

Women On the Edge:
Making the Case for Intersectional Feminist Science Fiction

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment for the requirement for graduation
with research distinction in English in the undergraduate
colleges of The Ohio State University

by

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April 2017

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Introduction/Retrospective

Science fiction, is a genre of literature based around social and political commentary. Even early examples are rife with satirical and thinly-veiled discussions of politics from that particular time period, or act as fantastical thought experiments for how one ought to live and act. In the past 50 years American activists have come to utilize the science fiction for liberal causes, adapting the narrative structure to make a case for messages of equality and a warning against the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Feminist groups since the second wave have utilized literature and art as tool of social justice. Moving from non-fiction pamphlets to poetry, stories and personal narratives has been an important marker of this postmodern period. This pivotal period of the 1970's to early 1990's marks the convergence of ideas that would turn into the third wave: namely black feminism and feminist postmodernism. As a millennial, I have grown up with the kind of feminism that is considered "intersectional" and third wave. Having taken classes in both English and Women's Studies, I became especially interested in this period because it historically embodied a shift towards diversity that was marked with a lot of tension. Periods that are indicative of historical shifts are rarely discussed because they often involve complexities. Because the wave system was introduced it has erased many of these distinctive moments of tension from feminist literary history such as the formation of "intersectional theory" which has been debated as a pre-cursor as well as feature of the third wave, and of the rise of visual culture, diverse representation, and the process of reclaiming. In this thesis I hope to make the case this shift towards a more diverse and united feminist movement and the rise of visual culture has led to the formation of highly visual, intersectional, experimental science fiction.

I decided to explore science fiction in light of postmodernism because each are incredibly creative genres. They also have been closely related to one another because of the social commentary associated and fantastic or surrealistic place of space and time. In the case of feminist postmodernism or in this case feminist speculative fiction there is not only the play of space and time but also of the self and characterization.

For this thesis I will make my case for the evolution toward intersectional thinking in feminist science fiction by doing case studies of four texts spanning 3 authors: Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and *Dawn* (1987), and *Bitch Planet Vol.1: Extraordinary Machine* by Kelly Sue DeConnick, Valentine De Landro, and Robert Wilson (2014). Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*, for instance, is a fluid narrative following a terrorist cyborg woman named Abhor and her part-time partner Thivai, a pirate. The plot combines experimental postmodern methods like cut-up with personal narrative to create a fluid space where shifting narrative and character connect to create a spin on popular dystopias where the protagonist's subversion and destruction of society and self are depicted as heroic. Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn* are much less experimental but contain similar transgressive notions of hero or protagonist and the invocation of complex tensions. Butler's work brings in the African American female experience where Acker brought in a "queer perspective". *Kindred* follows a modern black woman, Dana, who is caught in-between her time and the antebellum south, forced to confront her historical self and the continuation of racism in the modern era. *Dawn* reads much more like the classic alien encounter genre of science fiction and is part of a trilogy called *Xenogenesis*. It follows a human Lilith who is woken up by an alien species called Oankali who are attempting to save humanity after a nuclear holocaust. Lilith is also a black woman caught between two worlds who must figure out her place and overcome preconceived

notions to survive. *Bitch Planet*, a feminist dystopian comic series, is a contemporary dystopia about a future where non-compliant women are sent to a prison planet. Overall, these every different texts connect in several ways: they present dystopian science fiction tales, they subvert the construct of hero by casting complex women of color as the protagonist, and explore intersectional feminist issues.

An Overview of Theories

Several theories and concepts are important to this thesis and the analysis of each of the works presented: Third wave feminism, intersectionality, and feminist postmodernism.

As mentioned previously, third wave feminism is a response to the second wave movement of the 1970s and 1980s attempting to correct and expand upon the movements to have a broader impact (Budgeon, 1). In Shelly Budgeon's *Third Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity* she provides a listing definition of factors:

The contemporary context is one in which the structure and meaning of gender relations are undergoing substantial questioning, due in part to advancements achieved by women; societal changes brought about by the restructuring of economies; increased cultural diversity; the proliferation of techno culture and the expansion of information technologies; the dynamics of globalization and the rise of global capitalism; crises of environmental degradation; diversifying sexualities and intimate practices; changing demographics; and declining economic vitality (1).

These historical markers of third wave feminism indicate the rise of cultural diversity and the questioning of gender. These elements are important markers of intersectionality and postmodern understandings of identity becoming key elements in contemporary feminist movements. Thus, third wave feminist literature combines this critical lens of intersectionality with postmodern feminist theory and feminist postmodern techniques.

Intersectionality foremost has allowed for the development of a more diverse and inclusive movement. Intersectionality is a black feminist theory that helped inspire the rise of

cultural diversity in social justice movements like feminism and third wave movements holistically. Initially, the term, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw –a civil rights lawyer and critical race scholar used the term to suggest a multi-dimensionality to the examination of black women’s experiences in the court, citing implicit bias and eraser based on race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, 1). Intersectionality involves three key features: a multi-axis approach to studying identity that solves the issue of erasure in single-axis approaches, critiques the exclusionary practices of identity politics in the 1970s and 1980s, and method for examining power structure and politics. First, Crenshaw establishes a critique of identity politics situated on exclusionary practices of white feminist groups and male centric civil rights organizations:

The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. Moreover, ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups, another problem of identity politics that bears on efforts to politicize violence against women. Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling (Crenshaw, 1991, 1242).

This critique is important because it calls on feminism and civil rights groups to intersect their practices, identifying the issue of position and the isolation of women of color in these experiences. Second, Crenshaw establishes two subtypes of intersectionality that allow for theory to be used to discuss power relations and politics as well as identity formation. Brittney Cooper’s overview of these concepts provides a clear purpose of each sub-type:

Structural intersectionality referred to a convergence of “race, gender, and class domination” wherein social interventions designed to ameliorate the results of only racism, or sexism, or poverty would be insufficient to address the needs of a woman of

color marginalized by the interaction of all three systems of power. For instance, in addressing domestic violence, “intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who face different obstacles because of race and class” (1246). Political intersectionality, on the other hand, looked outward to “highlight that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (1252).

Thus political and structural intersectionality mark an expansion of intersectionality to a method analysis rather than just a tool to explore the experiences of black women and identity formation. As Crenshaw’s theory has evolved as prominent feminist analytical tool from social science to literature it has adapted to include even more elements such as ability, age, religion, and sexuality.

Postmodern feminism, which is also connected to the women’s movement from the late 1970s to contemporary times, has provided tools for which Crenshaw’s theory can be mapped onto, such as parody, fluid notions of space and time, deconstruction, and meta-analysis. Feminist postmodernism, like postmodernism generally, has many definitions and is defined based on the medium of which it is affiliated. In this case of literary feminist postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon’s discussion in *The Politics of Postmodernism* will be used to clarify:

As Catherine Stimpson has argued, the history of feminist thought on this topic includes the confrontation of dominant representations of women as misrepresentations, the restoration of the past of women’s own self-representation, the generation of accurate representations of women, and the acknowledgement of the need to represent differences among women (of sexuality, age, race, class, ethnicity, nationality), including their diverse political orientations (Stimpson 1988: 223). As a verbal sign of difference and plurality, ‘feminisms’ would appear to be the best term to use to designate, not a consensus, but a multiplicity of points of view which nevertheless do possess at least some common denominators when it comes to the notion of the politics of representation (138).

Thus, postmodern feminism is characterized by issues of representation and the deconstruction and play of essentializing definitions, the politicization of the body and desire, the mixing of forms such as visuals and text, the diffusion from feminism to feminisms, and the rise of self-

representation (Hutcheon, 137-8). Hutcheon also suggests that feminist art and literature use postmodernist tactics ironically creating a literary style known as the postmodern parody, which attempts to “de-doxify” problematic systems of meaning and value (148). The case of this study, Hutcheon’s postmodern parody concept and Haraway’s cyborg metaphor, which attempts to de-doxify the cyborg and use it as a device for which feminism and multi-axis identity can be mapped, are utilized (Haraway, 149-150).

An Overview of Chapters

This thesis will attempt to answer the questions: How has late modern feminist science fiction used the post-modern parody or cyborg and intersectionality to attempt to solve the issue of representation? How does intersectionality inform literary techniques in connection with the postmodern feminist literary techniques proposed by Hutcheon? Why is science fiction an ideal space for this and why the cyborg? How has visual culture and the rise of neoliberal capitalism impacted feminist science fiction and created the third wave? In order to solve these questions I will provide case studies of 4 examples of Feminist Science Fiction representing feminist postmodernism, black feminism, and third wave feminism. I will then analyze characterization, narrative, and genre based on multi-axis or intersectional identity, parodic use of science fiction genre norms, intertextuality and visual elements of each text. The texts analyzed in this project are the following: *Empire of the Senseless* by Kathy Acker (1988) , *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler (1979) and its graphic companion adapted by Damian Duffy et al (2017) , *Dawn* by Octavia E. Butler (1987), and *Bitch Planet Vol.1: Extraordinary Machine* by Kellie Sue Deconnick and Valentine De Landro (2014).

In Chapter One, I will closely explore the connections between feminism and postmodernism through a case study of Kathy Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless*. The first part of

this chapter will take time to identify Kathy Acker as a postmodern feminist writer and establishing the text along Haraway and Hutcheon's concepts. Then, an analysis of character will be provided focusing the protagonists as intersectional feminist existential figures and the text as one that explores consciousness and the limits of identity politics. Next, a study of narrative form is given in which the issue of identity is tied up in the fluidity and deconstruction of self. This section will include discussion of intersectionality and Acker's adaptation of the cut-up method. Last, I will explore the intertextuality and multi-modality of the piece making the case that the text itself is meant to embody, both physically and metaphorically a multi-axis concept of identity and self.

In Chapter 2, the role of black feminism will be evaluated through case studies on Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn*. The first section will focus on *Kindred* and three aspects of representation: a. Issues of character focusing on black feminist notions of self, b. structural intersectionality and the role of relationships, and c. political intersectionality and the promotion of social justice. This format is continued in the section analyzing *Dawn* as well. Last, I will give a brief overview of her legacy.

Finally, in Chapter 3, a brief analysis of *Bitch Planet* will be provided in context with the other chapters and the concept of third wave feminism. The chapter will be broken down in to sections based on literary techniques established in the previous chapters: relationship to intersectionality through characterization and narrative, role of visual and intertextual elements, and role of postmodern parody and genre-mixing.

Chapter 1:

Now Eat Your Mind: Understanding Identity in Kathy

Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*

Empire of the Senseless is primarily a work of postmodernism. However, its narrative focuses on a cyborg protagonist in a future dystopia. Furthermore it contains many science fiction themes: power, what it means to be human, posthumanism, and society. Acker being a preliminary third wave figure uses some of the techniques now essential to contemporary texts namely reclaiming texts, genre-mixing, and multi-modality. This chapter will analyze *Empire of the Senseless* a postmodern parody, example of Haraway's "cyborg metaphor" and postmodern notions of multi-axis identity, as well as the role queer theory in influencing Acker's fluid structure. The text itself focuses around issues of representation and language. It follows a bi-racial terrorist cyborg woman, Abhor, and her pirate partner Thivai in a near future where a global resistance situated in Paris is attempting to abolish society for good. The text is build up from a mixing of plagiarized excerpts of classic texts from *Huckleberry Finn* to *Neuromancer*, and Acker's own writings which are mainly personal narratives and images of tattoos and symbols. This reclaiming of texts exposes how language and art often fails to represent the complexity of people and often ends up supporting social order. Thus, this text acts as a means of meta-analytical destruction of meaning where the character destroy their own identity, the space of the text and its essentializing definitions, and the society the characters are rebelling against. Thus, the science fiction elements of dystopia, futurity and the cyborg provide ideal forms for which Acker's experimental postmodern style can affectively explore multi-axis identity and identity politics.

A. A NEW DYNAMIC: DECONSTRUCTION AND THE FORMATION OF MULTI-AXIS CHARACTER

Empire of the Senseless is situated in the space of political issues in the 1980s such as the AIDS crisis, race riots, terrorism, and the rise of neoliberal capitalism. Identity politics were a rising issue in this period and with it came salient discussions of selfhood related to external and internal processes. The external self and subsequent identity is based on superficial means and related to how others perceive an individual, meaning a purely social self. In contrast, internal identity and self is based on how one perceived themselves and is more psychological and personal. Intersectionality manifests in the composite characterization of figures in the text, and in the narrative's focus on multiple perspectives and politicization of voice.

The multi-axis identity of characters incites a quest for freedom and inclusion. This plot of freedom mirrors the internal/external conflict of self that becomes situated in the character's roles in destructing the setting of the text and in the social or external patriarchal definitions of identity. Thivai similarly challenges his own understanding of himself and contemplates how the patriarchal society of the text limits him. Although *Empire of the Senseless* was written before Crenshaw's essay came out, it acts as a precursor to the kinds of representations of diverse and complex interplays of identity that Crenshaw later discusses in her own work. Instead, it adapts Haraway's cyborg metaphor as a means of embodying and exploring the tensions and facets of a multi-axis intersecting identity.

i. *Characterization: Multi-axis Representation*

Although Acker was not necessarily a part of black feminism, her work does have a racialized component. In this particular text several characters are defined as "black" or female or both. What is unique however, is that these representations are placed on continuums, where

one identity category is made up of a spectrum that experiences different positionalities, thus differentiating black into African, African American and non-white. In many cases, Acker mixes identity formations based on class, race, gender, ability, and sexuality in characterization and narrative. The most overt example of this is the character Abhor, who embodies all forms of otherness and is also a cyborg and terrorist. Along with Thivai, the other protagonist, she is given an ultimate heroic status as a composite of “otherness.” Other characters who are secondary, are reclaimed historical or literary figures who appear to be rewritten to embody the political issues of the period. For instance Mackandal (Haitian abolitionist) who leads a rebellion in Algeria deals with issues of racism and forced assimilation, Sinbad the sailor is rewritten as gay and embodies the AIDS Crisis, and Shahra’zad is rewritten as a transnational feminist heroine who saves her people by using her sexuality. This mix of metaphor and adaptation of characters comes to represent this external/internal conflict of identity. This section will explore the characterization of Abhor and Thivai, the text’s protagonists.

i. *Abhor:*

Abhor is the first character that is introduced in the text. She is introduced by Thivai, who tells her story for her, which is indicative of the proliferation of white heteropatriarchal voices speaking for marginalized women: “This is what Abhor, who’s my partner, part robot, and part black; told me was her childhood” (Acker, 1988, 3). This description also represents Abhor’s multi-axis identity as a biracial woman who is also a cyborg. Most notable is that she is placed on the borderline between human and machine and between races. These combinations of opposing characteristics set up a post-human and post-racial dialogue that continue throughout the text. This initial description is juxtaposed with a tattooed image on the opposite page, the first

in the text that further establishes the role of identity and Abhor's place in the text (e.g. see figure 1).

Figure 1. "My Family Fortune".



Source: Acker, Kathy. *Empire of the Senseless*. New York: Grove Press, 1988. Print.

The image contains a skull with two figures peering from the eye sockets and two rose buds with a banner saying "My Family Fortune" (fig. 1). The rose buds and figures seem to indicate Abhor and Thivai, their love, and their search for identity in a dystopian world that disfavors them. The image (fig. 1) resembles Dali's *Face of War*, a potential reference that suggests the death of humanity and the cycle of violence. In this case it is reclaimed to fit into the cycle of identity-based violence and the search for a true self. In this metaphorical representation of otherness and the play between tenuous identities Abhor becomes an embodiment of Haraway's "cyborg metaphor":

The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of "Western" science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of the reproduction of the self from the reflection of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war (292).

This emphasis on the cyborg as the other speaks to its history in science fiction. Often the cyborg is used to explore what it means to be human, and it is often depicted as a villain in the position

of the “other.” Often the cyborg is represented in a physical way but this metaphorical embodiment helps explore particular issues in feminism as well as social critique. Many scholars have noted that feminists like Acker have used the cyborg metaphor to work in ways that are often outside of the vested tropes of mainstream science fiction. This relationship has been thoroughly established by many a scholar, one notable one being Jenny Wolmark in *Aliens and Others*. Wolmark gives an overview of how Haraway’s cyborg feminism is used in feminist science fiction and postmodernism:

Donna Haraway’s use of the cyborg metaphor is particularly appropriate to a discussion of such contradictory encounters, since the cyborg is itself structured around contradictions which allow for ‘transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities. In the context of such transgressions, the unfixing of the seemingly stable categories of identity constructed around gender, race, class, becomes a means of contesting definitions of otherness, and in so doing, reconstituting subjectivity and identity in a non-totalizing way (26).

Whereas these contradictions are central to a postmodern feminism they also act as a framework for a progressive experimental narrative and form as well, which Acker invokes. Wolmark also relates the cyborg metaphor to the subject of identity in feminism: “The cyborg is, then, an imaginative embodiment of the subject of feminism, described by de Lauretis as being ‘at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision” (26). This brief discussion of the duality of identity is important but lacks the depth of intersectionality. Keeping these discussions in mind, it is important to note that Acker builds upon this tradition of deconstructing gender or presenting a duality of self by invoking a multiplicity and self-identification that has become popular in the 21st century. Therefore, Abhor’s initial definition and the tattooed image (fig. 1) help establish Acker’s use of the cyborg as a feminist literary device for the discussion and manifestation of the “other.” Whereas this specific characterization embodies more so the multi-

axis of Crenshaw's intersectionality, it also mixes postmodern notions of self and other identities beyond race, gender, and human.

Another part of Abhor's complexity is internal and this is explored in the first section of text called "Elegy for the World of the Fathers" in which Abhor's backstory is provided, narrated by Thivai. It discusses her relationship with her father and implies a Freudian understanding of self as it recounts a psycho-sexual history that also acts a social formation for the setting of the text. Most pivotal is how Abhor's identity is based around her relationship with her Father and Mother. The relationship is evidence of an Electra complex, where she is in competition with her mother for her father's attention. This negative relationship acts as a comment on how social conditions in the 1980s pitted women against one another, negatively impacting social change. This Electra complex leads to her mother's suicide (*Empire of the Senseless*, 10). This initial narrative is meant to show Abhor's plot of development and finding a place where she can fully exert her freedom. Abhor discusses how love and sex are too closely intertwined and how she fears getting close to others. Abhor tries to escape this oedipal culture which has forced an identity on her through sexuality. Sexuality and its pain and pleasure both provide a sense of freedom and further entrap her in this world of the text, establishing another tension.

Another tension that is established in this first section is the othered state of ability. This identification like sexuality is established through her relationship with her father: "So he gradually let it be known I was a cripple. For this reason, he was shutting me up for the rest of my life. I was a genetic cripple: I was weird. Also I was dyslexic and autistic. I was too crippled for anyone to love me" (*Empire of the Senseless*, 14). This identification of "crippled" is self-inflicted, and is seen as an effect of how society treats girls. It represents the ways in which otherness is internalized. This is also meant to both establish the tension of external and internal

identity and the role of intellectualism in both creating and destroying hierarchy. In this first section Abhor expresses her frustration with how society has labeled her and forced her into her respective boxes, establish the role of language in her objectification and “othering.” Thus, Abhor creates these contradictions of self which she tries to escape by finding a place that is freer than the oedipal world she knows. Her partner Thivai, is also troubled and deconstructs himself in relation to her.

Another instance of a characters quest for self is the section of her narration entitled “In Honour of the Arabs” in which Acker uses an excerpt from Freud’s analysis of Dr. Schreber, where he is depicted as a sadomasochist who is asking who he is and then goes to Algeria, a place described as “the land of the free” (*Empire of the Senseless*, 45-47). Abhor then goes to Algeria and decides to find herself; she compares the setting of Algeria to her childhood. She, Thivai, and Dr. Schreiber began to explore Algeria and its cultural contexts; the episode ends with Abhor killing Schreber. This death marks Abhor journey and causes her to get away from Thivai, sparking his own existential journey and introducing a code of the novel: death.

This leads to Abhor’s realization that her sexuality has led to pain. In this next section Abhor is on her own in New York and thinks about the cruelties of slavery. Abhor’s identity is wrapped up in her sexuality and gender and she becomes trapped by this Oedipal society that forces her to be an “other.” She tries to reclaim her sexuality. In Abhor’s contemplation of slavery she begins to link identity to history: “History shapes all of us; history is the lives and actions of dead people. As soon as I’m dead, I’ll be part of this history which shapes. Memory or history runs human blood over time” (*Empire of the Senseless*, 66). This discussion of history shows Abhor’s journey of self-reflection and her expanding ideas of the complexity of these situations. Before she only knew herself in relation to her family and now she is exploring the

history of slavery and how these events impact the present. It also connects to the text's natural duality of meaning as both an exploration of identity and an exposé of how literature helps inform and deconstruct the patriarchal systems that create it.

Overall Abhor's multi-axis identity is initially psychological focused around the oedipal nature of culture she is brought up, the complex relationship with her father and issues with her mother. She feels trapped in her identity which she feels is forced on her through personal history which she begins to explore through her connections with the Algerian revolution and interactions with characters like Mackandal. Her journey is also based around her relationship with Thivai and his desire to gain her love and change himself in the process.

ii. Thivai.

In one section Thivai interacts with a rewritten Dr. Schreber, the famous patient of Freud. This narrative emphasizes Thivai's point of view and relationship to Abhor's plot of deconstruction. Dr. Schreiber is another image of a patriarchal figure that tries to categorize and pathologize Abhor's identity. This becomes a minor plot related to Thivai and Abhor working with Schreber and Abhor eventually killing him. In the section, "Beyond the Extinction of Human Life" Thivai meets with the Doctor with whom he is working and he evaluates Thivai and eventually leads him to discover codes for how society and identity are constructed. Dr. Schreiber insists on Thivai finding an enzyme or taking drugs that will ease his degeneration, comparing the affliction to AIDS (page 32). After the meeting Thivai's narration positions the plot of text as constructed identity and revolution:

I thought all I could know about was human separation; all I couldn't know, naturally, was death. Moreover, since I who desired and the eye who perceived had nothing to do with each other and at the same time existed in the same body-mine: I was not possible. I, in fact, was more than diseased. But Schreber had given me hope of a possible solution. A hope of eradicating disease. Schreber had the enzyme which could change my blood. When all that's known is sick, the unknown has to look better. I, whoever I was, had no

choice but to go along with Schreber. I, whoever I was, was going to be construct (Empire of the Senseless, 33).

After working with Schreber, whom Abhor eventually kills, Thivai decides to follow Abhor and eventually loses himself in the process. In many ways his journey is meant to deconstruct the masculine pirate and he eventually decides to do away with his masculinity completely as part of finding this freer more fluid space of being. Thus, his own existential crisis reflects the deconstruction of meaning in the text itself. In the section called “I realize something,” Thivai expresses this struggle between his masculine self (the king of pirates who inflicts violence and pain) and the feminine side that wants to wear dresses and be a ballerina (175-6). He expresses this struggle between his two sides thus: “The male half of me’ll rape the female half of me, which I know, isn’t very nice, but what can you do in a society which doesn’t recognize human needs?” (Empire of the Senseless, 176). He also references the tattoo image of the sword piercing the rose with the motto “Discipline and Anarchy”. This suggests his representation of a struggle that is meant to embody a larger struggle over societies’ failure to recognize the rights of people. Overall, Thivai and Abhor’s existential crises and search for a freer place reveals that there is no perfect place, that utopia is myth but dystopia is a reality. The novel ends with Abhor hoping for a freer, calmer state but acknowledges that there are will always be chaos.

II. Diverse Representations of Character: Understanding Identity in Secondary

Characters

Another feature of Empire of the Senseless that embodies third wave feminism is Acker’s fluid experimental narrative form. This narrative form is constructed from various texts, personal narratives, and images of tattoos and symbols. Acker uses theme in ways that disrupt the initial meaning and reframe them to promote a feminist message. In this case, the message is that

language is a tool of power it defines and constricts people, acting as a tool of social control. Acker attempts to represent and explore narratives based on several aspects of otherness: ability, race, gender, sexuality, and class. Race and gender are explored primarily in the narrative as it focuses in New York, Paris, and Algeria. The narratives are centered on Abhor and Thivai but feature many famous characters and historical figures of color such as Sinbad and Algerian revolutionaries. Acker's work often explores race, which has always been a divisive position for white women. Although Acker writes at a time in which feminism was becoming feminisms. Her discussion of race is a revolutionary and process yet problematic endeavor. Acker discusses many of these issues through Abhor's journey throughout the text, discussions of slavery and representations of famous literary and revolutionary figures and like Mackandal, the Algerian revolution, Sinbad the sailor, and Shahra'zad.

Empire of the Senseless focuses in part on the Algerian revolution and the dynamics of a slavery and definitions of blackness in connection with patriarchy and western hegemony: "Toussaint L'Ouverture who used Voodoo to defeat Western hegemony said: 'If self-interest alone prevails with nations and their masters, there is another power. Nature speaks in louder tones than philosophy or self-interest'" (Empire of the Senseless, 65). Acker's text then goes on to discuss the horrible treatment of slaves and the psychological and physical trauma of these situations. Abhor then follows this by comparing the body and mind to mirrors, a theme that is explored in connection with these forms of otherness. But much of the inclusive rhetoric of the text comes from the discussion of characters like Makandal, Sinbad the Sailor, and Shahra'zad. Shahra'zad is perhaps the most overt call for inclusion as Acker reframes the character as a feminist icon through recounting her role in 1001 Nights to end Shah Zamam and King Shahryar's patriarchy through sex and stories:

In order to control women, Zamam murdered his wife and her lover who was black and his cook. Sexuality and negritude are allied. King Shahryar murdered his wife and all her fiends, then fucked and murdered one woman every day for three years. Finally, one woman, Shahra'zad, wanted to end patriarchy. Finally, one woman, Shahra'zad, wanted to fuck this king more than life. He fucked her. In her prison of herself, or the world, she began her marvelous exploit, a tale which lasted one thousand and one nights, which staved off death, which staved off patriarchy, a tale of travelling, poverty, sensual pleasure, the unknown, wonder, disease, sex (*Empire of the Senseless*, 152-3).

Shahra'zad is thus framed as a hero and explicitly connects bodies, pain, sex, identity, and society. This characterization is followed by Persian script which alternates with Acker's English and shows a shift from Abhor's first interactions with the language to being able to switch between languages. This is meant to symbolize an immersion and sense of growth for the character and a shift of setting in the text. It represents a kind of textual multi-culturalism and presents several kinds of feminisms, at once pro-sex feminism and transnationalism. Acker's choice to "reclaim" Shahra'zad as feminist or even pro-sex feminist and use her story to show how issues of gender, sexuality and race connect is a textual claim for inclusion. Most importantly, it also starts a chain of narratives of other rewritten characters of color like Mackandal and Sinbad who delve into masculinity, race, and sexuality, thus further evoking notions of deconstructing identity based on different aspects of the psychology and physical manifestations of self.

In another section a black man sips a martini and looks at his reflection in a mirror and ends up shooting the image (*Empire of the Senseless*, 146). This action is related to a scene of lobotomies, and expresses the plot of destroying the images of identity that society subjects onto humans. The mirror becomes a power symbol in the text as it forces the subject to confront their own bodies and self-image. The black man's rejection of this suggests that it is part of a deconstruction of race and masculinity that corresponds with Acker's call for a progressive and inclusive feminism that presents all as victims of a white heteropatriarchal system.

B. EMBODIMENTS OF ADAPTATION AND CHARACTER: CREATING A FLUID NARRATIVE

Empire of the Senseless was created through a combination of experimental methods in attempt to create a fluid body of text. In the case of the text, fluidity constitutes a consistently changing, liminal space associated with deconstruction. In relation to feminism and intersectionality it suggests the creation a space or text that breaks convention and heteronormativity but applies this across the multiple axis of identity to include race ability, class, sexuality and gender. Acker's use of a fluid narrative form is a precursor Judith Butler's concept of the performativity of gender, but is de-constructivist rather than constructivist. Acker presents characters who move in and out of gender definitions and explore sexuality. While race and ability are not as fluid the narrative does explore each on a continuum. Much of this is created through Acker's pirating or appropriation of literature, in an adaptation of the cut-up method. This method is often attributed to William S. Burroughs by whom Acker was highly influenced. In his piece "The Cut-up Method of Brian Gyson," Burroughs explains the process:

The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and cross the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4... one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page. Sometimes it says much the same thing. Sometimes something quite different. Cutting up political speeches is an interesting exercise in any case you will find that it says something and something quite definite. Take any poet or writer you fancy. Here, say, or poems you have read over many times. The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition. Now take the poem and type out selected passages. Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like. As many Shakespeare Rimbaud poems as you like. Tristan Tzara said: "Poetry is for everyone." And André Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: "Poetry is for everyone." Poetry is a place and it is free to all cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place (2).

This second part of the definition and its overt call for using other texts and reworking them destroying the original context and invoking new meaning is essentially what Acker does. She

even uses Shakespeare and Rimbaud in her other works and talks of her love of Rimbaud in many interviews and her personal writing. For *Empire of the Senseless* other prominent revolutionary writers like De Sade, Freud, and Jean Genet are used along with classic literary texts like *Huckleberry Finn*. Most important is how this cut-up method is used to discuss issues of inclusion by including texts about the Algerian revolution, the Haitian revolution and Acker's own autobiographical writings about sexuality and gender. This composite of texts adapts the cut-up to create a strange duality of deconstructed meaning and political satire of 1980s issues like AIDS and Reaganism. From this fusion of postmodern technique and Acker's politics several stylistic tendencies and themes related to intersectionality can be found: the text as a metaphorical and figurative body, reclaiming of language and representations of othered bodies/characters, and deconstructing forms of identity and invoking fluidity and liminal space.

This goal of the text as deconstructing language is set up in the first section of the text:

The German Romantics had to destroy the same bastions as we do. Logocentrism and idealism, theology, all supports of the repressive society. Property's pillars. Reason which always homogenizes and reduces, represses and unifies phenomena or actuality into what can be perceived and so controlled. The subjects, us, are now stable and socializable. Reason is always in service of the political and economic masters. It is here that literature strikes, at its base, where the concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified. Well before Bataille, Kleist, Hoffman etc., made trail of Hegelian idealism, of the cloturing dialectic of recognition: the German romantics sung brazenly in the brass of spending and waste. They cut through conservative narcissism with bloody razor blades. They tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self, the proper; dislocated you the puppet; cut the threads of meaning; spit at all mirrors which control (*Empire of the Senseless*, 12).

Here Acker attacks the traditions of classic literature by exposing it as a means of supporting a patriarchal capitalistic society. She then depicts literature as a potential for "slashing apart the repressive machine" and establishing the mirror as a means of control, a symbol that is used by characters to confront identity. Therefore, Acker's approach to narrative to have one that evolves

naturally as opposed to one created by literary mechanism. The mechanisms are depicted as problematic as they help to establish the social order that characters try to destroy. By adapting the cut-up method the randomization of events is set up and creates several narrative points instead of a single one. Like Abhor's search for self discovery, the fluid structure allows for social critique. Overall fluidity of narrative is done to try to escape the essentializing trap of language and attempt a form that allows for ultimate freedom and self-identification.

C. FORM AS A METAPHOR: INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE BODY AS TEXT

i. The body as a text and the Tattoo as a symbol

Empire of the Senseless takes on the style of a body through the use of tattooed images. Several scholars have discussed the complexity of this form in relation to skin tropes. This notion is best explored in "Scratching the Sensory Surface in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*" by Maureen K. Curtin. Curtin emphasizes the role of the tattoo as essential to Acker's discussion of empiricism and a multi-national critique of capitalism and society: "But since the tattoo occurs on the surface and serves to raise the interior on the skin- physically in the form of blood, psychologically in the terms of represented values- then the tattoo might be said to mark not a turn toward embodiment but rather a complete evacuation of depth and a thorough objectification of the body as an artifact for visual consumption" (93). Looking at this analysis of tattoos and experimental form with Burroughs's definition of the cut-up in mind, it is clear that Acker is using these forms to expand upon the often problematic ways in which postmodern literature objectifies and evokes materialism. The cut-up is meant to challenge the conventions of language, of the institutionalization of art and literature, and to provide social critique. Acker's use of the cut-up and tattooed images then invoke this Dadaist notion by combining a feminist ideology of performative identity, cyborg, and postmodern deconstruction of meaning.

Curtin provides a discussion of the tattoo in *Empire of the Senseless* that establishes this idea: “the tattoo’s value exceeds that of a visual mark that represents ties to either the sacred or the profane. Its value derives from painful incursions that, even on the most superficial plane, have profound implications for the body subjected and for the body politic engaged in the subjection” (116). This relationship between the tattoos and subjugation is further expressed through characters’ identities. In several cases the tattoos are placed to introduce sections of the text or to represent identity and plot. Other times, Acker both invokes discussions of what tattoos mean and has a tattooist as a character.

In one section she discusses the relationship between tattoos and language, and a description of Christianity, identity and tattoos: “Among the early Christians, tattoos, stigmata indicating exile, which at first had been forced on their flesh, finally actually served to enforce their group solidarity. The Christians began voluntarily to acquire these indications of tribal identity. Tattooing continued to have ambiguous social value; today a tattoo is considered both a defamatory brand and a symbol of a tribe or of a dream” (*Empire of the Senseless*, 130). This idea of social identity and tattoos reflects the text’s focus on identity as both internal (psychological) and social. Tattoos are used as a symbol to explore material and superficial values, and the attempts to reclaim the body as a space for the individual. This notion also reflects Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality by acknowledging these overt bodily aspects of identity in relation to lived experience while also noting the sense of choice and individualism. Thus, tattoos are set up as an important symbol throughout the text.

The tattoo embodies many of the themes of the characters in *Empire of the Senseless*: self-identification, pain and violence, sexual pleasure. Acker also describes the character of the tattooist and practice as a painful sensation of a knife creating scars on the body, and relates this

practice to other symbols of the knife: “Caught between the rock of a false self-sufficiency and the rock of a need to go beyond his identity, he instinctively recognizes his mirror: his friend: the tattooer. The knife had become their point of looking at each other” (Empire of the Senseless, 135). Again, the tattoo and tattooist becomes symbols of identity and in this case masculinity. Acker’s overall focus on bodies, pain and pleasure are associated with this idea of tattooing and the tattooists themselves. It is this relationship between the Tattooist and Agone who is getting the tattoo that presents an erotic moment and one that is also non-heterosexual. The extended scene that follows (page 135-140) discusses this strange combination of pain and pleasure. It also discusses the tattooed image of the ship and dragon and the symbolic meaning of the colors black, brown, blue, and red. The passage ends with a discussion of tattoos as a criminal act that represents the criminality of male on male love and the fantasy of their acceptance and of the world that the tattoo creates (Empire of the Senseless, 140). This section is meant to explore issues of sexuality, much like the Algerian revolution sections explored issues of race. The motif of the tattoo reflects again of this tension, in this case pain and pleasure. Thus Acker establishes a relationship between the three tattoos as fantasies and representations of identity and of the realities of the struggles for existence against a society that others.

II. *Empire* as a Precursor to remix and visual culture

Another important aspect of Acker’s style is the act of reclaiming – language, space, character. Reclaiming is often attributed to “third-wave feminism” in relation to offensive language being used by feminists to change the patriarchal meanings to something empowering. This often occurs with words like “bitch” and “slut” and is more closely associated with pro-sex feminism. Acker’s form invokes Haraway’s theory of the cyborg and promotes multiple feminisms and with it a multiple and complex notion of identity.

In her essay “critical languages” Acker gives an early account of why she uses language in the way she does:

Art and the artist have always been marginal to this polis, the political body. Right now, our government is increasingly attacking acts of the mouth, written and oral speech, which pertain to those parts of the body not ruled by the logos, and acts of speech occurring in other media, visual, theatrical, etc. Once only marginalized, art and artists are slowly becoming criminalized by a government whose real heads are just heads, invisible, without bodies? It is imperative to return to the body, to return the body (Bodies of Work, 82).

Here, Acker suggests that language is often used as a means of control and the role of the artist is to challenge this. For her and her methods of appropriation she is attempting to take away the power from that system of control. She then presents a list related to “The language of the Body” and the rules she invokes and critiques for her work and the non-fiction work she did. Thus, Acker’s use of language is to express raw emotion and reaction much inclined with the Beats and Dadists but with a feminist notion that celebrates difference, invokes better representation and allows for the exploration of self (Bodies of Work, 92).

The term “reclaiming” is a new concept relative to the time that Kathy Acker was writing. It is an important element of third wave feminism and postmodern feminism as it invokes much of Hutcheon’s notion of the postmodern parody. Much like Acker’s own “pirating” and out-of-context rewriting, reclaiming takes positive meaning to initially negative meaning. This refers to ironic use of terms like “bitch” which became popular in the 1990s. Acker was infamous for her “pirating” of classic texts and ran into some legal issues related to copyright. This issue is in fact an early event in a continually modern issue now related to the Internet. In many ways it is not only a postmodern feminist interpretation of the cut-up style but also a late 20th century version of the remix and intertextuality. Several famous works at this time have similarly used other works. Some notable instances occur in comics like V for

Vendetta and Neil Gaiman's Sandman, each of which references Shakespeare and contemporary works like lyrics from the Rolling Stones. Acker's work is prevalent because it is one of the first to rewrite classic characters, texts, and language to create new meaning and reference in this postmodern context. Furthermore, Acker's work does this in a way that combines visual and textual elements, bridging between the growing comic genre and literature.

Overall, *Empire of the Senseless* uses fluid narrative and reconstituted language to invoke codes of plot that help to create a freer space. Acker explains this in a section discussing language and tattoos:

What is the language of the unconscious? (If this idea unconscious or freedom doesn't exist: pretend it does, use fiction, for the sake of survival, all of our survival.) Its primary language must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes, a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes (*Empire of the Senseless*, 134).

This rather nihilistic discussion of language is actually one of the most important sections of the text because it is an instance of Acker breaking from the omniscient narration of her characters to her own "meta" reflections of literature and textuality itself. This kind of narration has been used since the beginning of the novel but here she modernizes it through her use of appropriation.

This along with her intertextuality and multi-modality present a realistic notion of how language can be used to promote revolution and a space of freedom. Acker speaks in many ways of "reclaiming" language and establishing codes, reflecting earlier discussions of identity as a construct. She shows that language is often used to control and civilize but she dares to use language to do the opposite. This text is so productive because it invokes this master combination of intertextuality, commentary, and narrative. Furthermore, she uses these things to create a fantasy and future space to present real possibilities and expose social issues.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, *Empire of the Senseless*, is a work of feminist postmodernism that uses intersectional rhetoric and promotes inclusion within feminism through the use of Haraway's cyborg feminism. Through its innate intertextuality, *Empire of the Senseless* creates a complex and fluid narrative that invokes not only social critique but a place of revolution that mirrors a positive reality rather than exaggerated utopia. In many ways Abhor acts as a bit of an anti-hero as she is flawed, complex, gritty, and traumatized. She is a unique and revolutionary character in every sense of the word. Her innate embodiment of othered identities provides a unique literary interpretation of Haraway's cyborg that is played out through the intertextuality and rewriting of other famous characters with whom she interacts. Furthermore, she also invokes textual precursors to feminist postmodern theories like Judith Butler's performativity theory through the deconstruction of gender and sexuality and general identity as related to setting. This combined with the remixing of plots and characters creates a kind of meta-fiction that establishes modern literary techniques: multi-modality, fluid identity constructs, and a multi-voiced dissociative narrative. Last, Acker invokes a new kind of dystopia that involves finding order and freedom through chaos. Finally, Acker's loose use of a science fiction framework shows the radical potential of this subgenre as a political and creative force used to embody the most mundane and complex of theories.

Chapter 2: Creating A Diverse Space: Octavia Butler's

Black Feminist Politic and Genre-Bending

Science fiction, like postmodernism, was initially rejected by African Americans. It had pulpy narratives fixating on Anglo-Saxon male heroes that seemed all too close to space colonialism. Furthermore, its political history rarely focused around civil rights issues, presenting one sided attempts at exploring the alien other, space travel, westernized concepts of self and humanity, and the limits of science. Octavia E. Butler, who is considered the first successful black feminist science fiction writer, helped expand this literary genre to speak to a larger and more diverse audience and to tackle complex issues from a more nuanced and intersectional positionality. Butler's positionality is unabashedly that of a black feminist, as it explores issues of diversity from multiple lenses and interjects plots of social justice rather than fear of the other. Unlike other feminist writers she was not afraid to self-identify as a writer of genre fiction, when so many others, by Margaret Atwood (Atwood, 1), preferred the more sophisticated title of "speculative fiction writer." Her work expands upon many genre norms such as futurity, alien invasions, and time travel. Furthermore, Butler's work plays with the stereotypes of black women that have been established in western literature. This transgression of norms and character associated with classic science fiction and even African American fiction stems from Butler's focus on "grey areas." This complex tension at play in her works invokes some postmodern techniques similar to Haraway's concept of boundary crossing in "Cyborg Manifesto" (292-3). This chapter analyses *Dawn* and *Kindred* as examples of intersectional political rhetoric and characterization as manifested science fiction genre techniques that combine and form a black postmodern aesthetic.

To better understand Butler's work and the conversations that are central to this chapter I will provide a brief overview of definitions of the following: Afro-futurism, visionary fiction, and black feminist postmodernism. First, Afro-futurism is defined as "the intersection of

imagination, technology, the future, and liberation” or more specifically: “afro-futurists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-western beliefs. In some cases, it’s a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques” (Womack, 9). Womack’s exploration of Afrofuturism in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, depicts afro-futurism as a feminist space and as one that is transgressive and genre mixing, taking on several elements of postmodernism. Most important is the multi-axis identity that is represented and explore in Butler’s work, the play of tensions related to power, and genre-mixing. Second, Visionary fiction, is a genre proposed by scholars Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Marie Brown in their anthology *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*. This genre is theorized in a direct response to Butler’s legacy and oeuvre, visionary fiction is defined as,

a term to distinguish science fiction that has relevance to new, freer worlds from the mainstream of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc of bending towards social justice (4).

Thus, it’s a form of textual activism and decolonization that reflects the current state of identity politics as a diverse and intersectional movement. Third, black feminist postmodernism, is something I am theorizing, which involves theories like intersectionality as a critical postmodern method that mixes the social fabrication of identity and fragmentation with the reality of its consequences. I also want to suggest that a black feminist postmodernism actively plays with stereotypes and notions of blackness, much like the definition of afro-futurism suggests.

This chapter will explore these themes in two of Butler’s most famous works: *Dawn* and *Kindred*. *Kindred* follows a modern black woman, Dana, who navigates between 1976 California

and the Antebellum South to save her white ancestor. Dana, who is married to an older white man named Kevin, must navigate the dreams of a post-racial and multicultural space with the legacy of slavery and continued racial tension. *Kindred* is an important text because it presents a unique perspective using several different genre techniques. Often it is discussed as one of the first examples of the neo-slave narrative. *Dawn* is a take on the alien invasion text. It follows Lilith, a Nigerian-American woman and one of a few survivors of a nuclear holocaust who must grapple with a new existence and interaction with a strange alien species who wants to mate with her in order to save the human race.

i. Characterization and Narrative:

One of the unique features of Butler's work is that she has African and African American woman as her protagonists in almost all of her work. Furthermore, their characterization follows the tradition of creating complex and transgressive black female protagonists in African American fiction. However, Butler's portrayals of African American and African women go beyond these representations because the setting is a future space, rather than simply shifting from period to period, involving a new relationship with the environments of the text resulting in the shifting of power norms. For instance Butler adapts many of the qualities of male protagonists in classic science fiction to fit the multi-axis identities of her black female protagonists. They are strong and complex, and caught between a role that provides power and being second to a dominant group. In *Kindred* this kind of characterization manifests in Dana, who struggles with her historical identity, the modern space and self, and the social realities she must face. Butler as a writer of genre fiction in the 1970s was aware of these legacies of characters and the conflicting nature of literature and representation.

Kindred is a revolutionary novel because it challenges many of those stereotypes related to the science fiction genre and in African-American fiction and mainstream depictions of black women. The protagonist, Dana is depicted as strong, intelligent, and modern. Butler's complex depiction of Dana allows for the exploration of identity to be seen as socially constructed as Dana must deal with the historical realities of her identity in society and America's legacy of racism. Dana's own identity as a modern woman is treated less in light of psychology and more about how her own life and existence are tied to community and social hierarchy. Dana's first narrative description discusses her losing her arm and recovering:

I lost my arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until I was gone. When the police released Kevin, he came to the hospital and stayed with me so that I would know I hadn't lost him too (1).

This opening line uses a technique that draws the reader in and establishes the protagonist's reflection. Here Butler emphasizes experience and condition rather than overt narrative identity that is typical of many texts discussing black women. Furthermore, it begins with a scene that appears like domestic abuse but suggests complication. In the coming pages, Dana reveals the strange nature of their situation. Butler opens up with what seems like a predictable narrative but quickly shatters that interpretation. Dana is first introduced in this vulnerable condition but is revealed through the text to be a strong modern black woman. Dana's racial identity is not revealed until her second time-slip when Rufus uses the n-word. He also discusses her wearing pants, invoking a kind of androgynous interpretation of her character, further relating her to a modern era.

Dana struggles between her modern self and her historical self through her experiences in the time-slips. During each instance she gains physical and psychological scars that climax with the loss of her arm. Dana's modern self is related to her educated voice, which does not reflect

the dialect common to other depictions of black characters, her vocation as writer and worker, and her relationship with Kevin. Dana's historical self is situated with Rufus and Alice. Rufus dominates her time in the past becoming overly attached whereas many of the women such as Alice feel disconnected from her because of her closeness to Kevin and Rufus. Dana struggles with the knowledge of a modern woman, her connection to Rufus, and the realities of racism. In several sections of the text Dana engages with and juxtaposes her own position to the figures and settings she encounters. In one section she reflects on Rufus's mother's position as a woman trapped by her society who is barred from education, and yet has no compassion for Dana herself or the female slaves. Butler seems to frame this as a critique of white feminism and the denial of black women's rights and place in feminism. More overtly, the novel discusses how marriage in this period was a form of slavery –a topic much contested and explored by many feminists, then and now. Another juxtaposition relates to Alice and the other slaves. Many of them resent Dana for being educated but ultimately they accept her. In one scene Alice notices that Dana and Kevin love each other and she suggests that she use this situation to gain her freedom. In this society, an interracial relationship cannot be interpreted as loving because such hierarchies exist.

Butler explores the relevance of this kind of identity and notion of the self through Dana's timeslips and the historical relevance of her ancestry. It is revealed early on that Dana's ancestor Hagar, is the product of an interracial relationship between a slave owner Rufus and Alice, a black slave. The realities of this historical self is brought into Dana's modern life. The plot of the text revolves around Dana attempting to survive through aiding in Rufus and Alice's union which is not consensual. Dana is left with both physical and psychological scars from this experience and she is forced to examine the racial realities of her modern experiences. Dana's body is central to the plot of the text in which her experiences manifest themselves upon it in

scars, the loss of her arm, and whip marks on her back. Dana herself becomes a metaphor and is given an identity that is much more fluid within the scope of black female representation – a transgression and exposition of the realities of race in America’s modern era. Dana’s physical scars and displacement play with this theme of historical identity and manifestations of racism in the United States. Butler uses time travel as a means to explore direct and indirect as well as historical and modern iterations of racism and racial identity.

Dawn similarly projects a strong and complex leader in Lilith. She is in an opposite position from Dana however, as she must grapple with herself being from a past that has created prejudice against the alien creatures. Instead of establishing clear roles of good and bad, Lilith and the Aliens are granted a rare complexity; they grow, they make mistakes, and ultimately must decide to come together. Dawn is about a future where nuclear war has wiped out most of humanity except for a few. Lilith, the protagonist awakens to this world and upon her awakening interacts with an alien species called the Oankali. They tell her that she must mate with them or humanity won’t survive. The novel then focuses on Lilith and the other awakened humans struggling to cope with the alien encounter. Mainly it follows Lilith’s growth from initial prejudice to open-mindedness. One reading of this text is a sci-fi reimagining of the story of Lilith from the Jewish Talmudic texts. Moreover, it complicates the encounter stories of popular science fiction as well as transgresses the conventional motif of the alien other. The text, like many feminist science fiction pieces, embodies several social justice themes: it expands the scope of intersectionality to species, explores issue of colorism and through this supports the notion of multiculturalism and unity, and explores issues of immigration. Most notable is that Lilith’s survival is based on her ability to be open-minded and work with others. The text is indicative of intersectionality through characterization and narration as well as plot. This case

study will explore how Butler mixes science fiction, postmodern and intersectional feminist elements to create her characters and produce a plot in *Dawn*.

The character of Lilith contains several key elements – leadership, reimagining of the mythological figure of Lilith, cyborg nature, and intersectional composition. First, Lilith is best known as the demonic first wife of Adam in Jewish mythology. She is often depicted as a sexualized demon character who appears as half woman half bird. Butler’s reimagining of Lilith connects her to the transgressed lines between human, non-human animal, and machine. Furthermore, she is also an example of Butler’s attempt to create complex black female protagonist. Lilith’s role in the text ultimately is one of teacher, leader, and mother. She struggles knowing that she is “sleeping with the enemy” due to her relations with the Oankali. This provides Lilith with a dualistic sense of self that is also contradictory.

Lilith’s characterization and reference to this mythology figure is done to address the complex issues black women face and the challenges the character faces in the text.

and Black women is often highly stereotyped, and often negatively so. As Harris-Perry mentioned there are several key stereotypes associated with women of color that force the perspective of the “crooked room” that compares the experiences of black women reflected in the character Janie from *Their Eyes are Watching God* where she has to balance trying to do what she wants with the expectations people have of her (29). Harris-Perry then refers to this struggle as the “crooked room” which is a reference to a post-World War II cognitive psychology experiment where individuals had to locate an upright space and some, as a metaphor for the black women face,

To the researchers’ surprise, some people could be tilted by as much as 35 degrees and report that they were perfectly straight, simply because they were aligned with images that were equally tilted. But not everyone did this: some managed to get themselves more or less upright regardless of how crooked surrounding images were. When they

confronted race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion (29).

In many ways Lilith projects this in her relationship with the humans and Oankali. She is caught in between her relationships with each and her preconceptions that limit her ability to control either situation. Sometimes she conforms to the Oankali's orders and sometimes she produces a prejudiced ideology in relation to them. Its these tensions that are played with that make Lilith such a nuanced character. Butler's Lilith is a transgressive and complex figure. She is depicted as an African American woman. She is also given occupations as teacher and even as a mother, her body a vehicle in the forced union that creates a new species of half-Oankali and half-human beings. Furthermore, Butler's identification of Lilith's womanhood and race are not overt initially until her name is given, from self-description through narration, and through interactions with other characters. Lilith is not stereotyped either but instead allowed the contradictions associated with her captivity and being placed in a hierarchical setting.

Lilith is first introduced as she "awakens" after a nuclear war and it is suggested that she is imprisoned somewhere,

The room seemed dimly lit, though she had never awakened to dimness before. She corrected her thinking. The room seemed dimly lit, though she never Awakened to dimness before. She corrected her thinking. The room did not only seem dim, it was dim. At an earlier Awakening, she had decided that reality was whatever happened, whatever she perceived. It had occurred to her-how many times? –that she might be insane or drugged, physically ill or injured. None of that mattered. It could not matter while she confined this way, kept helpless, alone and ignorant (Butler, *Dawn*, 5).

This passage is important because it introduces several key themes and introduces Lilith's character. In awakening she is able to create and reflect upon reality and in a brief space expand her own knowledge of it. It is also here that her name is revealed, Lilith Iyapo. The last name is Iyapo, a Nigerian name, connected to the Yoruba tribe, meaning "many trials." Thus, her name

becomes a foreshadowing of her trials throughout the series. It also allows Lilith to be identified as a black or Afro-centric character without implying stereotypical behaviors. Furthermore, the notion of awakening and reflection which occurs in the next couple of pages allows Lilith to both reinvent her identity at each “awakening” and to still contain a historical self connected to these “past lives.” She also explains the backdrop of the attempted humancide that occurred in her past life.

Lilith’s identity shifts throughout the text from human to cyborg to a sort of mix. Initially, she discusses her cured cancer and hints at black female identity. Thus, Lilith’s identity contains different notions of these transgressed boundaries of otherness as well as power. When she first interacts with the Oankali she is given the role of teacher and leader to the other humans. She is given then, the power to decide who should be awakened and new roles:

“You’ll Awaken a small group of humans, all English-speaking and help them learn to deal with us. You’ll teach them the survival skills we teach you. Your people will all be from what you would call civilized societies. Now they’ll have to learn to live in forests, build their own shelters, and raise their own food without machines or outside help (Butler, Dawn, 32).

This task complicates Lilith’s notions of self as she initially identifies as human but in this new role she knows the other humans will not respect her nor see her as an equal due to her role of power associated with the Oankali. Overall, the text juxtaposes Lilith’s memories of her old life, thinking of her husband and child and friends, with this new space and its effect on her own changing body and sense of self. In one section she recounts her husband’s Nigerian identity, and the issue of her American identity being a problem for his parents, which affected her husband and how they raised their son (Butler, Dawn, 77). At this point she is also in contact with two Oankali, Nikanj and Kahguyaht, who are trying to change her body. By the end of the text Lilith has already begun her bodily changes and she is pregnant, carrying her human lover

Joseph's baby, which also contains Oankali DNA and that of two other humans. This ending suggests that Lilith then feels as if she had betrayed her people. Thus, Lilith's identity by the end of the text is one that more overtly embodies that of a cyborg and one that begins to question what it means to be human and the notion of the other.

II. Social Interactions and Political intersectionality

In coordination with each protagonist's complex mix of historical and social/modern self, is the ways in which social interaction form these notions of identity and plot. In each case, Butler emphasizes that relationship and social conditions are key elements of her work. In each text, society invokes hierarchies that led to the protagonists seeking means of survival. Often survival is based on interacting with people in powerful positions and dealing with this kind of hierarchy. Furthermore, Butler explores multiculturalism and diplomatic relationships between groups through interracial and interspecies relationships. This section will explore how these relationships further exemplify intersectional rhetoric as well as provide complex discussions of race and oppression.

i. *Kindred*

Interracial relationships are often discussed in American literature from the 1920s to 1980s. In the case of black postmodernism several examples undertake realistic discussions of tension and issues related with this subject. Most scholars look to examples by black men and the ways in which they are connected to discussions and stereotypes in literature since Shakespeare's Othello and Caliban, emphasizing relationships between black men and white men. Some of these works are James Baldwin's Blues for Mister Charlie, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, and Frantz Fanon's psychological study, Black Skin, White Masks. Ellison's work is considered one of the first works of Afrofuturism and emphasizes the issues of identity, sexuality, and black

masculinity in the modern era. Butler's work is an example of a discussion of identity that continues and expands upon the discussions of these relevant works of black and white relations, racialized identity and the post-modern era. Butler focuses away from the black male perspective and often these highly critical discussions of interracial relationships to emphasize the experiences of black women and the complexities of African-American identity in relation to the harsh and contradictory history of the United States.

The setting of *Kindred* is 1976 America. This setting is important because it is after Dr. King's Civil Rights movement but before the rise of groups like the Black Panthers and black feminist organizations. It is a time in which the feminist movement was moving towards intersectionality. It was a time in which interracial marriage had only been legal for a decade. The tensions were high at this time but also seemed to be moving forward. Thus, *Kindred* is a timely novel that presents a radically new approach to these discussions, using science fiction as a way to connect the developing African-American identity and to dispel the assumption that America was becoming post-racial.

Within the text, interracial relationships play a key role in Dana's timeslips. The novel focuses around Dana's timeslips related to her own descent from a racist plantation owner's son Rufus and his relationship with a slave named Alice, which results in the birth of her ancestor Hagar. Dana is forced to confront the complicated nature of her relationships as they are based upon racist and sexist social hierarchies. In one section of the text Dana recounts how she met Kevin at a casual labor agency. This sparks a discussion of wage slavery and the ways in which slavery has inspired modern forms of oppression related to class and race (Butler, 52-3). They connect over both being writers but are interrupted by comments made by colleagues about them being "the weirdest-looking couple" or being related to porn (57). Despite this Dana describes

Kevin as a “kindred spirit crazy enough to keep on trying” (57). Other sections hint at some hierarchical disparities. For example, Dana reflects on Kevin asking her to type his manuscript and she resists. They fight but she comes back the next day and he asks her to marry him. Then they both deal with family members rejecting their relationship and in Dana’s case being removing her from a will. These instances along with the complex central plot of Dana trying to save her ancestor show the complex race relations in America. Dana and Kevin’s good relationship is juxtaposed with the forced and abusive relationship between Alice and Rufus. Overall, Butler explores how society enforces racism in both modern America and the Antebellum South. Throughout the text Butler makes reference to the continuing issues of race; whether it be welfare or South Africa’s Apartheid, she makes the present issues visible. In doing so, the text establishes itself as a neo-slave narrative, exposing a social justice message as the central purpose of the text. Thus, this juxtaposition and exploration of the tensions and realities of race in America, are all allegorically and metaphorically used to explore African-American identity. It presents a black female voice that challenges the post-racial myth and makes visible the hierarchies that make up the fabric of American society.

ii. *Dawn*

Unlike *Kindred*, *Dawn* plays with the classic science-fiction mode of encounter narratives. *Dawn*, is centered on a future world where Aliens are attempting to “save” the human race by using complex sociobiology and genetic experiments. It reads more like a classic science fiction text, concerned with the ethics of science. Also, Butler contains a more overt nuance: discussions animal rights and the non-human through her heroine’s complex interactions with the Oankali. Lilith is described as being captured by the alien creatures. In this section, alien and human

interactions in the text will be explored in relation to Lilith's growth and intersectional political rhetoric of the text.

a. Alien relationships

Lilith's interactions with the alien creatures, the Oankali is varied. Initially, Lilith is seen as a captive of these creatures. Lilith interacts with several Oankali but the most important relationships are those with Jdahya and Nikanj. Jdahya is the first Oankali she interacts with. He is kind to her, or at least more so than many others are. Lilith's initial reaction to the Oankali is one of disgust and is linked to her own captivity, noting the humanlike qualities and overt differences of the creatures:

What had seemed to be tall, slender man was still humanoid, but it had no nose-no bulge, no nostrils-just flat, gray skin. It was grey all over –pale gray skin, darker gray hair on its head. The hair grew down around its eyes and ears and its throat... she glanced at the humanoid body, wondering how humanlike it really was. "I don't mean any offense," she said, "but are you male or female?"
 "It is wrong to assume that I must be a sex you're familiar with," it said, but as it happens, I'm male."
 Good. "It" could become "he" again. Less awkward.
 "You should notice," He said, "that what you probably see as hair isn't hair at all. I have no hair. The reality seems to bother humans." (Butler, Dawn, 13).

This initial encounter with Jdahya is an important moment in the text as it shows a "queering" of human and non-human traits as well as gender. This notion of the alien is an inherent amalgamation of Haraway's cyborg metaphor and of Butler's intersectional rhetoric. Lilith's initial discomfort with and prejudice against Jdahya, is an intersectional and postmodern feminist exploration of humanity. As Lilith interacts with Jdahya throughout the text she begins to accept the gender variation and non-human aspects of his identity and her captivity and complex relationship with him and the other Oankali becomes blurred. Jdahya's discussion of the ooloi gender further exemplifies the transgression of gender, human/non-human, and machine that Haraway's explores in her cyborg manifesto piece:

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence. No longer instructed by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, or household..... (293).

Thus both the Oankali and Lilith's position and body, and social relation define her within the space of the text and the plot is based around her growth. By the end of the text, Lilith has had much more conflicted relationships with aliens having been forced into pregnancy by Nikanj, the reader becomes aware of the complex and hierarchical relationships between the humans and Oankali. Lilith's motherhood and forced alliance with the Oankali becomes indicative of two political notions: a visible exploration of animal rights by comparing both human and alien relations as victims and instigators of this, and of the moral ambiguities of these situations as it allows both Lilith and the Oankali to contain both positive and negative moral traits.

b. Human relationships

Lilith's relationship with other humans is also a bit stressed and complex. She is given a leadership position by the Oankali and forced to awaken other human survivors. This forces Lilith to feel at once both immense pressure, power, and otherness. Lilith is a science fiction version of the Talmudic figure and acts as a leader and "mother" of humanity. She is also caught between the other humans and the Oankali which both gives her authority and dissonance. It is this contradiction of power and that becomes an important element of Haraway's feminist cyborg concept and Butler intersectional rhetorical space. A key feature of intersectionality is fluidity and social construction as well as hierarchy and power. With the emergence of black feminist theory and organization based around figures such as Audre Lorde leadership, power, and identity were recognized as a fluid and contextualized space.

In Lilith's relationship with Joseph Shing she is his lover, teacher, and leader. She is given some aspects of power. Lilith has two key human relationships one with Joseph (her love interest) and the other with Tate Merah (a friend whom she awakens first). These relationships change as her own identity shifts from human to transhuman figure of both human traits and Oankali traits. As Lilith begins to awaken other humans she has to deal with fighting that occurs. Like her initial reaction to the Oankali, there is also much resistance by other humans, and they don't fully trust Lilith because of her alliance. Tate, her friend even tries to steal Joseph away from Lilith (Butler, *Dawn*, 147). The in-group fighting and refusal to trust and work together is deemed incompatible with the environment and many of the other human's survival. Eventually Joseph is killed and Lilith's survival and others depends on their ability to comply with the Oankali and to have an open mind.

CONCLUSION:

In exploring these texts and their proposed use of intersectionality several questions arise namely, how does this lead to a black feminist postmodernism? This is because of Butler's unique mix of genre-bending and create play with time and space. Butler's story building more overtly invokes intersectional literary techniques. Her plots focus around diverse futures and take on a positive approach to science fiction spaces, instead of fearful rhetoric her work is indicative of complexity. Butler's characters are positive representations of black women that are also complex as they are caught in between spaces of power. Butler's work both presents complex characters who present intersectional identities as well as plots that explore structural and political intersectionality. In both *Dawn* and *Kindred* tensions are played out in the relationships that they protagonists have across species, races and genders. In the unique situations of the text

this multi-axis characterization allows for complex discussions of power relations and promote the importance of open-mindedness and love. Butler's work is revolutionary and has paved the way for so many other black feminist writers both in the West and in Africa.

Chapter 3: Bitch Planet and the Culmination of Visual Culture and Intersectional Feminism

Another area in which intersectionality has manifested is comics. In the last decade, popular comics have attempted to broaden their audience to women and girls. This has manifested in revived comic series where women of color are in more prominent roles. One example of this is Marvel's reimagining of Ms. Marvel as a Pakistani-American girl who grapples with her identity, growing up in America, and with the previously known white embodiment of the character. Similarly, the independent comic brand Image comics has produced several series featuring female characters that challenge the hypersexualized and thin archetypes of classic genre-based comics. A prominent example of this is the comic series *Bitch Planet Vol 1: Extraordinary Machine* by Kellie Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro. *Bitch Planet* attempts to reclaim and subvert the problematic genres of women in prison and exploitation films that was often heavily influenced by the male gaze, hypersexualized and demeaned women, and continued tired tropes of women as background or for male character development. Furthermore, *Bitch Planet* embodies a contemporary use of intersectional rhetoric by promoting intersectional feminism, reclaiming the comic and exploitation and science fiction genres, and through its experimental techniques. This chapter will explore how *Bitch Planet* adapts the techniques of Acker's experimental feminist style and merges them with Butler's discussions of race in the space of comics, as well as embodying feminism's evolution to a more inclusive and intersectional movement.

i. Characterization and Use of Intersectionality

A unique feature of *Bitch Planet* is how it engages the reader's assumptions by creating unpredictable plots and by subversively mocking genre norms. The writer, Kelly Sue DeConnick, in an interview with the third wave feminist magazine, *Bitch*, notes several inspirations for the comic series such as pinky violence films, feminist revenge narratives, women in prison films, and exploitation and Blaxploitation film. Many of these are explicit genres, for instance Pinky violence films are "sexed up bad girl action films" (Mirk). Thus, *Bitch Planet* has a plot built around female-centric action films that take on tropes of hypersexualized women, who although powerful are reduced to sexual objects for the enjoyment of a male audience. DeConnick also invokes classic comic and science-fiction film genre techniques related to a near future setting, interplanetary scope and corrupt government leading to a dystopian setting. Like Acker and Butler this dystopia is based around a patriarchal society that has forced women to act in specific ways or be punished. In *Bitch Planet* this is based on sexuality, husband's dissatisfaction, and the complete list of otherness captured by Audre Lorde's categories of age, race, class and sex. Subversion is the first of these categories is reflected in the first issue (given the same name as the series), where the text appears to follow a rich white woman, Marian Collins, who is sent to *Bitch Planet* after her husband divorces her for a younger woman. However, she is quickly killed and the narrative switches to a cast of women of color at the end of the section. The narrative initially focuses on a black woman named Kamau Kogo but disperses to other characters as the text continues. Thus, the notion of hero and protagonist are subverted in three ways: through the number of protagonists, their identities and their characters, and the promotion of collective engagement rather than the promotion of an individualistic hero or heroine. Instead of just one hero there are several and these women are women of color and they are violent. In the context of the text their noncompliance is deemed

heroic and more ethical in contrast with the patriarchal government. These representations are indicative of an intersectional multi-axis understanding of character. Not only are the women characters complex and bereft of simple good or bad natures, they are also given backstories that reflect discussions of otherness and oppression based around the intersection of race, gender, and class. This becomes apparent in the later issues such as 2, 3, and 4.

ii. Examples of Reclamation and Subversion of the Male Gaze:

Sexuality and bodies are a key feature in *Bitch Planet*. Because it is an attempt to subvert 1970s female-centric porno films about women in prisons etc, the writers and artists attempt to reclaim nudity as empowering. Most of the nudity is communal and seen as enforced by the government; it is rarely sexualized. In one scene called “The obligatory shower scene” (Ironically) an attempt to subvert the problematic representations of lesbian sexuality in pink violence films and the other genres that influenced the comic, the writer switches the focus from two women kissing to the man watching them (e.g. fig 2.)

(Figure 2- “Shower Scene”)



(Source: DeConnick, Kelly S, Landro V. De, Robert Wilson, Cris Peter, and Clayton Cowles.

Bitch Planet: Vol 1. Extraordinary Machine. , 2015. Print.)

This attempts to inhibit the male gaze and to give back power to the subjects, which leads to a tradeoff that was initiated by the female character. This overt reclaiming represents an evolutionary step from Butler’s discussions of power relations and the complex sexual relationships in Acker’s work. In *Bitch Planet* there is a similar multiplicity to the discussion and representation of characters along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, and class that is present in Acker and Butler’s work. This scene focuses more so on subverting and reclaiming the notion of “the gaze” or the ways in which patriarchy controls and sexualizes the representation of women for the pleasure of the assumed dominate white cis-hetero male audience.

iii. White Women as Secondary- A Critique of White Feminism.

Another manifestation of intersectionality and postmodern feminism is the covert critique of white feminism. The text focuses on complex black female characters but also has a villainous white woman that is used by the patriarchal government to enforce the policy of compliance on the women on the prison planet. More so, she is precarious hologram who is scantily clad and wearing a nun's habit. Like Acker's discussions of language and classic text shaping and reaffirming patriarchal norms of women, this mother figure similarly represents the expectations of women in patriarchal society namely the virgin-whore complex. She tells the women that they must be compliant and docile while also suggesting they must be beautiful (in relation to specific characteristics- thin) and sexually available to men. Furthermore, she references how female characters are often depicted as flat, two-dimensional, and likeable. This complication of character thus mirrors the discussions of tension, representation, language, and hypocrisy in Acker and Butler's work. Furthermore, this mother figure juxtaposes the common characterization of women in comics and popular science fiction (e. g. fig 3).

(Figure 3. "Mother Figure")



(Source: DeConnick, Kelly S, Landro V. De, Robert Wilson, Cris Peter, and Clayton Cowles.

Bitch Planet: Vol 1. Extraordinary Machine. , 2015. Print)

Last, the mother figure like the final scene of the first comic embodies and critiques white feminism, as a hypocritical and exclusive force. Ultimately this figure acts a tool of the patriarchy forcing the prisoners to confess their non-compliance and blame themselves for their misfortunes. She is an exaggerated form, a monstrous postmodern embodiment of western gender expectations and sexist representations in literature.

Another key feature of subversion is the parodied comic ads that feature in each issue. Along with catchy slogans they satirize the advertising of feminine products, and allude to characters' pasts, and to actual merchandise related to the comic. The first ad calls out to kids much like the golden age ads of kids' comics like Harvey. There are several types of ads – missed connection, ads by two characters about an anniversary and one by Alice attempting to reach out (e. g. fig. 4).

(Figure 4. “Hey Kids, Patriarchy!”)

HEY KIDS, PATRIARCHY!

Missed Connection
 ME: At the post outside DESTINO'S LOUNGE, sat Thursday night, I was waiting for my date, and having patience, a parking brake and a smoke drive to maintain emotional equilibrium beyond the usual crap talk.
 YOU: Me, wet and nude.

Are You Non-Compliant?
GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS!
 You want that sexy, hot chick in a bottle around your neck? **CRAZY CHICK** has you! What says **DREAMY BAD GIRL** like a temporary tattoo?
PUT IT ON YOUR FACE.

Happy Anniversary! **RABBIT**
 Damn, you are my light, my morning, my fire, my life, my love, my return. Every minute before we met, my life was a dull, grey, unexciting, light-bulb. **THE BUSINESS** said this sign, then he ribboned you. **GET OUT WHAT TO DO** — ALICE.

Let Us Change Your Personality (or at least your signature!)
 Send us your full name and we'll craft **SIX UNIQUE SIGNATURES** for you to choose from. Sign and pretend they express something real about you. Don't like your name? For an extra safety-net cents, we'll change that too.
SIGN.....3 for \$3.00 w/shipping

ORDER BY MAIL:
 You know this is garbage, right? You're ordering garbage. Okay, well, you were warned. Send your debit card earned money to the address below and we'll keep the Postal Service one a little longer to making you some crap. I'm not shipping internet, so don't even try.

ITEM	HOW MANY	PRICE	ALLOW 3-4 WEEKS FOR SHIPPING
SIGN		\$3.00	
FACE		\$3.00	
NON		\$1.50	
TOTAL			

SEND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO: PO Box 25846, Portland, OR 97226

PROTECT YOUR FACE
 The sadistic staff on BITCH PLANET must shield your face to protect themselves from the damaging effects of the alien environment. Also, by their own WISELY chosen words, they are **PROTECTING** your face from the sun. We'll take up your book to wrap your face and call it **FACEBOOK**.
FACE.....\$3.00 w/shipping

X-RAY SPECS
The Perfect Way to See Through His Intentions
 ONLY \$1.00
 AMAZING CLARITY INSTANTLY!
 Purchase magic X-Ray Specs and you'll see every woman's true intentions. See if she's really into you and see the truth that you in the back of your mind know you want to see. X-Ray Specs are probably the most powerful tool you can have to see through her intentions. **LOADS OF LAUGHS AND FUN AT PARTIES.**

(Source: DeConnick, Kelly S, Landro V. De, Robert Wilson, Cris Peter, and Clayton Cowles.

Bitch Planet: Vol 1. Extraordinary Machine. , 2015. Print).

It is this first ad that sets up the pattern of the ads page as another tool of subversion, continued narration, and general marketing for the comic. Because the issues are syndicated and adapt over time, the last ad page in the volume differs highly from this first one and reflects the issue's specific storylines. While this first one is a direct reference to the romantic ads of golden age romance and girl comics, the last two ad pages are much more overt in their political and satirical nature. The second ad page is made up of completely fake ads created in the world of the text, and is titled "Advice for Ladies" (e.g. fig 5).

(Figure 5. “Advice for Ladies”).



(Source: Source: DeConnick, Kelly S, Landro V. De, Robert Wilson, Cris Peter, and Clayton Cowles. *Bitch Planet: Vol 1. Extraordinary Machine.* , 2015. Print).

Furthermore, this ad page features feminine products of compliance and an ad for a character's bakery. Thus, these ad pages help to keep the reader invested and to continue the subversive content of the piece. In many ways they also continue the narrative and give clues to the next issues.

Overall, *Bitch Planet* indicates a shift in feminist experimental literary forms as well as a general shift towards a more inclusive feminism. As in the cases of Acker and Butler using a speculative format and genre mixing allows for creativity, exploration, and social commentary. The text uses framing, shot, dialogue and ads to create its critical plot. Its focus is a dual one: on both promoting intersectional feminism and creating a story to inspire it by discussing non-

compliant women. The text uniquely situates itself in intersectional feminist rhetoric, using the plot to engage in political discussions of privilege, critiques of white women, and reclaiming of space. It provides a cast of complex women of color who like Acker's *Abhor* use violence to fight back against a patriarchal system. Following a recent trend in comics, the text has darker narrative themes and allows the characters to be like antiheroes. Antiheroes and complex depictions of women are rare, especially in comic spaces; this comic attempts to break with that tradition. It allows the women to take up a kind of agency against the regimented system of the prison planet. This comic represents the ways in which feminism is adapting to a highly visual and commercial culture. It allows for a discussion of intersectionality and invokes its methods in its storytelling. It engages and inspires the reader to resist, making the comic more than just an intellectual or entertaining piece of art, but one that fights back.

This text in its use of reclaimed problematic genre, women-in-prison and pinky violence films, there is a concern of post-feminism that must be addressed. It was Audre Lorde that said "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 112). With this trend of reclaiming problematic genres it begs the question: can reclaiming offensive terms ever bring about change? The imagery in this graphic novel is highly explicit and does objectify at times. It also, like many third wave publications has direct ties to capitalism in the form of t-shirts and other memorabilia. Texts like these run the line between post-feminism and intersectional feminism. While the text self-identifies and provides discussion questions for readers, it fails to contain the complexity that comes with the creativity of Acker and Butler's pieces. While still a revolutionary text in its subject and promotion of feminism, the covert use of bodies for its promotion waivers on post-feminist praxis. As the series develops and readership grows, this may dissipate into more substantive plot. Overall, it is a promising series that is an important

development in third wave feminism as it invokes political and structural intersectionality through its diverse representation of characters and acknowledgement of multi-axis power differential. It suggests that feminist science fiction is moving towards visual and parodic modes as well as the burgeoning role of reclamation as a literary technique.

Conclusion:

1. Overview:

In Chapter one, the role of postmodernism and experimental art in the formation of third wave feminist science fiction is explored through the parodic fluid dystopia, *Empire of the Senseless*. Furthermore, several key features are identified in light of intersectional representation: namely how diversity manifests textually and metaphorically in characters using Haraway's concept of the cyborg metaphor. Furthermore, I explore Acker's approach to science fiction as one that is de-constructivist, not only acknowledging that truth is subjective and self-made but also tries to destroy positivism in problematic literatures and its poor representations of women and those who are "othered." Characters in *Empire of the Senseless* are both manifestations of conscious social critique and political issues of the time: transnationalism and the Middle East and Africa, the AIDS crisis, and race relations. In the analysis of Abhor and Thivai, I introduced them as feminist anti-heroes whose act of destruction is seen as heroic and their journey towards self-actualization, which I define and explore as a feature of the narrative. The last element that I discuss in this chapter is that of narrative and multi-modality, or Acker's mixing of tattooed images and symbols along with text to tell a story. This concept of the text as a body or self is then represented through this mixing of elements and embodies the tensions between constructivist ideologies and positivists' ones, in which Acker presents her own take. I

make the overall case that reclamation of texts and concepts, multitudinous characterization like Haraway's cyborg metaphor, and multi-modality of text and imagery are established as third wave feminist literary techniques.

In Chapter two, I evaluate the contributions of Black Feminism in third wave feminist science fiction by providing a case study of Octavia E. Butler's texts *Kindred* and *Dawn*. Through these case studies, several elements of a proto intersectionality are established: a complex multi-dimensional representation of a black female protagonist, genre-mixing and creation, and connecting power relations to concepts of the other and space. Overall, I establish Butler's work as creating space for people of color in the science fiction genre by establishing plots and characters that break from the positivist tradition of the Anglo-Saxon positivist hero to black female protagonists who struggles with being in-between states of power. Thus, the chapter focuses on the formation of a black female heroines, and plots focused around future spaces that are both diverse and promote unity as a solution to power relations. Here I establish the issues of representation as constructivist and apply the concept of genre-mixing and formation as a key element of Butler's legacy and third wave feminist techniques. Each text mixes black feminist concepts of selfhood and intersectional political rhetoric that pushes for diverse discussions of power and what it means to be human. Butler's work features diverse representations of future spaces and complex black female protagonists. She also structures plots around power relations favoring discussions of interracial relationships and tensions as well as looking beyond humanist perspectives to include a post-humanist contemplation of species as well. Last, Butler's adaptation of the science fiction genre as a space of social justice has led to the formation of sub-genres like afro-futurism and visionary fiction. Thus, Butler's black feminist approach has created a more diverse third wave feminist science fiction that

characteristically breaks from simple narratives of alien invasion to more nuanced discussions of power relations and the “alien other” as well as a critique of humanist science fiction.

In Chapter 3, I explored the how the established modes of intersectional character and plot have combined with the techniques of “reclaiming” and rise of visual culture through a brief case study of Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine de Landro’s *Bitch Planet*. The first part of this chapter reiterates third wave feminist sentiments as “intersectional feminist”. I evaluate the text as intersectional feminist based on its self-identification as such, characterization, narrative and plot. I explored several features that reflect postmodern techniques established by Acker such as reclaiming of problematic genre and space within the text and the concept of parody. In light of Butler’s established black feminist science fiction: exploring power relations through tenuous relationships, favoring black women who are given complex roles rather than stereotyped, and using the plot to promote intersectional politics. I also established several unique features of the text like its focus on multiple characters and group dynamics over protagonists and the role of imagery and capitalist endeavors as part of its methodology.

II. Further Research:

Although this thesis project explores a great deal in relation to intersectionality and its role in third wave feminist science fiction, there are several areas of potential research that I would like to address. The first such area is intersectionality, as it is reflected in the multi-axis identity formation of character, namely in contemporary black feminist literature. While this project focuses on feminist speculative fiction and makes the case that it embodies traits of feminist postmodernism, it is not an explicit exploration. This is a topic that could field a much larger project and with it the discussion of black feminist postmodernism.

While discussing Octavia E. Butler's work I had hoped to explore more connections to elicit such a characterization but it would have digressed from the topic too much. Instead the suggestion is made and characteristics are established in focus with intersectional character, narrative and plot. In early drafts I had attempted research to find sources that promoted this idea, but very little scholarship exists and is situated in a more contemporary space of the last 20 or so years. In particular, I have noticed elements of a black feminist postmodernism in the works of Zadie Smith and art movements like *Art Hoe Collective*. Smith's narrative form has been referred to as the "multi-voice" and attempts to reflect various positionalities and backgrounds. I had briefly considered doing an analysis of *White Teeth* for this project but felt it did not fit with the other texts and did not fit with the theme of dystopias. However, Smith's unique style does incorporate black feminism and postmodern narrative techniques and should be discussed in future scholarship.

Second, because I became so focused on narrative and manifestations of intersectionality, I was unable to explore postmodern concepts of space. More specifically, I had hoped to apply the Foucauldian concept of heterotopias, as a metaphor for the utopic possibilities of identity politics in *Empire of the Senseless*. While doing research about experimental postmodern writing, I had stumbled upon the concept and found it extremely applicable to Acker's work. At this point I was working with different texts than *Bitch Planet* and even Octavia E. Butler's work and struggling to figure out a clear topic. Acker's complex intertextuality created a play between the initial meanings of the appropriated texts that her new meanings in relation to the overall plot of deconstructed meaning. The method was only applicable to *Empire of the Senseless*, because of its complex layering due to Acker's use of the cut-up method. The text suggests that language has the power to both trap and continue heteropatriarchal social order and to free the individual.

Heterotopias apply a similar contradiction by juxtaposing spaces, in light of utopian and dystopian models. While this application could have been applied it would have only worked with *Empire of the Senseless*. Also, because it is such a complex concept applied to an equally complex text it would have been too general of a discussion and required its own thesis or dissertation length project.

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