of his crew and keep the carnage to an absolute minimum. He uses his human logic to determine the best means of acquiring necessary prey (especially in reference to sexual partners), serving as an amalgam of human reason (here defined as sentience and ethical understanding) and animal instinct. When forced to kidnap the Maslin family, a healthy source of prey, the infected crew returns to the Clayark enclave (more like a den), where they explain the nature of their bizarre condition<sup>18</sup>. Meda, Eli's infected partner imparts, "Eli says we're holding on to our humanity by our fingernails. I'm not sure we're holding on to it at all. In some ways, I'm more realistic than he is. But maybe we need a little of his idealism...He helps us hold on even if all we're holding on to is an illusion. Take away that illusion and what's left is something you wouldn't want to deal with. You'll see" (*Seed to Harvest* 497). Here Eli is framed as the most powerful, both as the leader of the group and the one with

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<sup>18</sup> The symptoms of Clayark disease most notably include a wasted appearance and sallow skin.

the most ‘human restraint’ left, which he frequently demonstrates through resistance against impulses that strike him as animal. The narration imparts, “It tempted him by making nonhuman behavior pleasurable, but most of the time, it let him decide, let him choose to cling to as much of his humanity as he could. Though certain drives at certain times inevitably went out of control” (*CA, Seed to Harvest* 513). Thus, while Eli is certainly the most powerful individual within the Clayark commune, he acknowledges his personal enslavement to the will of the organisms. Far from helping him hold onto his humanity, while the organisms do not intentionally seek to destroy it, they also have no impetus to help him retain it. In a symbiotic relationship reminiscent of Mary and her Patternists, the organisms reward Eli’s animal instincts, making them harder to resist. But the observation that the organism “lets him decide” (most of the time) most clearly remarks upon his subjugation.

Most notably related to the theories of Deluze and Guattari, such a battle seems to fall in line with the rhetoric of Drives more than it does Power (capital P). Based upon the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan, the theory of drives asserts that desire (i.e. compulsion) arises from the assumption of the subject position at the mirror stage of development, when one displaces and represses pre-Oedipal urges to enter into the symbolic order of discourse and self-identification:

Drives...are conventions used to account for behaviour that cannot be explained by the observable evidence, nor by any conscious or unconscious aims or interests that might plausibly be attributed to a reflective subject, behaviour that suggests instead hidden and internal forces of compulsion.

Every drive seeks only discharge, release onto some object or other, though each also competes with innumerable other drives whose discharges may or may not be

compatible with it. Their force is ever present, and decidedly amoral: as Nietzsche maintains, ‘In itself it [a drive] has...neither this moral character nor any moral character at all, nor even a definite attendant sensation of pleasure or displeasure: it acquires all this, as its second nature, only when it enters into relations with drives already baptised good or evil or is noted as a quality of beings the people has already evaluated and determined in a moral sense.’ Drives thus receive their meaning from the dominant moral sense of the society in which they are expressed. (Widder)

In endeavoring to master his drives (unconscious compulsions), Eli attempts to assert power over his body with the resolve of his mind. But as his earlier acknowledgement suggests, Eli is ultimately a slave to the whims of the organisms’ drives. Presumably, it is only by the grace of the unconscious animal mind of the alien organisms that Eli retains a sense of freedom.

Regardless of the power that he may hold within (his) society, he is subject to the whims of his body, suggesting both an alternate definition of subjugation, and a decided dominance of the body over the mind. “‘There are two meanings of the word subject,’ Foucault writes, ‘subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’” (Rainbow 21). In Foucault’s view, the act of occupying the subject position *subjugates* – a linguistic certainty that is often symbolically misinterpreted. Eli becomes both subject to the control of another and the self-subjugating subject, as his very narration attests to the latter.

Eli recognizes himself, and therefore becomes a subject in his own mind, fixed to ontological identification with the mind as consciousness. Meanwhile, the organism subverts his will, subjugating him to the animal instinct that drives evolution – reproduction. He recognizes this conflict in action, once noting, “He found any feeling that would have been repugnant before

his illness, but that was now attractive, to be suspect. He would not give the organism another fragment of himself, of his humanity... He would make a colony, an enclave on the ranch. A human gathering, not a herd” (*Seed to Harvest* 529), but his will does not always win out. This internal struggle, seated at the epicenter of Cartesian dualism and Western rationalism, defines man’s inherent paradox as a civilized being. Butler utilizes the Patternist series to explore various permutations of this battle, creating a mind-centric Patternist society and an instinct-centered Clayark society, which ultimately evolve into two warring factions fighting the same battle at the macro level. The Clayark disease serves as a perfect specimen of dualistic thought which attempts to challenge the strength of the mind when matched against unconscious compulsions of the body.

Associated with the original Clayarks are the Clayark race, the children of two infected parents that resemble animals as much as they resemble humans. As Meda explains her son’s appearance, she describes a “Disease-induced mutation. Every child born to them after they get the disease is mutated that way... Jacob’s beautiful, really... The way he moves- catlike, smooth, graceful, very fast. And he’s as bright as or brighter than any other kid his age” (*Seed to Harvest* 512). As a starker evolution of the original Clayark’s disease paradox, their children bare the indistinguishable “Mark of the Beast,” a common concept in the era of physiognomy, or the study of disposition based upon appearance. Jacob is described as a startlingly beautiful quadruped with half animal, half human characteristics. But the social influence of humanity has clearly played a large role in his subjectivity. When Rane (one of the kidnapped Maslin’s) asks if he can walk on his hind legs by themselves, Meda responds, “Not so well... He sometimes tries because we all do, but it’s not natural to him. He gets tired, even sore if he keeps at it. And it’s too slow for him. You like to move fast, don’t you, niño?” (*Seed to Harvest* 523). Jacob was born

and raised in the Clayark enclave and yet his desire to seem like everyone else encourages him to walk ‘like a human,’ even though it is less effective and more painful than his natural, cat-like gait. The Clayarks’ desire to maintain their humanity enforces a manner of normativity that, unconsciously or not, contradicts the biological evolution of the species.

The art of punishing, in the regime of disciplinary power traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal... The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault 195<sup>19</sup>).

If punishment is understood as the action that enforces discipline, then normativity is the ‘action’ that enforces conformity. While run-of-the-mill humanity is not objectively better than psychic ability or superhuman strength, the normative (punitive) power of “Adamic” humanity disciplines bodies into recognizable forms, identifications, and behaviors. Normalization is key to the existence of institutional power, as it aids in the creation of the status quo. It is the ultimate expression of Western rationalism, as it posits that the reasoning mind can dominate the animal body. It seems that even on the interpersonal level, normativity is what keeps humanity in line. While Eli and Meda do not actively discipline or scold Jacob for his inhumanity, the normativity existing within the community makes him aware of his otherness. Still, in yet another of Butler’s brilliant narrative strategies, she endows Jacob, and the rest of the Clayark children, with speed, strength, and most importantly, mental resistance to the Patternists. While complicating the mind/body split between the Patternists and the Clayarks, this paradox enables evolutionary

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<sup>19</sup> See “The Means of Correct Training” from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*

survival. Thus Butler seems to be suggesting that evolutionarily, the most powerful position is one of adaptability. Fixity is a liability.

To justify the creation of Clayark children and the continued infection of healthy non-Patternists, Meda argues, “Eli says we’re preserving humanity. I agree with him. We are. Our own humanity and everyone else’s because we let people alone” (*Seed to Harvest* 525). Moral relativism aside, Meda constructs a larger Clayark battle (in addition to the individual, internal battle) which pits the illusion of humanity, maintained through ritual and symbolism, against the dark reality of animal instinct. And unfortunately, the latter eventually wins out. As with the case of *Dr. Moreau*, the Clayarks ‘revert’ to an animal state (both mentally and physically), which over time, truly separates them from the humans they used to be.<sup>20</sup> Thus Jacob’s very existence further complicates the presence of Cartesian dualism within the series, as the Clayarks represent the loss of man’s “rational nature,” shedding their humanity but retaining their personhood. The purpose of Cartesian thought reveals itself to be a massive inferiority complex on the part of humanity, which needed to assert its dominance over nature. Unable to do that in the face of Darwinism, the European subject turned inwards to conquer nature, and in doing so, succeeded in creating an “animal Other” that is ethically easier to dominate, both within the self and within that Other. “Cartesian thought defines nonhuman nature as that which is devoid of mind or intention, so that humans can fashion themselves as the only creatures endowed with ‘reason’ and, moreover, to justify reason’s unchecked use, alteration, and even destruction of nonhuman nature” (Alaimo 127). Thus, taking the symbolic role of European rationalism, Patternist society declares war upon the instinctual and threatening presence of the Clayarks. As time progresses,

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<sup>20</sup> In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, the subjects are animals vivisected into human form (physically and mentally) but who, left uncontrolled, revert back to instinct and discard ethics. Ethics are the province of the rational mind, it would seem. The difference in Butler’s narrative is the origin of the subjects as traditional humans, but the result is the same: social degeneration. (See Wells)

the children of the Clayark's disease survivors evolve (or devolve, depending on how we value animal consciousness) into beings defined by this struggle. Represented as little more than rabid dogs by the time of the *Patternist* novel itself, we learn that "Clayarks consumed Patternist flesh to show, symbolically, how they meant someday to consume the entire race of Patternists" (*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 679). This genetic war, one of the hallmarks of the series, once again locates power in positioning and suggests that it is mankind's refusal to give up the mantle of humanity that ultimately enslaves us to one another.

The *Clay's Ark* installment of the *Patternmaster* series questions whether it is the body that defines humanity or the mind. If one can control the mind, one can control the body, and so in the most fundamental sense, the mind is more powerful. But at the edges of restraint and instinct, restriction and indulgence, are the blurred lines which hold the two antitheses at bay. If we grant that the mind and the body might be different entities, then the question of dominance and submission necessarily arises. In our dualistic Western society, concepts are defined by their "opposites," a patriarchal strategy which obscures the true nature of reality through relativity. But if there are, indeed, two forces acting upon one another and battling for supremacy over "control," power must "exist" on the intrapersonal level as well. It manifests in this context as 'willpower.' The ability to control one's animal urges (if we grant that humans do this because civility is in our best interest, and not because of the normative disciplinary measures in place within society) suggests an exertion of power, or ability to control, over not only the functions of the body, but also the desires of the body. Sensation and reason become opposing phenomenological experiences as well, implying a fragmented subject at war with itself over primacy and determined to retain both contradictory halves. *Patternmaster* reflects the ultimate outcome of this paradox in a manner recalling the Eloi and the Morlocks of Wells's *The Time*



*Machine*. While true freedom is an illusion, power is not, and the metaphorical reigns of power prove to determine the evolution of mankind.

On both macro and micro scales, then, the access to and assertion of power is relative to the symbolic order governing the social world. Be it through the classist labor divide dramatized by the underground-dwelling Morlocks (the evolutionary progeny of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century working class) and the docile, defenseless Eloi (the evolutionary progeny of the idle rich) in Wells, or the creation of a caste system which uses psychic ability to determine worth in Butler, power, at the micro and macro levels reflects a discourse of social values, normativity, and socially constructed systems of power. While surveillance, normativity, and the threat of annihilation work at both levels, the intrapersonal exertions of power demonstrated within the series address ideologies reliant on Cartesian dualism through a series of mental and physical acts of aggression and accommodation.

## SECTION II: THE SOCIAL CONFIGURATION(S) OF POWER

The previous section took up the ontology of power as its subject, utilizing a reading of Butler's *Patternist* series to underscore the universality of the desire to occupy positions of power. Emphasizing the relativistic nature of power and its essence as a relational force, most effectively utilized from various positions of surveillance and through resistance against physical compulsion, it briefly touched upon the social contexts that define the agency of our bodies and minds within patriarchal systems. In this section, we turn to mechanics of those systems by examining the socially constructed nature of society (otherwise known as social constructionism):

The term *social construction* is used by contemporary scholars to explain how norms that are taken for granted as natural or objectively true are often—at least partially—socially and culturally constructed... A social constructionist framework can enable scholars to explore the idea that individual and group identity positions, such as gender, ethnicity, and race, are built within a structure of social relations rather than biologically determined” (Mercadal).

Within the *Patternist* series, Butler's unconventional protagonists serve to emphasize the relativity of identity. In the midst of her body-swappers, telepaths, and self-transmuting priestesses, the biological “facticity” of identity is entirely undermined, and self-identification is represented as a process of internalizing standards established by society, wholly unrelated to biological inclination. Thus, social constructionism revolves around the premise that our understanding of, in fact, our belief in, an “objective reality,” is merely an artificial construct projected from the human collective unconscious back into the individual psyche. In other words, we create the very boundaries that control us.

In conversation with power, social constructionism can be viewed as the means by which we might free ourselves from essentialist forms of self-definition. Quoting the words of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their hallmark book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Time Barrow describes the process by which an individual, entering into symbolic society and thus, the already symbolically governed and institutionalized world, pregnant with meaning, experiences ‘externalization’, ‘objectivation’, and ‘internalization’ along the road towards identity formation. Through these processes, the individual subject experiences the world “as an objective reality,” in which “humans create a world that they later experience as something other than human-made.” In the third step, internalization, we find the aspect of social constructionism most relevant to our exploration of power. Barrow describes, “...the third moment, ‘by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization’<sup>21</sup> (Barrow). In other words, at the point of internalization, the individual subject ascribes personal meaning (and often, mistakenly, essential characteristics) to the meanings their bodies are given by the context of the outside world. It is one’s relationship with power then – their social and contextual positioning within society’s governing structures – which offers or denies them access to the central tower of the Panopticon. Butler’s work explores the socially constructed nature of self-identification, particularly in relation to the sensation of powerfulness or powerlessness, positing that it is this internalization, described by Berger and Luckmann, that most truly defines our ability to effectively ‘wield’ power and to envision ourselves as empowered, embodied subjects.

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<sup>21</sup> Berger, Peter L., Thomas Luckmann, and Texas Tech University. Institute for Studies in Pragmaticism. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Anchor Book. New York: Doubleday, 1967. pp. 61

## SOCIAL PRESCRIPTIONS ON THE BODY

The *Patternist* series makes use of the science and speculative fiction tropes of body-swapping (transferring consciousness, intact, from one human “shell” to the next) and self-transmutation (the ability to, by will, knowledge, or intuition, modify one’s internal and/or external structures to assume a different essence/image) to explore the ways in which internalized “power relations,” far from objective fact, determine the views that we hold about ourselves. To address the latter first, Anyanwu, the three-hundred year old Igbo priestess (later referred to as “Emma” in *MoMM*) represents the elasticity of the mind, body, and soul, as she holds onto some fragments of traditional gendered and racial ideologies while rejecting others. For instance, as Anyanwu leaves the African coast as Doro’s unofficial new wife, he reminds her of her “place” as both a powerful source of ‘wild seed’ (and female generative power) and still, as his property:

ANYANWU. I could not live in a place where being myself would mean being thought a slave.

DORO. Nonsense...You are a powerful woman. You could live in any place I chose.

*She looked at him quickly to see whether he was laughing at her—speaking of her power and at the same time reminding her of his own power to control her.*

(*MoMM, Seed to Harvest* 90)

Because Anyanwu submits to Doro’s hierarchically superior role as her husband within both the tribal and Western patriarchal frameworks, her power is always to be defined by her inferiority to Doro, or her subservience to him, despite her superior gifts. In her “Introduction” to Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Judith Thurman contends, “A man’s body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of the woman, whereas the woman’s body seems devoid of meaning without reference

to the male” (6). Thus, in the patriarchal mode, a powerful woman is still subjugated by powerful men. While Doro uses “traditionally male” modes of discipline to control her (reproductive manipulation and threatening her progeny), his ability to maintain sovereignty lies in Anyanwu’s acceptance of his “thoroughly male” consciousness, and his physical ability to obliterate the life force of others. While the latter imperative taps into the biological fight or flight reflex, the former is entirely fictitious, especially in the case of Doro, who is actually capable of occupying female bodies as well as male ones. Thus, the question of “maleness” in his consciousness is a matter of perspective. He views himself as male, his subjects view him as male, and so they accept his symbolic role of the patriarch once they recognize him, regardless of the gender or color of the body he invades. His subjects concede power to the consumptive male shadow in the panoptical tower, as he exercises power once again through the threat of oblivion from his socially supported pedestal. It becomes not only a question of gendered ontology, but also one of the social contexts that establish woman as man’s counterpart, defined by her relation to and “complimentary” relationship with the male subject.

The woman’s inferior place within patriarchal frameworks is a longstanding tradition, largely responsible for the restrictive natures of marriage and motherhood. Even in our earliest introductions to Anyanwu, we see that she has learned as much already: “She knew some people were masters and some people were slaves. That was the way it had always been. But her own experience had taught her to hate slavery. She had even found it difficult to be a good wife in her most recent years because of the way a woman must bow her head and be subject to her husband” (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 11). This acknowledgement of the way things “must be” and “have always been” reveals Anyanwu’s internalization of the pre-existing, normative status quo (men rule and women submit), even if she does not believe in the assumptions it enacts. In other

words, Anyanwu accepts that when she plays the role of wife and mother, she *must* do these things, even if she is truly the stronger or smarter partner in the union. As noted by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, “Always already a cultural sign, the body sets limits to the imaginary meanings that it occasions, but is never free of an imaginary construction” (J. Butler 71). Thus, because the body is never culturally “neutral,” by playing within the existing frameworks of phallogentric thought, Anyanwu “must” accept the “imaginary meanings” that they suggest, allowing others to control her because of the position she occupies *within the social framework*.

As an individual consciousness, Anyanwu submits to no one, but as a woman, she submits to men. This view directly contradicts Hampton’s position when he argues that “Butler’s fiction suggests that the body can be interpreted as a blank canvas waiting for experiences to be painted on it, which give it form and meaning” (25). Always already gendered and racialized upon entrance into the symbolic order, the body can never be a “blank canvas.” I argue that Butler offers Anyanwu and Doro a speculative means of experiencing alternate subjectivities without conceding the view of social constructionism, which contends that individual identity is determined by the positioning of the body, a body which is normally inescapable. To take that further in the context of power, embodied existence (for most people a fixed, ontological viewpoint) consigns the individual subject to the immediate and perpetual consequences of embodiment. Because regular individuals (non-telepaths, for instance) can never experience life through any other modality, they are irrevocably changed by the cultural meanings internalized as intrinsic attributes of various gender roles and racial characterizations.

The woman’s place within patriarchal society is perpetually restrictive, a dictate which necessarily extends to the policing of gender performance, as one considers the vast array of

strategies and techniques implemented to “control female sexuality.” As someone who can assume the form of an animal or a human of either gender or any race, many of the narrative observations describing Anyanwu’s internality suggest her commitment to social performances alongside her loyalty to private agency. After many years of freedom from Doro’s regime, he finds her and quickly attempts to take over her miniature settlement.

Anyanwu dressed quickly and casually as a man. She kept her body womanly—she wanted to be herself when she faced Doro—but after the easy unclothed freedom of the dog body, she could not have stood the layers of tight clothing women were expected to wear. The male clothing accented her womanliness anyway. No one had ever seen her this way and mistaken her for a man or boy. (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 189).

Here, Anyanwu separates social roles and expectations from their function or purpose, noting that female clothes are not restrictive so that men can recognize women: female clothes are restrictive so that men can objectify women and advance essentialist dogmas of female propriety and virtue. They are a form of discipline to be used by those occupying the male position of power. “Discipline is not, Foucault argues, a relation of servitude in which the subject submits to a visible monarch or master, but is rather a subtle, even invisible form of power that coerces the body at a mechanistic level. It is an analytic power: it works the body in its parts, details, joints, and units - "retail" rather than "wholesale" - in order to control its "movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity<sup>22</sup>" (Hass 62). The process of getting women to accept restrictive clothing, one still in practice today, is a process conducted through illusion, suggestion, and essentialism, one which counts on female submission to the supposed wisdom and propriety of the patriarchal establishment. Whereas the tyrannical dominance experienced under Doro’s direct

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<sup>22</sup> *Discipline and Punish*, pg. 137

control/supervision is overtly oppressive, Anyanwu only truly recognizes the arbitrary dictates governing women's bodies by occupying the bodies of man and beast.

Anyanwu is most "herself" in her "true" womanly form, however, implying that her altered forms are mimetic, even adaptive, but never completely authentic. While her perspective, drives, and priorities change depending upon her physical circumstances, the attributes and values that compose her consciousness, for the most part, remain unchanged by her shell. If a subject is defined by different drives and social positions through occupying different bodies, how can it be bound to the rules of one group or the other past its occupation of said body? How can it be objectively necessary for men and women to wear different clothes, the vestments of the latter group being much less comfortable and much more performative than those of the former? *Objectively*, it not necessary at all. In such a manner, Anyanwu reveals the entirely relativistic and constructed nature of social reality, understanding and accepting the dictates of many of her roles without buying into the "necessary conclusions" about her worth and status to be drawn from their requirements.

Anyanwu's meditations on the clothing of women also provide another critical insight into our understanding of embodied existence. Her womanly body is *central* to who she truly is, giving added significance to her roles as wife and mother. While the category of woman does not signify weakness, passivity, gullibility, or fragility to Anyanwu, she is not merely an asexual consciousness in a gendered body. Perhaps it is because of her healing abilities, which prove so essential to her self-definition and keep her tied to her 'original' female form, but Anyanwu's identity seems to be irrevocably tied to her "core appearance," which defines her first and foremost, as a black woman. Thus, it troubles her to discover that like many of the white people who control black bodies within the slave trade, time spent within a white body begins to erode



her sensitivity to injustice and the abuse of power. "I bought him in New Orleans because as he walked past me in chains on his way to the slave pens, he called to me. He said, 'Anyanwu! Does that white skin cover your eyes too?' I was not seeing the slaves in front of me. I would not have thought I could be oblivious to such a thing. I had been white for too long. I needed someone to say what he said to me" (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 191). Thus, despite her strong identification with her original form, and her strong resistance against essentialism, she too is susceptible to the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization that govern the creation of a pseudo-stable identity. As a white person, she no longer *sees* the injustice of slavery in a visceral manner, as she has become accustomed to being treated like the normative white subject. To awaken her subjective viewpoint as a black woman, she must be reminded that most subjects in black bodies cannot escape their treatment as objects and chattel. Thus, this interaction with a distant family member reminds Anyanwu of her race, her narrower subjective standpoint, suggesting that while family offers companionship and solace, they, like gender norms, also serve as another normative, restrictive, body through which subjectivity is limited.

Interestingly, Anyanwu gains power through certain "traditionally female" means, occupying the panoptical position only through her overwhelming control of her physical body and her affinity with nature. In particular, Anyanwu's ability to take the shape of animals presents a significant challenge to Doro's control. "Anyanwu had too much power...He inhabited bodies. He consumed lives. That was all...In her human shape, she was as vulnerable to him as anyone else, but as an animal, she was beyond him as animals had always been beyond him" (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 84). This revelation, which later reoccurs in the Clayark immunity to Patternist mind reading, opens up a space for agency in an otherwise "diminished" capacity (for most human beings). While Anyanwu is a slave to Doro's whims while she is in human form,

she is free from him as an animal. Established alongside the historical legacy of chattel slavery, Butler reinscribes the generally demoralizing characterization as animal with new positive meaning.

On the whole, animals are often considered to be less evolved, and therefore, less important than humans, but Anyanwu's ability to escape in animal form points to a freedom that they possess which humans lack – freedom from social constructs. Just as mankind tends to underestimate animals, and men tend to underestimate women, Doro underestimates the adaptability of Anyanwu's body and fails to recognize it as a possible site of liberation. "[Man] considers a woman's body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it" (Thurman 5)<sup>23</sup>. Thus, while Doro recognizes Anyanwu as "good seed," he cannot see the supremacy of her physical gifts over his mental ones, once again reinforcing patriarchal insistence on seventeenth-century European rationalism. If the mind is always stronger than the body, then Doro will always reign supreme. But his miscalculation allows Anyanwu to flee from him for several decades, offering her freedom through her capitulation to a "less human" form. In an area where I happen to agree with Salvaggio, she characterizes Anyanwu's resistance in feminine terms. "Her personal goal is freedom, but given the obstacles that constantly prevent her from achieving that goal, she learns to make advancements through concessions" (Salvaggio 81). By using her "womanly" affinity with nature to escape Doro's grasp, Butler provides a means of resistance that can operate *within* patriarchal modes.

Similarly, Anyanwu's final act of resistance, the decision to die (something she can easily do with her transmutational abilities) forces Doro's hand, requiring him to ultimately admit his reliance on her and beg her to live. While the decision to commit suicide in the face of

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<sup>23</sup> Introduction, *The Second Sex*

patriarchal oppression has been the source of much feminist debate within literature,<sup>24</sup> Butler channels the ideologies of feminists such as Beauvoir, who focus on the perception of the female as a deformed or lacking male, into her characterizations, creating a strong female character who must be willing to revert to oblivion to gain freedom. "...While there is no ending power – because power is involved in almost every social relationship – there are certain arrangements of power which allow greater possibilities of freedom than others. The aim of resistance is to maximize these possibilities of freedom (Newman 90). Doro only maintains the upper hand so long as Anyanwu values her life. And when she proves herself willing to discard it, the master/slave relationship between them cannot be maintained. While I suspect that this is not the most intentionally emphatic message within the narrative, a radical feminist reading of the text would suggest that only through willingness to lose everything can a woman gain her freedom. It may be true that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 283), but it is also true that an understanding of relativistic self-definition is the surest route to undermining the constraints to which "woman" is consigned. In Anyanwu, Butler illustrates the ways in which women might operate within patriarchal systems to undermine phallogentric power in scenarios where neither domination, revolution, nor escape are possible.

Doro, as the resident body-swapper of the series<sup>25</sup>, functions as a prime example of the ways in which posthumanist ideations, such as eternal life, skew the importance of gender and race. In some ways, these ideations retain internalized visions of social reality, and in others, they act with impunity across all domains. In a conversation with Mary as a young girl, Doro contends that he has no race, perhaps a nod on Butler's part towards the illusion of a post-racial society. They exchange the following:

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<sup>24</sup> Many relevant discourses involve *The Awakeining* by Kate Chopin.

<sup>25</sup> Mary could presumably do so, but does not need to/is attached to her body in a way that Doro is not.

MARY. God! You're white so much of the time, I never thought you might have been born black.

DORO. It doesn't matter because I haven't been any color at all for about four thousand years. Or you could say I've been every color.

MARY. You mean you don't want to admit that you have anything in common with us.

But if you were born black, you *are* black. Still black, no matter what color you take on."

(*MOMM, Seed to Harvest* 334)

In the same way that Anyanwu switches between male, female, and animal bodies to achieve her ends, Doro utilizes black and white bodies in particular to please, threaten, disarm, or enforce as he sees fit. But as opposed to Anyanwu, who is self-defined, in part, by her status as a black woman, Doro denies his association with blackness.

On one hand, it seems that Doro has truly transcended this distinction, having had four thousand years to reflect on his superiority over regular humans, regardless of race. But on the other, he feels no qualms about using the social positioning implied in race to tighten his hold in the central tower. He recognizes the restrictions on blackness that limit his mobility, telling Anyanwu that he will take her to the city near Forsyth only when he gets himself a white body, as he is "not interested in trying to prove to one suspicious white man after another that [he] own[s] [him]self" (*WS, Seed to Harvest* 90). No longer human after involuntarily shedding his human form, Doro feels no ethical indignance at such an injustice – in fact he exploits it. He merely refuses to be restricted to the cultural meanings assigned to such bodies, taking white bodies as it suits him and maintaining the subjective standpoint of the all powerful white male.

Thus, Butler's narrative decision to allow his daughter, Mary, to kill him, while he is occupying a white body is a doubly significant gesture. As observed by Briana Whiteside in her

Master's Thesis, "Octavia Butler's Uncanny Women: Structure and Characters in The Patternist Series," "Mary kills Doro while he is in the body of a white man. Allowing a black woman character to kill a white male character is symbolic of destroying patriarchy and white supremacy" (Whiteside 39). Despite Doro's four thousand year reign, the combination of transcendent mind and adaptable body enable Mary to usurp him. Thus, regardless of whether or not he acknowledges the core blackness *or* the core maleness that seem to define his conscious, subjective standpoint, ultimately, Butler sends the message that the female symbiont will prevail over the male parasite every time. Where 'man' and 'woman' are social constructs with no real objective meaning beyond biological facticity, it is woman's ability to give through her body, then, which gives her the power to topple the male-controlled Panopticon. The question becomes, is she interested in ruling the Panopticon, toppling it, or working within it to her own ends?

An analysis of the social contexts from which both Doro and Anyanwu derive their internalized relationships with power explains why Cartesian dualism provides an incomplete understanding of the "corporeal consciousness" and reveals it to be, first and foremost, an instrument of rationalist oppression. Neither the mind nor the body *always* reigns supreme. Power is dependent upon the relationships between entities in their social contexts, and thus discussions of power can never be accurately simplified to absolutes. The mind or the body may dominate, depending on the subject's needs and its relationship to other subjects. By this reasoning, Hampton's assertion that "The exact shape or color of Anyanwu's and or Doro's self is insignificant, because until it takes a physical form there are no consequences to be dealt with in the real world" (31) proves to be untrue. While Anyanwu intentionally carries (or feels she should carry) her "base" identity with her psychologically, due to her attachment to embodied

form, Doro unintentionally carries his gender and shirks his race as a utilitarian means of gaining the most powerful position relative to his subjects (a white male). For varying reasons, both are unable to entirely untether themselves from gender and race, proving that despite the machinations of the transcendental, self-defining mind, the arbitrary social dichotomies which give meaning to embodiment as a choice between binary modes, (and thus facilitate the exertion of power) irrevocably influence identity through social signs and symbols. “Despite the fluidity of both characters’ forms, they both cling to an essentialist notion that their interiority is ultimately the most well defined aspect of their identity” (Williams 42), revealing the intense effects of internalization on the subject, as we bring the judgments and regulations of the world home with us.

While I disagree with Hampton’s assertion that race and gender only matter in embodiment, contending instead that one’s ‘original form’ irrevocably changes the subject’s phenomenological standpoint, he and I agree on Butler’s aims. “Butler presents methods of imagining the body that allow us to understand how and why the body is restricted. Through her characters and narratives, readers are better able to explore the meaning of various identities such as race, sex, and gender. These terms are seen for what they are, arbitrary markers designed to give stability to that which is unstable and ambiguous<sup>26</sup>” (Williams 41). Butler’s inquiries into identity, embodiment, and power coincide to reveal the invisible seams of normativity and relativity which attempt to define and regulate embodied, and consequently, internal, hierarchies of subjugation and oppression. “The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to

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<sup>26</sup> Hampton (248, qtd. In Williams)

carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 173<sup>27</sup>). As a relational force, power is always already governed by the existing symbolic order, which places bodies (the only windows to human experience that normal humans can exercise) within said order.

The appearance and encoded meanings of the body largely determine the scale of power one might exert within a given social framework. Butler’s work is so revolutionary because she helps readers to imagine a way to break with that embodied prison – the predetermined access to power decided by the social reception of a given body. In the speculative subjective spaces of Butler’s world, we can all occupy the transcendental disembodied white male position (at least theoretically) while retaining some of our “original” perspective. But that original “home base” has irrevocably changed our understanding of the ways we view the world and thus influences conditional ideologies such as morality. All embodied human beings seem to drag around a trace of that racialized and/or gendered perspective wherever they go. And thus their interactions with power are often limited by their bodies, even when they are no longer within them or occupying the same socio-physical position.

#### INSTITUTIONAL POWER – THE CORNERSTONE OF PATTERNIST SOCIETY

As its last topic of inquiry, this paper is interested in the dissemination of institutional power as Mary’s Pattern breaks with the old social order and forms the beginnings of what would come to be known as Patternist society. Viewed most completely through the last installment, *Patternmaster*, Butler expands her examination of power from the individual, interpersonal, and intrapersonal to the societal, dislocating the old hierarchies of meaning, and creating a new society in which psychic ability (as opposed to wealth, race, or gender)

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<sup>27</sup> See “The Body of the Condemned” from *Foucault’s Discipline and Punish*

determines power. Perhaps it is because *Patternmaster* was narratively composed first, but the society that arises in the far-future is notably more feudal (and patriarchal) than its “modern” predecessors<sup>28</sup>. As the size of Patternist society expanded rapidly in *Mind of My Mind*, new modes of discipline and control arose around the concept of the Patternmaster, or the one who inherits/controls the Pattern. This ironically preserves the notion of sovereign power (one ultimate ruler) in that the society that forms around the Pattern turns out to be even more restrictive and “primitive” than the present in *Mind of My Mind*. Based upon a hierarchy of Housemasters (strong psychic individuals who come through apprenticeship), Apprentices (up-and-coming telepaths to be trained in psychic control and battle), Outsiders (actives without Housemasters or latents - essentially slaves to the Housemasters), and Mutes (non-psychic humans – the “normal” humans of the modern era), *Patternmaster* displays a highly regulated feudal society in which the proprietary feeling of ownership experienced by Mary is institutionalized into a system of ownership, tiered exercise of power, and aggression.

To ‘hold’ the Pattern, it is revealed, signifies that one has killed the majority of their siblings (*Patternmaster*, *Seed to Harvest* 630), as genetic inheritance signals the psychic power necessary to capture it. Inheriting the incestual practices that brought the Patternist race into being, Rayal begins the novel by challenging his sister-wife, Jansee about her motherly instincts<sup>29</sup>, reminding her, “Didn’t I have to kill two brothers and a sister to get where I am? Won’t at least some of my children and yours be as eager to inherit power as I was?” (*Seed to Harvest* 628). The erasure of the traditional nuclear family unit is the first noticeable difference between the societies presented within *Mind of My Mind* and *Patternmaster*. As Housemasters grab for power amongst one another, it is almost as if the parenting instinct has been transferred

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<sup>28</sup> *Mind of My Mind* takes place in the present while *Clay’s Ark* is in the not so distant future

<sup>29</sup> Parental instincts are associated with mutes since actives and latents cannot handle the chaotic minds of children.



to the ownership of more or less powerful members of the telepathic community. Given that Housemasters often manipulate their subjects through sheer mind control, the brute force presentation of Patternist society strikes a jarring contrast with the elitism suggested by Doro's early genetic hubris. After generations of "evolution," it seems, mental might replaced (or at minimum, superseded) physical dominance in the conventional sense, portraying a compelling reversal of cognition into an object of brute force and direct oppression. Thus power, in this far-future, reverts to "might makes right" in a system of institutions that neatly determines mobility, wealth, and status by heredity and circumstance.

Teray, the novel's protagonist, finds himself limited by such constraints as his presumed mentor Joachim, instead of taking him into his modest House as an apprentice, betrays him and his wife Iray to Teray's elder brother, Coransee. Coransee, as a powerful, well-respected Housemaster and the presumptive heir to the Pattern after his father Rayal's death, abuses his power in a manner very reminiscent of Doro. But where Doro utilizes his unconventional ontology and immortal consciousness to *create* a race that he could own (befitting his God complex), Coransee operates within the confines of a pre-established institution to ascend to the panoptical position of Patternmaster. Still, despite their differences, both are tyrannical and lack the "female empathy" which characterizes the series' heroines. Perhaps because of his place within an ancestral line (as thus, a strictly regulated system of inheritance), Coransee takes undue joy in stealing his younger brother away from Joachim (robbing him of his chance to be a master in his own House) and subordinating him into Outsider status. In a display of mental energy, Coransee gives Teray a heart attack, "slash[ing] at the rest of Teray's shielding, his mind a machete" (*Seed to Harvest* 653), asserting mental dominance, and through it, absolute physical

control over Teray's body. Coransee enjoys the process of humiliating his brother, particularly in respect to the outsider rules which regulate the sexual partners available to outsiders:

“[If] a man was married before he lost his freedom, his wife took her place among the women of the House, the Housemaster's wives. And she became the only woman in the House permanently forbidden to her former husband. The laws were old, made in harsher times. Perhaps it was reasonable, as the old records said, to forbid weak men to sire potentially weak children. But what reason could there be for denying a man access to his chosen one, his first, while permitting him so many others? What reason but to remind him constantly that he was a slave? (*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 647)

Patternist society has institutionalized a system in which the weak or unlucky are robbed of their prospects, dignity, and freedom, seemingly for no reason at all. The school system, which supposedly protects the “sale” of apprentices until they graduate, fails Teray and his wife, in that Teray's power makes him a threat to any potential mentor. “An outsider was a permanent inferior. An apprentice was a potential superior. An apprentice was the young colt hanging around the edges of the herd, biding his time until he could kill off the old herd stallion and take over” (*Seed to Harvest* 635). While Joachim seemed unfazed by Teray's superior mental strength, it ultimately proves to be the key to his destruction. Exceptionalism is not always a profitable trait for a slave (as many intelligent slaves in the American South learned the hard way), and thus while it may grant him power on an individual level, within the confines of society, he finds himself powerless, disenfranchised by a system that punishes his strength and ancestry. Teray had the misfortune of trusting a man already controlled by Coransee, but the conditions under which Outsiders are assimilated into the home is reminiscent of the conditions defining American chattel slavery.

It would seem, however, that instead of occupying the place of the ‘helpless African slave,’ the Outsider is truly more of an overseer. Coransee assigns Teray the position of “muteheard,” and upon meeting his co-worker Jackman, he is reminded that “they’re people, man. Powerless and without mental voices, but still people. So for God’s sake try to be careful. To me, killing them is worse than killing one of us, because they can’t do a damn thing to defend themselves” (*Seed to Harvest* 661). Jackman’s warning speaks to Teray’s inability to control his strength, not any desire to hurt the “Mutes,” but still, he sees his role as their overseer as little more than a consolation prize. Perhaps this is how he justifies intruding upon the weaker Jackman’s mind to “learn” the appropriate way to manage Mutes. “He wasn’t doing to Jackman quite what Coransee wanted to do to him<sup>30</sup>, but he was invading Jackman’s mental privacy. He was throwing his weight around, acting like a lesser version of the Housemaster. And he wasn’t even doing it solely for the mutes. They were important, of course, but Teray was also avoiding the promised beating and a cattleherding assignment” (*Seed to Harvest* 662). The role of the overseer complicates the allegory of the Panopticon, as institutional power is most effectively implemented through the decentralization of its core. But to stretch the metaphor, the overseer, one might theorize, is situated one floor below the top of the central tower, observed from above through a mirrored one-way ceiling from which they can be observed by the unseen reigning powers, but cannot observe them in return. They can, however, view each cell surrounding that tower. Thus, where the initial metaphor attempted to describe an architectural mode of surveillance that dislocated the locus of power from sovereign forces, this extended metaphor applies the same theory to the plantation structure of the American South. It was easier to control the slaves when they were under regulation by a caste of people endowed with power to

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<sup>30</sup> i.e. install a mental leash

discipline and punish, but also, enslaved, in one way or another, to the whims of the same 'master.' In his monograph, entitled, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, Joel Williamson argues,

White people could not prescribe and enforce a precise role upon black people without prescribing and enforcing a precise role upon themselves. If blacks were to be held in place, white people would have to assume a place to keep them there. In brief, if there were to be Sambos, there would have to be Sambos' keepers, and the keeper role, being superior, had to be even more firmly fixed than the role of the kept. (Williamson)

Thus through this tiered vision of the Panopticon, the internal structure of the standard Patternist House utilizes surveillance to ensnare both the "voiceless" mutes and active or latent Outsiders. By giving the subjugated middle class the illusion of power, the ruling interests both increase the productivity of their surveillance and discipline the more socially powerful of their subjects.

Within and between Patternist homes, then, the feudal framework established by the Housemaster/Outsider/Mute hierarchy partially utilizes the same social mechanisms as American chattel slavery. Or, I should say, the latter draws its structure from the former. In the feudal regime, "Both free and servile had cause to rue the power of the lords and to wish to set some limit upon it by making slaveholding difficult. Feudal social arrangements had no need for outright enslavement to obtain tribute or rent from the direct producers, because the lords controlled more effective instruments of production and violence" (Blackburn 72). Thus, the positioning of feudal lords offered them power that even diminished the need for slave labor, as their charges were reliant on their protection, and the goods produced by the community's occupants belonged to the lords as the owners of the land. Through an historical amalgam of the legacy of chattel slavery (inherited through the genetic memory of Anyanwu's ancestors) and a

notably unique formulation of neo-feudalism, Butler challenges essentialist notions of power by positing the legacy of a black world which has never truly escaped its colonialist roots. While their neo-feudalism lacks the overt brutality and inhumanity of American chattel slavery, it suggests that black people, if invested with evolutionarily “superior” qualities such as telepathy, would be just as likely to create a society segregated by caste. Racial difference (or gender difference, for that matter) is removed from the equation as a serious factor in power relations, and yet the society created by the evolution of “superior” black minds seems no more capable of transcending demographic hierarchy than our own.

The evolution of the term, “mute,” serves as an excellent example of the ways in which discrimination, as it exists in the present historical timeline, is perhaps more a matter of the way things happened, instead of the way things *had to* happen, due to some essential superiority of one group over another. First arising at the end of *Mind of My Mind*, Doro mistakenly utters the phrase to Emma (previously Anyanwu), and she rails against it as an epithet like any other:

EMMA. 'Mutes!'

*He looked annoyed, probably with himself.*

DORO. It's a convenient term. People without telepathic voices. Ordinary people.

EMMA. I know what it means, Doro. I knew the time I heard Mary use it. It means niggers!... 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)*

Doro does not discover the truth in Emma's words until he finds himself being consumed by Mary through coercion into the Pattern. While he believed that “They were a people who

belonged to him, since Mary belonged to him,” (*MoMM, Seed to Harvest* 392), he discovers the exclusionary nature of an entirely psychic network. The rise of the mental “voice” as the entrance token into Patternist society not only excludes latents, who are unable to reach transition, and mutes, who have no mental voice, but even the great Doro himself. While he is many things, he is not a telepath. His thinking continues, “...they were not a people he could be part of. As Mary’s pattern brought them together, it shut him out. Together, the “Patternists” were growing into something that he could observe, hamper, or destroy but not something he could join... He watched them with carefully concealed emotions of suspicion and envy” (*Seed to Harvest* 392). The exclusion of non-telepaths alongside the rising convenience of the term “mutes” works towards the linguistic subjugation of a “once great” human race. The narration explains, “mutes had been building a society more intricate, more mechanized, than anything that had existed since their downfall. Some Patternists refused to believe this segment of history. They said it was like believing that horses and cattle once had mechanized societies” (*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 709). The parallel between this attitude and those defining European rationalism perhaps provides the clearest comparison between Patternist society and Western culture.

The inability to conceive the other, whose gifts are less adaptive to their present environment, as potentially gifted in other ways, is the trademark of Western civilization. In the Patternist world, present-day humans become completely obsolete, a set of circumstances we may find difficult to imagine. But the toppling of a race through the loss of their knowledge and the eradication of their history<sup>31</sup> is a time-tested strategy for subjugating and silencing the voices of a people. Butler takes this a step further, to the literal level, leaving humanity without “mental

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<sup>31</sup> Much like the erosion of Africa’s history.

voices,” and thus ironically enslaving them to the whims of the Patternists. Once again the parallels between the oppressive structures of phallogentric Western thought and the ideologies that drive Patternist society emphasize the ways in which the position of power in the central Panoptical tower corrupts.

At this stage, readers may wonder how Butler manages to transform the legacy of American black culture into an equally elitist, oppressive regime in the far-future. Foucault’s discussion of normativity as a disciplinary strategy is best equipped to address the ways in which psychic ability is institutionalized as a cornerstone of Patternist society. In the “Introduction” to *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires*, Hampton quotes Sheryl Vint’s articulation of Foucauldian bio-power, noting,

...what we learn from Foucault is that the body is integrally linked to the discourses that make it intelligible. Biopower, with its classifications of normal and abnormal, valid or invalid, produces bodies that fall outside of this field and hence cannot be seen. The radical insight of biopower and Foucault’s notion of the disciplinary culture that deploys it is that we willingly participate in our own subjugation; we must in order to become subjects at all. (Vint 18; qtd. in Hampton xxii-xxiii)

Normativity, then, is a means of rendering bodies visible or invisible within a given framework, based upon their adherence to or deviation from the arbitrary median of “normalcy.” Teray concludes that the ongoing antagonism between the Patternist and Clayark races is fueled by their mutual belief in the other’s abnormality. Teray observes, “Patternists and Clayarks stared at each other across a gulf of disease and physical difference and comfortably told themselves the same lie about each other... ‘Not people’” (*Patternmaster, Seed to Harvest* 709). This dissemination of normative expectations, reinforced on the micro scale by the feudal House

system and on the macro scale, by the Pattern, limits both races and consigns them to the old human paradoxes beyond which they had supposedly evolved. As Everhart postulates in her thesis, "...the tendency to wield power toward creating a social order that favors oneself or one's kind, one's genre, does not evolve alongside the Patternists' evolving brains. They may be superhuman, to a certain extent, but they remain tied to humanity's great contradiction" (Everhart 84). While the Clayarks, considered inferior by the Patternists, can perhaps be excused for this "primitive" behavior, the Patternists reveal that the ability to effectively implement discipline plays as large of a role in the oppression of subjects as do the aspersions and ethical aspirations of the oppressors.

The rhetoric of normativity, which, as argued in the previous treatment of social inscriptions on the body, confuses external social norms with innate internal attributes (internalization), functions much like the process of evolution, weeding out the "undesirable traits," and favoring those that thrive best in new environments. As a mode of discipline, normativity utilizes surveillance (which the Pattern signifies in "Big Brother" proportions) to imprint and codify the body, thereby subjugating the mind. Utility and normativity collide to exclude the necessity for traditional human forms. Where the humans of our age may have thrived in an industrial era<sup>32</sup>, our "muteness" ultimately proves to be the instrument of our destruction, rendering us chattel to the Patternists and sustenance to the Clayarks.

Another means by which psychic ability is normalized is through the idealization of the Patternmaster. When Teray recognizes his inability to picture the Patternmaster's face, he notes, "[Rayal] was the Pattern. He was strength, unity, power. Every adult Patternist was linked to him, but the link did not involve tracing out his features. Most Patternists neither knew nor cared

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<sup>32</sup> Butler wrote this series before the rise of the digital era, but it is interesting to contemplate how this might have influenced the development of her Patternists.



what he looked like” (*Seed to Harvest* 655). The depersonalization of the Patternmaster figure (a notable change from the uniqueness represented by Mary’s crucial role in the maintenance of the first Pattern) represents the Panopticon in action. While Mary was the specific agent in control of the Pattern at its inception, irreplaceable at the time, Rayal, and presumably those who come after him, has been elevated (or reduced, depending upon your perspective) to the status of ideals. The identity of the powerful does not matter so long as their presence is felt. To reiterate the goals of the Panopticon, “This new power is continuous and anonymous. Anyone could operate the architectural mechanisms as long as he was in the correct position, and anyone could be subjected to it... If the prisoner is never sure when he is being observed, he becomes his own guardian” (Rainbow 19). Once the ideological power of the Patternmaster overcomes the importance of the specific individual occupying the seat, it is actually more effective if the subjects lose sight of the puppet master altogether. Where Mary herself was the subject of vitriol and resistance as the breaker of wills, Rayal assumes the anonymous mantle of Patternmaster, enforcing his presence through his absence and impersonality. Unlike Coransee, who must make *his* power known, it is harder to topple those idols one cannot see.

The division between the Clayarks and the Patternists, and within Patternist society, between the Housemasters, Outsiders, and mutes, demonstrates the means by which new regimes of power become institutionalized and gain currency amongst those it will come to subject. A final example of such social hierarchy can be observed in the least frequently discussed installment of the series, *Survivor*<sup>33</sup>. Bridging the gap between the events of *Clay’s Ark* and *Patternmaster*, *Survivor* follows a colony of human refugees who settle on the home world of the Kohn, a pseudo-bestial race of entities divided by an addiction one of the planet’s natural

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<sup>33</sup> See Nisi Shawl, “A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler” & and Randall Kenan “An Interview With Octavia E. Butler”

resources, meklah fruit. The Garkohn are the ‘savage branch’ of the original Kohn tribe who have maintained their dependence on the meklah fruit. Ruling through many of the same mechanisms as Doro and Coransee, the Garkohn leader, Natahk, controls through fear and surveillance with the added tactic of physical addiction, chaining his prisoners to the land under his control. The Tekohn are the warring tribe defined primarily by their abstinence from meklah. Alanna, the “wild human” child adopted by Missionary parents before their departure from earth, ends up married to the Tekhon leader Diut.

The main institutional challenge here is presented in the form of the conflict between the Missionaries, and the two Kohn factions. The Missionaries, who have followed the biblical imperative to save the human race by procreating, retain many of the Western rationalist modes of thinking that governed humankind before its downfall on earth. Alanna imparts, “The Missionaries had made a religion of maintaining and spreading their own version of humanity—a religion that had helped them to preserve that humanity back on Earth... It had [also] helped them to justify their belief that the Kohn were lower creatures—higher than apes, but lower than true humans who had been made in the image of God” (*Survivor* 6). The replication of this pattern, echoing the intrapersonal conflict between mind and body that defined the *fin de siècle* (discussed in the section on Cartesian dualism), demonstrates the exact sort of human egocentrism that spawns the genesis of two different social frameworks. Their perception of the primacy of the human over the animal places the Missionaries in a compromising position as they find themselves at the mercy of two alien races.

No strangers to subjugation, however, the Missionaries provide one of the only illustrations of the remaining human population in the far-future. They describe their slavery to the Patternists back on earth and express their gratitude for an opportunity to start over free of

Patternist influences (a dream shattered by the unexpected presence of the Kohn). Alanna's mother Neila explains, "Those children are like the eggs some wasps lay inside the bodies of living caterpillars. They're not evil, any more than any other parasite, but when they grew up, when their mental abilities matured, they would quietly, slowly, enslave us. Our Mission would be over, even forgotten, perhaps. They would become our gods" (*Survivor* 31). Here, not only do we see an unusual decentralization of the "decline of humanity" narrative, but we are also presented with a humanity on the run, once again subjugated by forces that it cannot overcome.

Not only are the Missionaries helpless in their own defense, but they become a liability to the Tekohn in their uneasy alliance with the Garkohn. Duit tells Jeb<sup>34</sup>, "I blame the Garkohn for the trouble between us. You have been lied to and used. But even so, I cannot afford to have your people remain here and be used again. And they would be used again, with your consent or without it. I admit that you and the Garkohn together are a formidable combination. But you must admit what a childishly vulnerable people your Missionaries are alone" (65). This ultimate displacement of humanity, a familiar trope in Butler's work, provides readers with an opportunity to examine traditional humanity alongside the animal other, and as the novel ultimately suggests, humanity proves to be the weaker of the two. While he refers primarily to *Wild Seed* in his article, "Structures of Desire: Postanarchist Kink in the Speculative Fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany," Lewis Call speaks to the impetus of the whole series when he observes, "In one sense, then, this is the story of the postmodern body's revenge upon the Enlightenment's mythology of human subjectivity" (Call 141). The primacy of humanity is rendered obsolete in a system which has no needs for its talents, and humans - "mutes" - occupy to lowest caste in every space – defined by the weakness that once made us so "civil."

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<sup>34</sup> Jeb is Alanna's foster father and the leader of the missionaries.

Still, power among the Kohn reflects a bizarre earthly shadow of racial codifications as their color caste system determines social roles and instinctual hierarchies of power. Describing the role of the Judges, who combine speed, strength, and reason to command hunters within the Kohn social orders, Natahk tells the Missionaries, "... You must understand what you are... You can think, but you cannot fight. You are judges to whom hunters need not be subject. There are few traditions to protect you because you have no blue" (*Survivor* 57). The blue coloring (displayed through the fur) found in the Judge lineages of the Kohn peoples works as a luminescent symbol of dominance, and as we learn from Diut some time after his and Alanna's mating, is instinctually effective:

She had learned all her respect for the blue since coming to us. I understood this with my mind, but somehow, I never completely accepted it. Respect for the blue was inborn with us. No one questioned it. It seemed impossible not to value it. I had grown up knowing myself to be highly valued for my blue. Even enemies like the Garkohn would have valued me" (*Survivor* 103).

Despite the obvious analogy between the instinctual worship of the blue in Kohn society and the seemingly innate worship of whiteness, spread by colonialism across the Western world, interestingly enough, the blue functions much the same way that blackness historically has. While it represents wisdom and supremacy, it also represents physical strength and is perceived as intimidating by those of other colors. When he wants to become less noticeable, the Hao (leader), Diut makes himself lighter to downplay the impact of his blue. Therefore, where Patternist society utilizes normativity to institutionalize psychic currency, the Kohn represent an essentialist portrayal of society in which social roles are determined partly by aptitude, but first and foremost, by color and build.

Genetic difference produces functional difference within Kohn society, and thus while power is exerted through surveillance by the Garkohn and their practice of spying by camouflage, it is also distributed according to biological qualities, suggesting a lack of social mobility similar to the Patternists. Still, Natuhk ultimately confirms the socially constructed nature of the blue. "'The power of the blue is a lie. My people believe it. I only use it. I killed a hunter and huntress bluer than myself to become First Hunter.' He clasped her throat between thumb and fingers, deliberately intimate. 'And now, I will have the wife of a man blue enough to be called a judge—but not blue enough to stop me!'" (*Survivor* 137). Natakh reveals that while the blue *symbolizes* power, it is actually not an objective measure of strength. The belief itself prevents most Kohn from challenging the blue at all. While his tyranny is unpalatable at best, the uncovering of social constructionism in this case is positive – the Kohn, like humanity, are similarly limited by the parameters internalized by the social interpretation of bodies, but, also, like humanity, they are capable of reaching beyond those artificial barriers to occupy positions of power through the mechanisms of institutional power and psychophysical negotiation explored throughout the series.

## CONCLUSION

Octavia Butler's *Patternist* series utilizes overlapping science and speculative fiction tropes to represent various modes of social and interpersonal development which seek to place the social systems and power structures of present reality into a larger ontological context. While many of us think of power as a thing to be seized, Butler reveals the many ways in which power is a matter of perspective and positioning. A reading of the series taking Foucault's model of the Panopticon as the central premise undermining the construction of power reveals the extent to which social constructionism plays an active role in self-identification, particularly in relation to agency (the ability, or lack thereof, to occupy positions of power). The collapse of the border between interpersonal, normative power, and legal, punitive power, is the defining ideology behind Foucault's biopolitics:

As no few critics suggest, Foucault shifts the political question from the public to the private realm (Norris, 1998). He does not accept the distinction between the individual and social and political structures, but attempts the process of establishing the subject within them. The traditional distinction between the political power latent in laws and norms that become part of the public space and the existential dimension of a person is no longer valid, for the individual has become a product of those same structures. Thus, the goal of the political theorist is to expose the process of the individual's construction as a subject of subjugation and freedom. (Parchev 2)

By observing the instability of the division between private and public regimes of power, Foucault articulates a subject who is at once both liberated and oppressed by his or her own assumption of the subject role. Through our participation in society, we enter the Panopticon,

and only by challenging its arrangement, seizing power, or working within its confines can we find our way out once again.

Slavery, eugenics, and the ultimate institutionalization of psychic ability each represent varying modes of power, enacted at the micro and macro scales of interpersonal existence. Through the exploration of man's animal nature, Butler further complicates her discussion by adding to it the struggle between the rational mind and the animal body. By placing Cartesian dualism within the larger context of phallogentric power (which can be largely credited with the illusory essentialist dogmas governing the *Patternist* universe) Butler addresses the primacy of the mind over the body, or vice versa, revealing the critical role (and implied complicity) of embodiment within patriarchal institutional power structures. Through an examination of ontology and social constructionism, this paper has endeavored to prove the transcendental nature of the drive for power, which seems to result from hierarchy more than it does from genetic or social difference. Butler's work contributes to the fields of ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology, just to name a few. But her focus on power within the *Patternist* series represents a unique creation within the genre of Afrofuturist speculative fictions. Such fictions envision a future in which blackness is not only still visible, but is also, at once, an inescapable condition of embodiment and a construction of social reality. Her narrative suggests that each of us holds the potential to exist somewhere in between.

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