

CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE: AFFECT, POSTMODERN CITIZENSHIP AND PROSTHESIS

IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *PARABLE OF THE SOWER*

AND *PARABLE OF THE TALENTS*

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ABSTRACT

This project explores representations of subjectivity, technology, and citizenship in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. These novels portray a not-so-distant future in which current social trends like privatization and increasing drug abuse have led to apocalyptic conditions. Accelerating these changes is the fact that the more advanced society becomes technologically, the more technology affects the characters' biology, and the more it mediates their personal experiences and relationships. These conditions lead to questions of how subjectivity and citizenship are deeply transformed by technology in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic America. I examine technology as a form of prosthesis because it both integrates into the self and extends the self in these works. Theorists of culture have given an increasing amount of attention to tropes and metaphors of prosthesis that explore the general relationships between the body and technology in modernity and postmodernity, and I pursue this trend by framing the question of subjectivity and citizenship through the lens of prosthesis because it captures the material and metaphorical aspects of one's position within the state in the future. In order to examine this relationship, I use a combination of affect theory in tandem with concepts of "prosthetic emotions" and "necro citizenship" in order to extrapolate Butler's portrayal of how life is fundamentally changed by technological advances. I interpret this type of citizenship as what I call prosthetic citizenship because it acknowledges a form of interconnectedness in which people reflexively affect and are affected by each other both

conceptually and materially through relationships and biological conditions such as hyperempathy. Butler's protagonist, Lauren Olamina, represents a rare type of person who adapts and thrives in the chaos and uncertainty of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse and thus, represents a radical new way of being and serves as a model for how we can understand the postmodern subject and the question of citizenship.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Prosthetic Citizenship	7
CHAPTER 2 TECHNOLOGY AS PROSTHESIS	12
Prosthesis and Material Extensions	18
CHAPTER 3 MEDIATION, SUBJECTIVITY AND IDENTITY	23
Postmodern Subjects and Prosthetic Citizens	27
Technology and Subjectivity	32
Mobility, Change and Citizenship	35
CHAPTER 4 POSTMODERN CITIZENSHIP	41
Cultivating Subjectivity	47
Discipline, Citizenship, Prosthesis.....	52
REFERENCES	59

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Partnership is giving, taking, learning, teaching, offering the
greatest possible benefit while doing the least possible harm.
Partnership is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership is life.
Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, 135

Partnership is a truth about life in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Butler privileges the model of sharing that partnership embodies, and her concept of sharing goes beyond the idea of sharing through emotional relationships by also calling partnership "mutualistic symbiosis," which indicates a physical level of sharing as well. She problematizes the idea of sharing by introducing a delusion syndrome called hyperempathy, which is informally referred to as "sharing," that forces people to experience another person's pleasure and pain thereby reducing the idea of sharing to something that is thrust upon someone rather than an extension of generosity. The narrator, Lauren Olamina, is a sharer, and she develops unique adaptations to survive this debilitating condition despite the chaos of the apocalyptic environment she lives in. As a result of her perseverance and unique perspective, she perceives metaphysical truths about god and human existence that lead her to found a religion called Earthseed. Butler raises the question of how to maintain active agency in a world that cultivates and promotes mental and physical passivity. Her work considers the contemporary dilemma about feeling, empathy and whether empathy can be a valuable or useful political model. Modern theories of affect, in particular, critique the role of feeling in politics and are the basis for my analysis of Butler's works. Before I begin to engage these issues, I will provide an overview of the main theoretical concepts I will use to then discuss the description of empathy in these texts.

Olamina conceptualizes partnership as a fusion of the material and the immaterial. This fusion suggests a relationship like the one that is created through prosthesis when something outside of the natural self is integrated into the self in order to extend a person's abilities. As the artificial is incorporated into the natural, prosthesis represents a liminal space where the organic and inorganic blur together and become one. Barbara Johnson explains that prosthesis is prevalent in literature because "the idea of a dimension that human beings cannot reach is actually a rather common form of aesthetic idealization" (83). Prosthetic devices compensate for a dysfunctional body part and in so doing, can actually amplify the body's ability to reach dimensions that human beings are otherwise unable to reach. I argue that Olamina embodies the concept of prosthesis both materially and immaterially because, as a sharer, her body is an extension of other people's bodies and because, as a spiritual leader, she sees human beings as individual prosthetic extensions of god who continually shape the universe. Olamina blurs the lines between the self and the other thereby providing a unique way to imagine alternate forms of subjectivity and citizenship. I call this liminal position prosthetic citizenship. I will stake this claim through a sustained analysis of several figurations of prosthesis in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*.

The concept of prosthesis opens up the possibility for a hybridized framework and offers a model for thinking rhizomatically. I take the view of "prosthesis as technology" in keeping with Vivian Sobchak's re-envisioning of that trope:

I want to take the general and vague trope of 'technology as prosthesis'...and *reverse* it—turning it back and regrounding it in its mundane context where, like my prosthetic leg, it stands objectively in common opinion as the general and vague trope of 'prosthesis as technology' (28).

I agree with Sobchak's claim that material prosthesis, the prosthetic device, cannot be overshadowed by the metaphorical concept of prosthesis. Her regrounding of prosthesis

challenges theorists to attend to the limitations of prosthesis and remind us of the reality that prosthetic devices are used to compensate for or repair a dysfunction part of the body and in turn, introduces its own set of limitations. As a metaphor, prosthesis can seem too good to be true because it represents a symbiotic relationship between humans and technology or, more generally, between the natural and the artificial. However, negating the limitations that prosthetic devices address and introduce doesn't present the full truth of the condition. Sobchak's understanding of prosthesis informs my attempt to maintain the materiality of prosthesis while also retaining the metaphoric value of prosthesis as a figuration. Prosthetic citizenship is rooted in theories of affect, in particular, as both affect and prosthesis share a hybrid status.

Affect theory is challenged with the lack of a coherent and solid interpretation of what affect means. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Brian Massumi have pioneered the study of affect in literary theory, but they do not agree on a solid definition of affect. Lili Hsieh astutely observes that there is still a need to develop a "politically effective theory of affect" (220). My understanding of affect is also informed by literary theorists, like Lauren Berlant, who have taken on affect theory in literature in order to study how it is encoded in texts and what we can learn from them. Berlant and Massumi distinguish between emotion and affect, reserving the term "emotion" for the personalized content and affect for the extension of emotion, mood, and/or feeling beyond the self. In other words, emotion is contextual and stems from an event whereas affect is situational and stems from one's environment. Affect operates in literature, for example, in the way that we read ourselves into a text, and yet the text also reads itself into/onto us. Berlant calls this "affective receptivity." In contrast, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, does not define affect clearly choosing instead to distinguish affects from drives explaining that "affects

can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects” (19). Similarly, theorists like Isobel Armstrong understand affect as a function or feature of reason. Armstrong includes all of the following under the general rubric of affect: emotions, feelings, passions, moods, anxiety, discharge of psychic energy, motor innervation, pleasure, pain, joy and sorrow, rapture, depression (108). Armstrong is rooted in theories of object relations as a productive way of understanding affect and how it breaks down the subject/object divide. Michael Hardt explains:

Affects require us, as the term suggests, to enter the realm of causality, but they offer a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers (ix).

The one thing that most people seem to agree on is that a major benefit of working with affect—in spite of its complexity—is its natural span across traditional binary divisions. It is in this spirit that I am using affect as a tool to understand Octavia Butler’s texts.

The reflexivity of affect that Michael Hardt describes is one of the elements that affect and prosthesis have in common because prosthesis is by nature reflexive. As an extension that is not a stand-alone, prosthesis is by nature reflexive because it relies on a “host.” True to the nature of prosthesis, this concept extends from several theories and brings what may seem like separate and distinct themes/modes of analysis or interpretation together in a way that shows how they are all interrelated and interdependent. As a result, prosthesis resists totalizing narratives. Such integration invites theoretical questions dealing with citizenship, identity, subjectivity, and discourse to inform one another and give attention to the intersections where these various realms overlap. The concept of prosthetic citizenship invites these issues to be examined in tandem without isolating or privileging one concept over another.

I use the concept of prosthetic citizenship to maintain a cohesive analysis while managing the lack of uniformity in affect theory. Lili Hsieh responds to the disparities between Sedgwick's and Massumi's works and asserts that "a new and more nuanced 'politics of affect' is to come, only when one takes up both of their dares, to give in to affect, and to give in a schizophrenic way so that the joint forces of a hybridized framework of affect will open a new political terrain of futurity" (232). Butler's works portray prosthetic citizenship through the figure of Lauren Olamina and embody a hybridized framework that advances the goals of Sedgwick's and Massumi's efforts. Hsieh explains the effort to find a more productive framework for affect theory: "the salient point they make of affect is precisely the broadening of scope from purely psychoanalytic or cognitive model of emotion by recasting affect in the post-modern political scene" (230). In addition to establishing a potentially productive framework for understanding affect, this concept unites and extends the conversation around affect into the realm of the political by bringing two productive, yet completely unrelated, arguments together: Kathleen Woodward's concept of "prosthetic emotions" and Russ Castronovo's concept of "necro citizenship." The benefit of combining theories of affect, prosthetic emotions, and necro citizenship is that each individual contribution is made more powerful and widely relevant when combined because each deals with issues that are widely circulating and discussed in contemporary theory. Necro citizenship sustains a strong argument on American citizenship that emerged in a specific time period and remains relevant today while prosthetic emotions draws parallels with and attends to the way that technology permeates interpersonal relationships and the public sphere in contemporary culture.

The term prosthetic citizenship extends from Kathleen Woodward's titular essay on prosthetic emotions. Woodward proposes the concept of prosthetic emotions to explain and

examine the ways in which emotions act as prosthesis. Her essay is situated within postmodern narratives and science fiction texts and explores the relationship between machines and emotions. She explains that these genres offer critical insights into emotions and emotional development: "certain emotions...are sanctioned in these technonarratives, the complex emotions we designate by such words as sympathy and pity, love and wisdom. Thus ultimately, as we will see, an altogether familiar cultural narrative of emotional growth--the maturation of the emotions--is inscribed in these stories" (98). "Sympathy and pity, love and wisdom," according to Woodward, are examples of prosthetic emotions because these are the emotions that cause an individual to extend her/his capabilities beyond the self toward another. She further develops this concept in her book *Statistical Panic* where she draws on the metaphorical side of its relationship to bodily prosthesis. In the same way that an "outside" hand is joined with the natural body to extend the capabilities of someone who does not have a hand, a prosthetic emotion is someone else's, an "outsider's," expression of sympathy, pity, love, or wisdom that attaches to another person. In order for a prosthetic body part to be accepted into the body and fully integrated, the body has to have certain conditions like being free of infection. Similarly, a prosthetic emotion can be expressed and attached to another person, but to penetrate that person and create a bond between two people certain conditions must also be present.

The second part of the term prosthetic citizenship extends from Russ Castronovo's work, *Necro Citizenship*, which discusses and analyzes the role of death in Victorian era American citizenship. Above all, his is a study of identity politics, but it is also strongly tethered to affect theory as is evident in the primary claim made in the book: "necro citizenship contends that abstract citizenship exploits the literal biological fact of mortality to effect a political death in which subjects alternately suffer and enjoy the de-politicization of cultural memories and social

textures that reside in human life" (4). Affect influences Castronovo's concept of necro citizenship as he is concerned with the moments in which people "alternately suffer and enjoy." Thus, he is concerned with the affective response of citizens to legal abstraction. Castronovo points toward the deeply personal influence of the political on the individual. This liminal space between private and public life gestures toward the hybridity represented in prosthesis. In *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina is what I call a prosthetic citizen because her body is a hybrid that is inextricably physically and emotionally connected with others. Furthermore, her journal is a form of material prosthetic device that extends from her and is incorporated into the lives of other people as they become followers of Earthseed. I will use these concepts to explore these various forms of metaphorical and material prosthesis in what follows.

Prosthetic Citizenship

I argue that Olamina represents multiple forms of prostheses and prosthetic devices by approaching each text separately and showing how many ideas presented first in *Parable of the Sower* evolved or became irrelevant by the time *Parable of the Talents* was published in 1998, five years after the first book. Beginning with an analysis of subjectivity as it relates to journal writing allows me to look at what writing the self means for Olamina and how her journaling influences her subjectivity. There is a strong connection between the activity of journaling and working through her daily experience. The result is that Olamina has a well-developed sense of self and confidently rejects her father's Christian beliefs because they don't reflect the truths that she has come to know and believe. Christianity represents a limited and repressed form of subjectivity in the novels because it promotes a patriarchal, omnipotent God that sounds more like a mythological figure than a divine presence in nature. She criticizes the fact that "a lot of

people seem to believe in a big-daddy-God or a big-cop-God or a big-king-God. They believe in a kind of super-person” (15). Believing in this kind of god, for Olamina, is tantamount to anthropomorphizing god and subjugating the self to a powerless position in which things happen to you—good, bad, or otherwise—at the whim of this super-person. Through journaling, Olamina gives voice to her radically different concept of god as change and presents the belief that the individual has an active role in the relationship with god through action and awareness. The journal itself becomes a prosthetic device, a literal extension of herself that attaches to other people as they read and become followers of Earthseed. According to David Wills, “the act of writing, criticism or whatever, is a prosthetic act” (30). I complete the analysis of subjectivity in *Parable of the Sower* by looking at hyperempathy and the concept of sharing that is central to the novel. Olamina comes of age during this novel and much of it is dedicated to her finding out her power and limitations as she manages hyperempathy in a range of ways, from fighting with her brothers to surviving on the dangerous journey north by foot on the freeway.

Technology is also a form of prosthesis because, in the novels, advances in pharmaceutical drugs have led to significant biological changes that in turn result in mass chaos brought on by “a new illegal drug that makes people want to set fires” (23). The chaos is exacerbated by the condition of hyperempathy, which can debilitate people like Olamina who are affected by simply witnessing the chaos. As social ills and mass suffering increase to apocalyptic levels in California, Olamina follows the space program and the astronauts who are exploring Mars as the single most important place of hope and discovery. She draws the connection between current suffering and space exploration by suggesting that current suffering shouldn’t limit exploration and possibilities for new discoveries. At odds with the majority in her community, Olamina sees the space program as the answer to current suffering because it

forces people to think beyond the here and now and offer a place of both spiritual hope and untainted territory. The hope of space travel is, in other words, equally as important as addressing the material and bodily suffering that are rampant in the California of 2024.

I conclude the section on *Parable of the Sower* by giving attention to the issues of citizenship that the novel raises. Suffering is a political condition in the novel. The failure of the state is evident in its inability to keep people safe and in its short-sightedness that leads to shutting down the space program. The laws are obsolete because although they have a classification of illegal drugs, there is seemingly no consequence for the pyromaniacs and crazy gangs that threaten communities. The government's failure is evident in the failed infrastructure that renders even the freeway obsolete. In this context of obsolete social and political structures, Olamina manages to establish a community rooted in immaterial connections of shared belief and values rather than by material connections of location or class level.

The second half of this thesis will focus on the way that these themes evolve and are represented differently in *Parable of the Talents*. Olamina's journal writing continues and the story is revealed through her journal entries, however, her daughter is present in the novel and narrates her mother's journal entries, which offers a different perspective and often a counter viewpoint to Olamina's personal writing. I will also give attention to the meaning of Olamina taking on drawing in addition to journal writing as an activity of self-expression and how it impacts her subjectivity. Olamina is also no longer a teenager with a vision in this novel as she was in *Parable of the Sower*, but a leader of the Earthseed religion, which she has been writing about and preaching since 2024. Olamina's subjective interests change from criticism of her father's Christianity in *Parable of the Sower* to managing the growth and threats that arise with

the new religion, Earthseed, which has broad appeal. I will analyze these questions in tandem with the issue of hyperempathy, which is less of a central theme in *Parable of the Talents*.

Looking at prosthesis in the novels illuminates a connection between Olamina's more fully developed understanding of herself and her beliefs in the second novel, and the way that technology has also become more sophisticated and integrated into people's lives and bodies. As a result, there is an increasing potential for people to be manipulated by technology. Her daughter's generation is plagued by virtual reality televisions more than drug abuse. Rather than an epidemic of hyperempathy, the multisensory experience of virtual reality television replaces human interaction and community thus alienating people from one another and cutting them off from reality. Advances in technology are increasingly invested in providing escapist entertainment that numbs the public and building up the military's capacity through more heavily equipped and armored vehicles, called maggots. Power is more easily mediated and exercised through these tandem forces of sedation and sheer force. Yet no single technological advancement embodies the sinister nature of control as much as the collars in the novel. The collars represent the level of brute force and control that technology enables in this dystopia and its use in advancing political and profit-making agendas.

Finally, by analyzing citizenship in *Parable of the Talents*, I argue that lack of engaged civic action is one of many reasons that appear to contribute to the increasing alienation of the public that allows hegemonic, ideological leaders, like President Jarret a right-wing Christian demagogue, to rule so effectively. In the novel, the state is all-powerful yet shockingly absent. We know that government dollars are spent to create destructive vehicles, like maggots, but we don't see how that process happens. Similarly, Olamina highlights the vast distance between government and private citizens by explaining: "President Jarret, if the country is mad enough to

elect him, could destroy us without even knowing we exist” (21). Increasing privatization through all facets of American social, civic, and business life seems to have effectively abstracted individuals to the point of negation. Ultimately, I argue that in this dystopian America, the alienating effects of modern day American individualism are projected through radical forms of affective subjectivity that are tied to technology. In response to this environment, Butler envisions Olamina as a prosthetic citizen who extends beyond herself to establish continuity with the people in her community and subverts the omnipresent disciplinary forces of advanced technology.

CHAPTER 2

TECHNOLOGY AS PROSTHESIS

The concept of prosthetic citizenship emerges from an in-depth analysis of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. The idea of prosthetic citizenship materializes in science fiction because science fiction novels imagine a hypothetical future and extrapolates current trends in scientific innovation making them more influential and far reaching than they are in the present. Because the genre is particularly concerned with current trends in technological advances, it is an ideal lens through which to explore questions of the body and technology. Science fiction often portrays elements of new and different social systems that emerge out of a radically transformed environment that exploits present day anxieties around scientific discovery and technological advances, which, along with their potential to improve human life, also bring a great potential for irrevocable change and possible destruction. Butler's novels explore the next generation and attend to the near future by being situated in America of 2024, which is only 30 years from the time the time novels were written. She examines the catastrophic potential that action—or inaction—today can have in an accelerated environment of significant and unexamined change.

Butler imagines the consequences and effects of current social trends like privatization and increasing drug abuse in *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Rebecca Wanzo's article "Apocalyptic Empathy" examines feelings and politics in the two novels and explores them as examples of postmodern sentimentality. Wanzo explains that

Butler describes *Parable of the Sower* as an "if this goes on story," because she argues that terrified gated communities, corporate enslavement of laborers, breakdown of socio-economic and legal systems, increasingly dangerous designer drugs, a fascist government run by the religious right, and environmental devastation can all happen and that versions of it are "going on" now. (74)

The works self-consciously and intentionally examine elements of our culture and social systems during the time they were written, and imagine what the future could be like if current trends and changing values continue to gain momentum. The apocalyptic environment of the novels envisions the potential stress that such momentum would put on our social systems. Butler hints at the disconnect between the rapid development of drugs, virtual reality, and prosthetic gadgets like collars and the lag in knowledge of the full effects of these innovations.

In her works, the more advanced society becomes technologically, the more technology affects her characters' biology, and the more it mediates their personal experiences and relationships. Technology in this respect can be seen as a form of prosthesis because it both integrates into the self and extends the self. Technological advancements in areas ranging from psycho-pharmaceutical drug development to entertainment systems complicate the characters' abilities to adapt to their natural environment. For example, Lauren Olamina, the protagonist, suffers from hyperempathy syndrome induced by a pharmaceutical drug—formally called Paracetco and informally called “the smart pill” or “the Einstein Powder”—that her mother abused during pregnancy. Hyperempathy, a technology-induced syndrome, is widespread in Olamina's generation and illustrates technology's potential to affect subjectivity and deteriorate the body. As a mind-altering drug, Paracetco subjects abusers to permanent chemical and physical changes in the body that extend to birth defects in a user's children. Butler highlights the role of pharmaceuticals in considering our relationship to technology because drugs are integrated into the body; whether illicit or medical, pharmaceuticals are consumed, ingested, and fully internalized. Consuming drugs is a process of fusing with technology because people subject themselves to temporary and permanent effects on the entire self, mind and body. Thus,

technology further complicates affect because it has the capacity to change people biologically thereby influencing their subjectivity as well.

Furthermore, drugs raise distinct questions about quality and safety since it is difficult to tell if drugs are fake until they are consumed, until the effects confirm their quality or raise suspicions that the drugs are counterfeit. This makes the consumption of drugs far different from the consumption of something like culture. Butler addresses the critical role that technology plays in affect through its material and immaterial effects. These texts highlight the ways in which technology becomes part of the body and increasingly shapes our experience. The reflexive nature of sophisticated technological devices that are incorporated into the self also incorporate the body into the device. The concept of prosthesis complicates this reflexive relationship because as it enhances the self by extending capabilities, it also extends the ability for technology to be a disciplinary force acting upon the subject, especially in its power and capacity to influence biological changes. In *Parable of the Sower*, drugs like Paracetco are meant to enhance one's ability to learn and study and thus support human flourishing while they also perpetuate human suffering because they are habit-forming and cause permanent undesirable physiological changes.

According to Olamina, technological advances also affect our metaphysical or ontological understanding. She values space exploration because the vast unexplored area of outer space represents a place of possibility that is not corrupted by the dominant cultural, ideological, and political forces at work worldwide as a result of colonialism and global capitalism. At the beginning of *Parable of the Sower*, she already sees space as the world's future and posits: "Space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than they hurt us" (20). By looking to space in the context

of current social ills of the past century, Butler examines technology as a form of prosthesis, which brings together the future of space exploration and past and present social ills. Space exploration is the first thing to go when current social ills seem overwhelming yet, distant a possibility as it may seem to people like her father, space exploration might actually provide an unforeseen answer to social ills. Thus, dismantling the space program is a shortsighted decision made under the guise of making resources available to address persistent social ills.

Technological advances both extend human capabilities and promote flourishing while they also integrate new and sometimes underexplored innovations into the mind and body that exacerbate human suffering that they were originally intended to ameliorate. In *Parable of the Talents*, Butler introduces advanced forms of virtual reality, like Dreamasks, which “made computer-stimulated and guided dreams available to the public.... They could live their character’s fictional life complete with realistic sensation” (220). Virtual reality is a form of prosthesis that links reality with fiction and offers a sophisticated form of entertainment that also threatened to numb people to reality and promote escapism. Dreamasks and virtual reality rooms and experiences allow people to engage in simulated experiences that feel so real that it is an addictive escape from the burdens of reality, which ultimately alienates people from their friends, families, and communities. By contrasting society’s response to the technological advances of developing more powerful mind-altering drugs like Paracetco and virtual reality entertainment, on the one hand, and the U.S.’s waning interest in technology for space exploration, on the other hand, Butler suggests that society is investing more in technological innovations that are harmful and less in technologies that may greatly enhance human life and lead to new discoveries and ways of knowing.

Questions around citizenship arise in the novels because mass-scale technological advances like space exploration are state-run programs. The role of government and citizenship becomes relevant as the public and private spheres of citizenship are blurred in a similar method to the blurring between self and other or natural and artificial represented in the concept of prosthesis. According to Earthseed, the religion that Olamina founded, “the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars” (76). Thus, space exploration is imbricated within the American political system because of its involvement in space discovery. For Olamina, space exploration is a spiritual matter as much as a political one. This is a minority point of view in the novel and this complicated relationship with the American political agenda gestures toward the history of how government decisions disenfranchise underrepresented groups. Russ Castronovo’s analysis of American citizenship illustrates the effects of government hegemony and misogyny as early as the 19th century and claims: “abstract personhood is rhetorically, if not actually, financed by the experiences, memories, and stories of others; the privileges of (white male) citizenship are tied up with the hyperembodiment of blacks, women, and workers” (17). Instantiated in a long history of collapsing the bodily needs of underrepresented people, the future 21st century of Butler’s texts represents the poor and weak as being denied full agency because their rights are reduced to bodily suffering and hunger while the spiritual needs of the suffering are trivialized and rendered inconsequential in the face of their basic needs. During a time of mass suffering, like the pre-apocalyptic summer of 2024, space exploration is considered a “criminal waste of time and money” to people like her father (20). Olamina’s father’s perspective represents an educated but misguided type of thinking common in 2024 that she reacts against and rejects.

Citizenship is a form of prosthesis because citizens are an extension of the government and the government is an extension of citizens. This reflexive relationship is exploited in the novels as decisions by elected leaders of the country that determine the level of investment in government programs has consequences for fulfilling spiritual beliefs for the followers of Earthseed. In other words, government programs that are typically meant to fulfill political goals, on the one hand, or address the basic bodily survival needs of its citizens, on the other hand, affect the potential for spiritual fulfillment for Olamina and her believers. Further, the traumas in each text take place in spaces that are governed by the state. In *Parable of the Sower*, the road, which represents strong national infrastructure and symbolizes individualistic ideals and freedom, is the site of national failure and the location of most of the text. In *Parable of the Talents*, the group that attacks Earthseeds' utopian community called Acorn is never determined to be part of the government, but because of their military-like uniforms, cutting edge military-style tanks and weapons, and the fact that they are clearly well-resourced indicates that they are likely connected in some way with the government. In both cases, the government is represented through negation and is registered through its absence and neglect. The neglected road in *Parable of the Sower* and the questionable state military affiliation of the Acorn attackers in *Parable of the Talents* suggests the convoluted and complex nature of the relationship between private individuals and their public roles as citizens as well as the citizen's relationship to the government as opposed to the individual's relationship to it.

Community in the novels is in tension with the state because community is Olamina's response to state failures. Olamina is reduced to a street person after her family's community, Robledos, is attacked and destroyed by gangs. She begins traveling by foot across 700 miles and builds community amidst the chaos and terrors of street living by identifying people along the

way as travel companions. The travelers ultimately establish a community called Acorn in Humboldt County where they live a utopian-like self-sustaining existence without much interaction with the state. In her essay “The Relationship Between Community and Subjectivity,” Claire Agustí argues that

Butler demonstrates how Olamina is able to blur the differences between subject and Other, manhood and femaleness in herself, in a way that difference is incorporated into the self, and it can be taught to the community in the process of relating, in order to downplay the legal fictions of gender and race which distort the growth of a community and its individuals. Her utopia is interior because, contrary to traditional male utopias, change takes place within the individual and, in her process of relating, at the juncture between subject and object (354).

The strength of Olamina’s community lies in its ability to counteract the power of the state and its oppressive ideology. According to Agustí, it isn’t community in and of itself that makes this possible, but Olamina’s ability to relate and change subject positions as both leader and follower. I interpret this type of community to represent the concept of prosthetic citizenship because it requires one to be actively connected with people while the demands and burdens of others affect you as well. Thus, this reciprocal type of community demands people act as prosthetic citizens.

Prosthesis and Material Extensions

Olamina’s journal can be seen as a prosthetic device because it is an extension of herself that enhances her capacity for self-expression and also connects her with other people once her journal becomes part of the publication *Earthseed, Books of the Living*. Olamina is an outsider in her community and her journal is a private place where she can share her views without risk. It is the one place where she can express everything freely and openly. In the journal, she recounts events more than feelings or emotions. She doesn’t work out her feelings through a regular practice of journaling so much as she discusses and reasons through the day’s events in a

chronological and rational way. As a place where she is free to discuss her beliefs and opinions without being censored, her journal becomes a compilation of her personal evolution from a minister's daughter to the founder of a religion called Earthseed. What becomes evident in the process of developing her own sense of self and independent beliefs is that Olamina's affective attachments are with the needy rather than with her family members or others in the Robledos community. In fact, in her journal she narrates the process of distancing herself from the people who are the likeliest objects of her affection: her father, family members, and friends. Her father's religion is a barrier between them. Her best friend, Joanne, betrays her trust and "looks so trustworthy—tall and straight and serious and intelligent—I still feel inclined to trust her. But I can't. I don't" (68). Regardless of the environment she is writing in, the journal traces Olamina's experience in a way that empowers her to go against the grain and believe in her own sense of truth without deferring to socially-agreed upon authority figures like her father, or friends, like Joanne, who may mean well but ultimately perpetuate the status quo. Her journal becomes the link between people who form the worldwide Earthseed community, and embodies an idea of prosthetic citizenship, defined as a mode of communal being in which people understand their relationship with others as if others are extensions of themselves rather than distinct and separate beings.

Her journal reveals the start of Earthseed for future generations and is an important material item that connects Olamina to people of her faith community. The Olamina that we know through the novel is fully represented through her journal, which makes the reader feel a sense of intimacy. However, the reader's interaction with Olamina is entirely mediated through the journal. This mediated experience raises the question of how intimately and fully the reader is able to know Olamina. She highlights the disconnect that hyperempathy produces between her

feelings and her outward appearance: “sometimes people say I look grim or angry. Better to have them think that than know the truth. Better to have them think anything than let them know just how easy it is to hurt me” (13). This description of her constant effort to disguise hyperempathy comes towards the end of an entry that started with her writing about a neighbor’s suicide. The experience moves her to write: “I need to write about what I believe. I need to begin to put together the scattered verses that I’ve been writing about God since I was twelve” (24). Olamina is writing to clarify her beliefs. She has to learn how to pass on her beliefs and writing them down helps to put it into language and organize her beliefs.

Olamina’s journal is an object that represents her interiority and can be called a performance of her subjectivity and identity. She is the source of her family’s shame—her father, in particular—because of hyperempathy, something she was born with because of her mother's drug abuse, and a condition she has to tolerate and manage. Yet, her family’s reaction purports that she is somehow implicated in the very thing that causes her suffering. In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the affect of shame and argues that shame “is the place where the *question* of identity arises most originally and most relationally” (37). For Sedgwick, experiencing shame plays an important role in shaping the self, but experiencing shame does not determine its impact and thus is not indicative of any specific response to the experience. In other words, shame is significant in identity formation but it isn’t determinative. Olamina’s journal entries illustrate the formative role that shame plays in developing her sense of self and in exploring self-expression because Olamina is motivated to write in response to the shame she experiences. Sedgwick further explains the relationship between shame and identity: “In the developmental process, shame is now often considered the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop” (37). Olamina is compelled to begin writing in her journal

because, despite resisting Christian beliefs, she allows her father to baptize her. This is the first event that happens in her journal and it is a shameful experience for her because she allows herself to be outwardly initiated into Christianity through the ritual of baptism while knowing full well that inwardly she does not accept the teachings or beliefs of that religion. The experience of shame leads her to question her identity and seek to understand herself through journaling.

Shame motivates Olamina to write because it forces her to seek solace in a space away from family and friends who are already ashamed of her because of her hyperempathy, but shame in no way defines Olamina. The journal embodies her experience and through her regular writing, her identity emerges in much the same way that Earthseed emerges from the collection of truths that she records alongside her personal experiences. Readers of Olamina's journal get to know her intimate thoughts, feelings, experiences, and importantly, how she processes her experiences. This narrative doesn't just recount what she went through during the apocalypse in *Parable of the Sower* and during the attack on Acorn in *Parable of the Talents*; her journal narrates her personal daily experiences in the context of the world around her. Because this is her personal journal, which also attends to her personal views on social and worldly issues, the journal becomes an object that represents Olamina's subjectivity and her subject position. It also models a unique ontological perspective with the potential to radically change the way that people understand their existence and conceptualize God. We see this in the way that her religion, Earthseed, has amassed a huge cult following through the publication of her journal, which articulates the insights and truths that she has collected throughout her life.

Through her journal, Olamina examines the differences between appearance and truth through her friend Joanne who "looks so trustworthy" but isn't. Writing helps Olamina to clarify

and solidify her beliefs and opinions and to see beyond appearances. Rather than being a subject of the community's laws and beliefs rooted in Christianity, Olamina—through her journal—has figured out a way to own her beliefs and to compile them in a way that strengthens her in moments of weakness and provides a solid foundation for her point of view. When her response in a moment seems outrageous or counters what the majority believes, she can fall back on her compilation of journal entries and trace the evolution of her decisions and opinions based on her history of experience. Her journal validates her difference. By writing and having a text that mirrors her thoughts, reflections, beliefs, and experience, she is able to find clarity of her beliefs. And with clarity, she finds strength and confidence in the truths that she has discovered and recorded in her journal. The journal enhances her own personal experience and extends her ability to think independently and discover truths that fall outside of commonly held viewpoints or beliefs thereby also extending her reach to others who share an alternative spirituality and understanding of humanity.

CHAPTER 3

MEDIATION, SUBJECTIVITY AND IDENTITY

Parable of the Sower advocates new ways of understanding and improving the world by suggesting that what is currently recognized as practical and rational approaches to significant social ills perpetuate the problems they seek to ameliorate because they are mired in existing paradigms of thought and, thus, prevent expansive thinking and limit possibilities for positive change. Through her journal entries, we learn that mobility is limited in the future California of 2024. The opening entry in *Parable of the Sower* features Olamina recounting a recurring dream in her journal in which she is “learning to fly, to levitate [her]self” (4). In this dream, she learns to fly without technology one step at a time. She lives in a walled community and people do not venture out except for specific reasons, like work, and even then it is restricted. Olamina believes that “space could be our future” (20). She goes on to explain, “as far as I’m concerned, space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than they hurt us” (20). She stands radically apart from people like her father, a Christian minister, who views space exploration as a luxury and an excess that the nation can only afford in times of plenty. During a time of mass suffering, like the pre-apocalyptic summer of 2024, space travel is considered a “criminal waste of time and money” (20). Yet, for young Olamina dismissing space travel amounts to giving up on the vast expanses of space as a symbol of hope and a place that serves as a potential source of spiritual development and renewal. She is attentive to the division between pragmatic economic concerns, on the one hand, and visionary and expansive thinking and discovery, on the other. Olamina rejects pragmatic responses to mass suffering and looks to space as the future frontier and source of enlightenment. The lack of mobility that characterizes apocalyptic times is related to limited knowledge and perception because people are literally and metaphorically restricted to the immediate concerns around

them, which hinders their ability to see and understand the world more broadly and comprehensively.

Earthseed, as a religion, embodies the concept of mobility as it rejects inflexible dogma and founds its understanding of God on the notion of constant change. Olamina's religion is prosthetic as it favors the notion that the self and the surrounding world are fused as opposed to the Christian binary that one is either accepted or rejected by God. In a radical break from a Christian explanation of the world, for example, Olamina believes that "God doesn't love me or hate me or watch over me or know me at all, and I feel no love for or loyalty to my God. My God just is" (25). She not only rejects the notion of God as male, she also rejects the notion of God as an authority figure of any gender. She tells us that "at least three years ago my father's God stopped being my God," but she doesn't give a direct explanation as to why. Through the course of the journal entry, however, she highlights the fact that her father believes she can overcome her hyperempathy. Her condition is a source of shame for her father: "To my father, the whole business (hyperempathy) is shameful. He's a preacher and a professor and a dean. A first wife who was a drug addict and a daughter who is drug damaged is not something he wants to boast about" (12). She goes on to explain, "I can't do a thing about my hyperempathy, no matter what Dad thinks or wants or wishes" (12). Her father's shame because of her condition as a sharer has a powerful effect on Olamina becoming a leader of Earthseed and on her general sense of self. Shame plays an important role in her identity formation because she becomes the object of dismay based on judgments that other people make about her mother's drug abuse. Her father's dismissal of the reality of her suffering and the shame it causes him helps to shape her beliefs in opposition to Christianity. Olamina does not own the shame of her mother's drug abuse even though she suffers the consequences of it. Her father's understanding of her

condition is misguided, and she blames his Christian beliefs for imposing a rigid concept of suffering as something that is brought on by sin rather than simply a normal part of human existence.

The shame that Olamina experiences is attached to her hyperempathy, which sharpens her sense of self as a suffering and deformed being because of this condition. Eve Sedgwick explains the effects of experiencing shame: “the conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt is that shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is, whereas guilt attaches to what one does” (37). Olamina’s father identifies her as a “sharer” and her mother as a drug addict, which reduces their characteristics to defining features of their identity and thus, produces shame. Olamina rebels against this reductive imposition on her character by shaping her own conception of herself and refusing to be victimized. Her response to family secrets and shame around her condition and what hyperempathy implies about her mother is to reject the Christian values that impose shame and to seek a different set of values entirely. Olamina learns to develop her agency despite the potentially debilitating effects of her condition thereby becoming a prosthetic citizen. She learns from the perverse feeling of experiencing other people’s pleasure and pain and is able to objectively observe the effects of her natural feelings and the artificial feelings produced by other people. Olamina doesn’t respond to shame by feeling personally humiliated, which is the typical way that people respond to shame. She accepts the condition and learns to manage it rather than allowing it to weaken her emotionally or physically more than it does naturally. This atypical response to shame models a new way of being that accepts and shapes imperfections rather than giving in to normativity and focusing all of one’s attention on fixing the condition in an effort to fit into the parameters of what is considered normal.

The implicit understanding in the above-mentioned journal entry is that Olamina's experience of living with hyperempathy causes her to reject the Christian concept of God because this conception of God and the belief system that supports it do not match up with her lived experience. Christianity asseverates that one has to look to God for answers to questions of personal and common human experience. The question of suffering, for example, is at the center of Christian belief and is given a great deal of attention in the Bible as Olamina notes. In fact, the book of Job, which is wholly dedicated to the question of suffering, is her favorite book in the Bible (16). However, instead of asking why suffering exists and seeking a theology that explains that, Olamina changes the question entirely. She accepts that joy and suffering, pleasure and pain are truths about humanity and are not indicators of a need to be reconciled to God. Just as she suffers from hyperempathy for no other reason than the fact that her mother abused drugs, she believes human suffering in general is an inherent part of the human experience that occurs naturally without divine intervention or spiritual or theological explanation.

Olamina knows that she is suffering because of her mother's drug abuse; hyperempathy has a scientific explanation. To make the question of suffering a spiritual matter and a premise of her faith would reduce her experience to the sum of her daily experience in feeling other people's pain and pleasure. The common question in Christianity is: if there is a God, why does he allow such suffering? That question for a "sharer" is the wrong question entirely. Instead, Olamina changes the question and asks how she is meant to live and flourish in this corrupt world. She believes that "God is Change, and in the end, God prevails. But God exists to be shaped. It isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse" (76). Her faith is rooted in human agency and the power of people to shape their own experience rather than a hierarchy in which we are subjects of an alternately

wrathful or benevolent God. Olamina's affective experience of hyperempathy enables her to conceptualize God in a radically different way because she experiences an oppressive and constant form of suffering that is extreme and persistent. Her belief is that "We do not worship God. We perceive and attend God. We learn from God" (17). Because she was born with hyperempathy and because suffering is a central part of her daily experience, she doesn't see it as a punishment that needs explanation. She sees suffering as a pervasive and constant part of the human experience and thus, she is not consumed with the question of suffering. Olamina sees the metaphysical question at hand as one having to do with enabling and empowering our personal agency in spite of suffering. We are subject to suffering as part of the human experience, but we are not subjects of suffering because of divine retribution. Thus, Olamina believes that we are meant to be actively aware and responsive to our world constantly seeking, listening, and shaping our lives rather than looking to some higher authority or greater intelligence for guidance or answers to life's questions. What flows forth from this perspective is prosthetic citizenship, which understands that the self is affected by the world and that individuals are interconnected and affected by each other and that no matter how virtuous one is, this is an undisputed part of reality.

Postmodern Subjects and Prosthetic Citizens

Olamina represents an entirely new way of being that changes the dynamic between people and empowers each as his/her own personal agent without then in turn becoming "masters" or dictators. She lives in a constant state of being both subject and object, and as the leader of her motley crew, master and slave. Olamina's condition as a "sharer" makes her a fragmented subject who is affected by the pain and pleasure of others as much as her own pain

and pleasure. Hyperempathy is purely affective. As a “sharer,” Olamina fosters affective practices in which she constantly manipulates her own weaknesses and resists being manipulated by the feeling of others through persistent self-awareness and constantly cultivating personal power and agency. Butler examines the effects of postmodernity on the body in *Parable of the Sower* through a protagonist who embodies the fragmentation and discontinuity, which are key elements of postmodernity according to scholar David Harvey’s work *The Condition of Postmodernity*. For Harvey, postmodernity is further characterized by a “breakdown of the temporal order of things,” and he agrees with Frederic Jameson that “alienation of the subject is displaced by fragmentation of the subject” (54). By imagining a character with a body that experiences the pain and pleasure of others and whose personal experience is affected by other people, Olamina represents the fragmentation and discontinuity of postmodernity in a way that examines the effects of postmodernity on the body in a very literal way. The way that she adapts to postmodernity exemplifies prosthetic citizenship. In recognizing herself as fragmented, she also understands that she is also integrated with others and is incapable of perceiving herself as totally detached from others. Thus, she acts and behaves in ways that acknowledge other people as an extension of herself.

Butler imagines a radical postmodern affect by developing a character that embodies postmodern sensibility in the form of “hyperempathy” syndrome. Hyperempathy articulates the dispersal and indeterminacy that characterize postmodern culture by applying the fragmentary elements of postmodern affect to the body. Just as Harvey explains “the breakdown of the temporal order of things” and a “preoccupation with instantaneity,” Olamina takes the postmodern out of the realm of the abstract and makes it an actual human condition that “sharers” have to manage (54, 59). Postmodernity is a new way of being in which anarchy and

constant change shape everyday life. According to Olamina, we must learn to adapt to maintain coherence and unity in a world that resists all such order and harmony. She represents a radically different subject position and models a way of living that rejects normative and normalizing social structures that seek to impose a singular form of order. Hyperempathy resists routine and forces sharers to constantly be aware and on guard without the potential of falling into behavioral habits. By resisting routine, Olamina cultivates a unique form of personal agency. She doesn't follow rules and she has to cultivate a personal level of adaptability and constant responsiveness that always keeps her in the position of agent and decision-maker. She never simply follows a prescribed, pre-determined course; she constantly makes quick decisions that keep her actively involved in her own decisions rather than simply a subject of daily habits, traditions, laws, rules, and even religious beliefs. This is a new model of living and being that allows people to cultivate agency despite limitations. This is a model of living and being in community that is rooted in mutuality and resists hierarchy. It results in a circular relationship among community members, rather than top-down or linear relationships. The type of agency that Olamina models also suggests a certain level of resistance to normative institutions, which can lead to various forms of oppression. Rather than living in fear and looking to the state to protect its citizens, people look to one another to support each other. By looking to community rather than state, people become influential in the state as much as the state is influential on people.

Through the condition of hyperempathy, the text suggests that the social ills stemming from poverty, class disparity, and government failure are compounded by rampant use of drugs, which are so powerful and effective that they permanently alter a person's biology. For Olamina, the failure of government, which is highlighted in the collapse of social infrastructure

that leads to the apocalypse, is manifested in mass suffering. However, one of the major reasons for the failing society is the government's myopia. The government fails its people by not looking ahead or thinking beyond earthly suffering and thus, not investing in space exploration. The lack of investment in space exploration reflects a lack of value in science and technology in general as the government prefers to focus on political conditions of hunger and poverty when in crisis, rather than viewing science and technology as a pathway out of suffering or acknowledging the spiritual elements involved in such suffering. Thus, technological advances are reduced to thrill-seeking drugs and mind-numbing virtual reality games rather than advances in the industry as a whole. The consequences of investing in the cheap thrills that technology can provide are that drugs and more sophisticated forms of virtual reality entertainment are permanently changing people. In its effort to make people smarter, for example, Paracetco, the "Einstein Powder" also called the "smart pill," is permanently changing people's biological makeup so that they become the drug, they do not just experience its side effects. Drugs are forms of prosthesis that fuse with the body and integrate the artificial into the natural. There is no suggestion in the book that if people stop taking these drugs they will detox and be back to their pre-drug-taking state. The government is so concerned with addressing material needs like poverty and hunger that these political conditions become more important than addressing the larger scale immaterial need that lead to people using drugs and entertainment in excess. Olamina believes that the discoveries and opportunities that can be found through space exploration will give people something to hope for while also opening up new ways of thinking. It is pejorative for the government to determine that the physical needs of the suffering majority are more important than their immaterial needs that might be addressed through scientific advances, like space exploration. Thus, the space program, for Olamina, is an investment in

humanity. By not investing in space, the government is reducing people to their bodily needs and physical suffering and in doing so, denies the validity of their spiritual and metaphysical needs.

Butler connects the growth and advances in technology with the alienation and deepening divisions among classes of people in the novel. Technology sets the tone of the novel and gives depth and texture to the environment of 2024 and paints the picture of the environment that the events are occurring in rather than the forefront of the text. Present-day technology and gadgets that keep people connected to one another, like family vehicles, cell phones, and email, are absent in *Parable of the Sower*. I consider these items together because they have the ability to bind people together and represent technology that facilitates “prosthetic emotions,” which Kathleen Woodward explains “connect us to beings in the nonhuman world” (139). People come to name their cars and gadgets and build a relationship with them because they become reliant on this technology. As opposed to the dependence that drug use and empty entertainment provide, cars allow people the freedom of mobility to visit loved ones frequently while cell phones and email allow people the freedom of communicating regularly and staying connected regardless of distance. Despite their potential to alienate people by over-mediating relationships, these technologies have an equal potential for bringing people together. The lack of devices that connect people in the novel is symbolic of the alienation inherent to the apocalyptic world. The affects of the apocalypse are loneliness, isolation, and uncertainty. The social responses to individual and mass estrangement are to create devices that provide temporary forms of entertainment that assuage the intensity of being disconnected from communities of friends and loved ones in the form of hallucinogenic drugs and virtual reality that allow people to detach themselves from the present and escape the oppressive feeling of abandonment. For Olamina,

one of the answers to this disconnected and lonely way of life is investing in space exploration because discovering other worlds may expand our understanding of the world and open up new possibilities that could radically change life as we know it. The prosthetic citizen understands that outer space is an extension of the earthly world both materially and spiritually and as an extension of the earthly world, it values and demands attention.

Technology and Subjectivity

Technology seems to fill the gap that failed bureaucratic and professional structures have left wide open and thus, acts as prosthesis. Entertainment in the form of window-wall televisions, reality vests, or illegal drugs is meant to let people tune out and enjoy a mediated experience. Drugs and high tech entertainment devices can affect the user's subjectivity by reducing an individual's investment in personal agency and responsibility in favor of an enhanced form of entertainment or mind-altering state of feeling. In a chapter entitled, "Bureaucratic Rage," Kathleen Woodward suggests that our increasingly mediated world permeates our present day transactions:

If...we live in a time in which we have outsourced our own subjectivity to experts (therapists, personal trainers, plastic surgeons, whatever), then subjectivity itself has been largely drained from our mediated society. Thus bureaucratic feelings are not binding emotions. They are not emotions that attach us to other persons, as do the strong emotions of love and hate, grief and jealousy (172).

Although Woodward is specifically talking about mediation through bureaucratic transactions, her assessment is relevant to the technology in Butler's novel precisely because it appears that this technology has by and large become a central figure in people's lives in the same way that paid professionals are ascendant in the lives of people today. Rather than a future of robots taking on service roles, like Rosey from the Jetsons for example, Butler's dystopia features a

total lack of infrastructure or professional base of people who serve in any kind of service profession from waitressing to counseling. In *Parable of the Sower*, there are no restaurants to hire waitresses and counseling would be a luxury.

Even though the apocalyptic environment of 2024 lacks any kind of coherent infrastructure, people still have a highly mediated experience because of drugs and escapist forms of entertainment that becomes not only mediation, but also an integrated part of everyday life. Thus, subjectivity in the apocalypse can perhaps best be explained as being outsourced through insourcing. Individuals are increasingly more private and closed off than ever before while sophisticated single-player forms of entertainment or recreational drugs for personal use foster intense levels of isolation while masking the feeling of loneliness. As people are increasingly estranged from one another and alienated from communities, they become more insular and keep to themselves for protection (insourcing). Yet in order to cope with the intense pressure of bearing the weight of the chaotic world, people increasingly turn to individual forms of escapism like personal drug use or single-person virtual reality experiences that mediate the individual's experience (outsourcing). Rather than therapy, personal training, or plastic surgery, individuals participate in loner activities like watching television, playing virtual reality games, and using mind altering drugs. Just like the emotions of bureaucracy are not binding emotions, these mediated experiences do not have attachments with people, and in fact, they alienate people from one another. Furthermore, these attachments breed addictions and dependency that weaken people rather than facilitate mutual relationships that strengthen and empower people. Thus, in the same way that subjectivity has been drained out of our highly mediated, bureaucratic present-day society, subjectivity has been drained out of apocalyptic society.

The novel's increasingly isolated and vacuous society, a world depleted of subjectivity, is claustrophobic for Olamina. Thus, she looks for a geographic area, a real and expansive location, to answer significant social ills, which is why she turns to space, to areas of possibility and great potential rather than rational economic and political policies or initiatives. For her, closing the space program forecloses a possible space for human flourishing and the process of discovery and exploration. Space is described as "darkness brightening," a place beyond the city lights, which cloud the bright stars (4). Darkness brightening represents the potential for understanding pieces of the unknowable. It isn't about an end goal of finding life or finding another planet to colonize; it is about discovering a new world and thus, a new paradigm that could foster an epistemological shift. The space program is the nation's engagement with exploration and discovery that enhances our knowledge about the world, about our environment, that shapes what we know about the laws of nature. Envisioning space in this way builds on Foucaultian ideas of power-discourse, which David Harvey details in his explanation that "the only way to 'eliminate the fascism in our heads' is to explore and build upon the open qualities of human discourse, and thereby intervene in the way knowledge is produced and constituted at the particular sites where a localized power-discourse prevails" (45-46). Improving living conditions, developing spiritual belief and enhancing knowledge, for Olamina, are all interconnected; they are the result of exploration and discovery of not only new philosophies or ideas, but of geographic territory as well. Space represents a particular site where a new discourse is possible. The space program is a national project that has a metaphysical quality because it represents a place of hope, a potential new frontier of knowledge and expansiveness that influences her spirituality and forms what Olamina comes to call god.

Mobility, Change and Citizenship

Space is the specific place of hope, which is a stark contrast to the most specific site of failure in the novel: the road. The road as a site of national failure raises the question of why apocalyptic circumstances in the novel force Olamina to onto the street rather than trap her in some form of confinement or stasis. Olamina and her companions are reduced to the level of street poor after their homes are attacked. Like most travelers, they head North to rural areas far away from the cities plunged in chaos. She has old maps to guide the journey, which will suffice since she informs us “no one’s been building new roads lately” (171). Through the journey north, walking on what’s left of the interstate highway system, Olamina’s journal maps the radical transformation of the concept of mobility resulting from environmental ruin and urban anarchy. American roads, the heart of the country and a symbol of freedom, signify hopelessness in the novel. Roads have fallen into disrepair, and the “broad river of people walking west on the freeway” is a shocking visual representation of despair (176). The road trip, the quintessential American vacation, is the site of national failure and the dissolution of national values, akin to the images broadcast on TV of people living on interstate overpasses after Hurricane Katrina. Staying in place, trying to maintain homes, communities, and any semblance of normal everyday life is rendered impossible. People are forced to either flee of their own volition or wait for thieves and arsonists to attack at any moment.

Stasis is not an option in the novel, but the compulsory movement only runs one way: down. Unavailability of vehicles slows the pace of everyday life so Olamina and her companions traverse the 700 miles from Los Angeles to Humboldt County for three months on foot. Cars and other modes of high-speed transportation are part of a postmodern condition that sees the “breakdown of the temporal order of things” (54). In the novel, the chaos of the apocalypse is spurred by inertia, which inverts time-space compression as a result of the

breakdown of technology. Replacing cars with people on the freeway ruptures the time-space compression that David Harvey claims characterizes postmodernism because an expressway is designed to compress the time it takes to travel on the road. The masses of people left homeless have to travel by walking, using an unmediated form of transportation, which reconnects the travelers with a natural order of time, space, and distance. Instead of a subcultural vision that celebrates a world free of technology, the pedestrian future leads to mayhem, confusion, and danger. This change is disorienting because critical tools necessary for everyday life in America—the car and the roads it drives on—become sites of despair and suffering rather than freedom and prosperity.

The American road, which is made for the family vehicle and enables personal mobility, embodies the American Dream that promises upward social mobility for those who undertake the journey. Freedom from the false hope of self-reliance that individualism promises and from the entrapments of middle class life that idealize the American Dream is represented by the path that Olamina's group takes to escape Los Angeles. They follow Highway 101, which runs north-south and symbolizes the road to freedom in the same way that the north has historically represented freedom from slavery in American culture. It is a place for new beginnings as Olamina explains, "Earthseed is being born right here on Highway 101—on that portion of 101 that was once El Camino Real, the royal highway of California's Spanish past. Now it's a highway, a river of the poor. A river flooding north" (223). The current of people that flow like a river is a metaphor for the change in tide that the apocalypse brings for the poor. The freeway-turned-river-of-people signifies the moral failure of colonialism and the institutions that promoted colonialism, like the Catholic Church. By referring to California's Spanish past, Butler connects the inadequacy of colonialism with that of Christian ethics because of the

integral role the Catholic Church, the heart of Western Christianity, played in promoting and proliferating colonization. Just as Christianity as a religion is too limited and prosaic for Olamina's understanding of God, highway 101—the work of Spanish missionaries—is no longer relevant. Butler highlights the connection between colonialism and the roadway to suggest that neglecting the roads, an important part of federal and state infrastructure, is a harbinger of further neglect and dissolution of American colonialism.

The obsolete highway is one of the only ways to freedom from urban mass chaos and suffering. The exodus of people who are suffering en masse is tinged with hopefulness in the possibility that a new national order may be established that no longer idealizes the American Dream or relies on the subjugation of women and minorities to fulfill those ideals. Yet, the street also symbolizes entrapment in poverty rather than freedom as “the rich are escaping by flying out in helicopters” (246). By walking on the freeway, they are committing a crime, “it’s against the law in California to walk on the freeways, but the law is archaic” (176). The law is irrelevant because the freeway is irrelevant. It is no longer a necessary structure in the apocalypse. It is neglected just like the people who are forced to walk along it are neglected. People either fly or walk because the division between rich and poor is exacerbated by extreme industrial and social privatization. In the novel, the street poor become the majority, which forces society to take stock of them as they cannot be easily relegated to the fringes by being classified, as displaced people have traditionally been, as mentally ill, drug addicts, or prostitutes. Olamina and her group live the same life on the street as the crazy pyromaniacs and menaces who are homeless, jobless, and forced to scavenge for food.

What does this mean for the American concept of citizenship and community? In her article, “Apocalyptic Empathy,” Rebecca Wanzo claims that “while Olamina suffers from

hyperempathy, it becomes necessary for her to distance herself from feeling in order to survive and get political work done” (Wanzo, 3). Olamina refuses to be reduced to her physiological needs. She rejects a tiered notion of self-actualization as outlined in Maslow’s hierarchy of need. For her, the spiritual and the physiological are imbricated within one another and cannot be separated and prioritized. Through Olamina, Butler demonstrates the affective response to current American social life that is saturated in emotions toward hunger and poverty is a vapid form of citizenship. Establishing political credibility in the notions of feeling and empathy to the basest level of need without encompassing the full array of human needs as valid is a form of mind control that breeds fear. The road is used as the site of this anarchy because the road is the literal intersection of base needs and self-actualization. The road represents individual agency because it is meant for the family vehicle while in the novel it comes to symbolize a luxury of the past when people had personal vehicles and could travel freely. Thus, it is a strong symbol of the infrastructure that democracy relies upon.

As a symbol of democracy, Butler uses the road as the location where the affective components of American citizenship are most evident. American roads were built as a symbol of Freedom, the open road and family vehicles articulate that freedom. However, Butler shows how the road functions as an instrument of state power that imposes laws and restrictions that facilitate autopilot mode and is a form of numbing the masses. By taking the freeway, people get from point A to point B in the most direct and fastest route. There are no scenic views or meandering on the freeway. There are no side trips or inadvertent discoveries that happen on the freeway, there is simply a destination. No road stops, just a rigid set of directions without exits to offer anything other than sustenance—bathrooms or food—to continue along the freeway. Deviating from the planned course is where discoveries and spontaneous experiences happen. It

is where autopilot has no place and is totally irrelevant. Maneuvering a road other than the one planned requires a map, and maps are no longer published. Olamina has these relics from her grandparents' time and because no new roads have been built, the maps are relatively useful and up-to-date. Reading maps is a function of agency because it lays out the options and lets the travelers choose which roads and paths they will take. It opens the possibility of side trips—long and extended detours that may allow the travelers to decide to change their route or possibly even their destination. Travelers using a map are constantly in an empowered position of agency. They adapt and choose which roads to use and when to stop. Map reading is a form of self-awareness and agency because the user shapes his/her own journey, which can be seen as a metaphor for Olamina's view of each person's role in knowing God as shaping God. Through map reading, she is modeling prosthetic citizenship. The map is a physical tool for enhancing the traveler's abilities and a metaphorical concept that the traveler can incorporate into her/his way of thinking.

Parable of the Sower brings issues of subjectivity, technology, and citizenship into conflict with one another throughout the novel. Olamina's subjectivity is shaped by her hyperempathy and she uses her condition to develop her own sense of personal agency rather than be victimized by it. The apocalyptic environment of 2024 is bleak; divisions among social classes are at an extreme and suffering is so ubiquitous among the masses that citizens as well as leaders are consumed with meeting physical and material needs. Therefore, at the individual and the political level, people have neglected to recognize that spiritual and immaterial needs are as important to a person's well being as food and shelter. Two significant objects of government infrastructure are in disrepair: American roads have become obsolete and the space program is waning. Many formerly middle class citizens have been reduced to street poor living on the road

and a majority of citizens view space travel as a luxury. The American road and the space program represent the tension between basic physical and spiritual needs, and Olamina views both as necessities. Prosthetic citizenship addresses this tension by incorporating technology into the self and thus, extending personal capacity beyond previous limits.

CHAPTER 4

POSTMODERN CITIZENSHIP

In *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina's journal is a prosthetic that binds her with her daughter, Asha, who narrates the text and lends another perspective by commenting on her mother's journal entries. *Parable of the Talents* takes on similar themes as *Parable of the Sower* by dealing with subjectivity, technology, and citizenship and portraying their evolution from apocalyptic to post-apocalyptic times. Shame motivates Olamina to write because she is forbidden from openly sharing the closely guarded family secret that she suffers from hyperempathy. As I previously noted, her father mistakenly thinks this is something she can get over. Because of his perspective and his shame about Cory's drug use, Olamina is driven to write because she is responding to conflict with her father out of frustration. In addition to conflict with her family and her father, in particular, she also takes issue with widespread political views against space exploration, and her journal provides an outlet to express her difference of opinion. Like Olamina, her daughter Asha is also driven by shame to a creative outlet. Creating Dreammask scenarios is Asha's response to shame. Asha's shame stems from growing up as an adopted child in a sexually threatening and emotionally abusive Christian home. Their different responses to conflict within their home lives and the feeling of isolation from their communities reveal two different representations of agency. Olamina models a form of active agency in the activities that she engages in to further develop her sense of self and ways of expressing herself. In contrast, Asha Vera's experiences are often mediated through virtual reality simulations and technology, and she develops a more passive sense of agency as a result. Each woman's response to shame produces something that can be consumed by other people thereby connecting them with an outside community of people rather than alienating them by having to bear the shame alone. Because Asha and Olamina are estranged, Olamina's journal

establishes a bond between mother and daughter because they reveal Olamina's intimate feelings and experiences that Asha would have no other way of knowing from their single meeting or through Uncle Marc's unfavorably biased stories of her mother.

For Olamina, writing is an extension of the self that enhances her ability to process her daily and lived experiences and connect with others and as such, it becomes the primary form through which her subjectivity and identity is formed. After the daily struggle for survival during the exodus from southern California to northern California narrated in *Parable of the Sower*, the post-apocalyptic environment presented in *Parable of the Talents* is a dramatically different kind of trauma that provokes Olamina to take up drawing as another medium for self-expression. Olamina's experiences are mediated through writing and drawing, which are active forms of agency that encourage independent thinking and open sharing with others. The journals and drawings articulate personal experiences in an accessible form that invites others to engage with these works of art. Whereas the concerns of daily life during the apocalypse are centered on finding food and protecting each other from vandals and crazy people, the concerns of daily life in the post-apocalyptic community of Acorn are to protect themselves from invasions of both their property and their bodies, as rape is one example of a war tactic that invades the body. Drawing is a way for Olamina and others to express the horrors of such personal invasions and terror that often are inexpressible with words. It also gives her a different perspective: "I had discovered that drawing was so different from everything else I did that it relaxed me, and at the same time, it roused me to a new alertness" (144). Producing images is another form of self-expression and way of processing experiences that takes a different kind of energy than writing. It taps into a more abstract form of thought than journaling that focuses on producing and reproducing images. After experiencing trauma, drawing is productive because it invites an

abstract image response that requires a different kind of energy to conceptualize and interpret images rather than the straightforward and linear nature of journaling. Olamina processes the horrors that happen to her and her community by finding ways to communicate those experiences through supporting community, talking about it, writing, or drawing. It takes particular energy and investment in being willing to put together opinions, views, and understanding of one's personal experience, especially when it is traumatic. This level of creativity and agency illustrates the persistent investment in developing active agency that prosthetic citizenship requires. Prosthetic citizenship demands a well-developed sense of self in order to extend the self, on the one hand, and integrate non-natural elements into the self, on the other hand, because otherwise, one risks an unequal balance of influence by the prosthesis that threatens to overwhelm and overtake the subject.

This is the threat that Asha faces in *Parable of the Talents* as she interprets personal experiences and develops ways of communicating that are vastly different from those of her mother. The question the novel raises is related to mediation and the impact of various forms of mediation on agency. Olamina's journaling and drawing engage her mind and rely on her personal ability to express herself through words or images. By contrast, Asha's experiences are mediated through technology rather than through herself, which develops a passive form of agency. Her experiences are mediated through an outside source rather than through her own mind. Thus she develops responses to her life experiences through a mode of communication outside of herself rather than through herself or through others, which disconnects her from the human—affective and emotional—side of processing information. She relies purely on the rational processing of information, which limits her ability to process information independently and with the appropriate amount of feeling. Technology fosters a certain level of dependency

that distorts her interpretation of personal experiences because in the process of developing a multi-sensory virtual reality experience, her natural feelings are short-circuited and thus, overshadowed by the technological reproduction of her experiences. Asha explains that she explored her sexuality through a Dreammask: “I had my first pleasurable sexual experience, wearing a deliberately mislabeled Dreammask” (278). Similarly, most of her other “first-time” experiences are also simulated through Dreammask rather than directly experienced (327). In addition, she loses the ability to write and draw, so the issue is twofold: 1) she is reliant on technology to interpret her experience and 2) by not engaging her unmediated thoughts and feelings to process information, she doesn’t mature emotionally. As a result, Asha’s personal agency is compromised by her use of technology, which leaves her vulnerable to the disciplinary effects and potential manipulation that is embodied in technology. The prosthetic citizen embraces technology while also actively cultivating personal agency that ensures technology extends and enhances without overwhelming the self.

Their different types of agency are represented in the divergent vocational paths that the two women take: Olamina is a spiritual leader who establishes a religion and Asha is an academic who uses her intellect to develop Dreammask scenarios for Dreammask International. Olamina becomes both a community and a religious leader and is an independent thinker. In contrast, Asha listens to Uncle Marc and remains unreconciled with her mother because she has believed too much of what he has told her. Even though she later understands that Marc has not been truthful, Asha is always reacting to the issue at hand and thinking specifically about each moment that comes up. She doesn’t think or address issues from a broader perspective, and in fact, she criticizes her mother for having her head in the clouds and heart in the stars rather than here on earth. She identifies with Uncle Marc because “he was a world saver, after all, like my

mother. Or not like her, since Earth was the only world that interested him” (155). She wants to analyze everything in a very rational way and has gone on to complete a Master’s degree and a PhD (378), so the issue with mediation is not that Asha is unintelligent or lacking in some intellectual way. She is obviously smart and thoughtful. The issue is that her mediated experience has created a disconnect between her emotions and her ability to express those emotions, which reduces her thought process to one of reason without emotion. Whereas Asha is obviously intellectually competent, she lacks a spiritual life, which is as important to Olamina as anything.

Technology has the potential to make us less connected with one another because it makes the user become reliant on objects rather than each other. Because of technology, Asha has not developed a sense of loyalty and community because she looks to technology to solve her problems and provide support in tough times. She doesn’t develop prosthetic emotions that connect to other people because most of her relationships have been characterized by rejection, control, and abuse. In response to the pain of broken relationships, she imagines relationship through simulated experiences and seeks to feel what it feels like to be someone else rather than seeking to build a relationship with other people learning directly from them. Asha becomes a Dreammask inventor (339) and uses her creativity to produce mediated experiences. She uses her intellectual prowess to simulate human experiences and to make ever more sophisticated technology. She explains the process of imagining and creating the human experience through technology: “I watched other people, tried to make myself feel what it might be like to drive a car or fire a gun or be an older brother who worked in the South Pacific as a deep-sea miner or an older sister who was an architect in Antarctica or a father who was CEO of a major corporation or a mother who was a molecular biologist” (328). Asha understands technology as

a replacement for personal relationships and thus is over-dependent on technology and under-dependent on people. As a result, she becomes totally isolated and alone. Lacking a support network, she becomes closed off and ignores her emotional needs. Prosthetic technology, like Dreamasks, escape from the deep emotional feelings of being estranged from her parents, abused by her adopted parents, and otherwise unable to trust most people. Uncle Marc, her closest confidant, even lies to her. Virtual reality provides her with a form of escapist entertainment that allows her to remain closed off and alienated from community.

By contrast, Olamina is forced to experience other people's feelings because of hyperempathy, which ultimately translates into her investing energy in knowing people, helping others, building community, and journaling her experiences. Asha is isolated from her community and craves an opportunity to know what it is like to be someone else. She invests her energy in intellect and building knowledge and having more sophisticated simulated experiences rather than in developing relationships with other people or developing her own self-expression. Thus, she learns scientific knowledge, but she does not develop self-knowledge and self-expression. She creates virtual reality scenarios whereas Olamina's journal re-creates her lived experiences. She objectifies people and experiences as something to be learned rather than as a valuable intricate part of her everyday life.

Through these representations of active and passive agency, Butler seems to be warning against outsourcing our subjectivity to large social and technological structures. She also seems to be warning against the degeneration of abstract thinking. The more Butler's characters rely on technology the less they can think abstractly. Abstract thinking is one of the ways that people develop active agency because it is one way that people can think creatively to solve problems and think of new answers to problems as opposed to concrete thinking. Through abstraction,

patterns that might not be visible or evident here and now can be conceptualized and understood. This relates back to Olamina's hyperempathy and the fact that in the novel Butler does not believe that concrete feeling – feeling the pain and pleasure of other people in a very real way based on seeing someone in pain or pleasure – is helpful in producing empathy and caring or benevolent citizens. Abstract feeling is an important element in making people more connected to one another and more thoughtful about their interactions, more caring and generous in building community. Concrete feeling does nothing to build relationships among people; in the novel, concrete feeling only serves to make sharers more vulnerable to other people. Relationships are important because they help people help each other. Asha is attached to technology and integrated into it but she is not a prosthetic citizen because she only has the material attachment to technology. The prosthetic citizen must develop prosthetic emotions that acknowledge interdependence and interconnectedness with people as much as technology.

Cultivating Subjectivity

Asha's subjectivity is outsourced to technology meaning that she understands herself almost exclusively as she is projected through technology. This has a numbing effect on her because her emotions and feelings—her prosthetic emotions that connect to other people—are not engaged regularly, which inhibits her from developing deep relationships and is thus alone. She confides, "Uncle Marc was, in the end, my only family" (394). Asha Vera is in some ways Olamina's foil because she is a passive agent who believes her experiences are an articulation of social ills that have no meaning. Whereas Olamina sees meaning in her life experiences, Asha sees no meaning in her experiences. Asha criticizes her mother for learning from horrible circumstances: "she learned from everyone, used everyone and everything. I think if I had died

at birth, she would have managed to learn something from my death” (154). She can’t stand the crazy Christian family that she has been “adopted” by because the father makes persistent sexual advances and the mother abuses her emotionally. She doesn’t see any meaning in her situation or circumstances. Each experience is without meaning and affirms the harsh consequences of the corrupt up world that they live in. Even when she meets her mother she sees the negativity of the situation and has a fairly harsh reaction to her mother rather than giving her the benefit of the doubt. As a result, she doesn’t learn how to become an active agent, for example, she learns how to escape. Olamina chooses a path of spiritual leadership and Asha chooses a path of being a virtual reality developer superstar. They are both invested in a vocation that is meant to enrich an individual’s life, but Olamina’s path offers people spiritual renewal and Asha’s offers people escapist entertainment.

This leads them to two very different forms of subjectivity. Olamina is an active agent who notes her experiences as discoveries of truth about God that she calls “a collection of truths. It isn’t the whole truth. It isn’t the only truth. It’s just one collection of thoughts that are true,” which are eventually used to start a religion called Earthseed (126). For Olamina, writing in her journal and eventually drawing, are ways in which she comes to know and articulate herself. Writing, in particular, makes her abstract ideas and feelings concrete. Her journal gives shape to the abstract concepts, feelings, intuitions, and interpretations of her experiences in a way that solidifies her understanding of herself and the world around her. Drawing becomes an extension of this concrete materialization of her ideas as well as she looks to drawing to produce images after such traumatic events that are so horrible that once they are put into words they are somehow reduced to a logically communicated event when in reality such horror and trauma hinders transmission. The experience of it can never be shared in full; it can only be represented

in forms of writing and drawing, for example, that share some part of that experience, but cannot fully embody the experience.

Asha's creativity has gone into creating other worlds and envisioning something far outside of reality. She is imaginative and creative, but she is unable to cope with the real world. Her ability to deal with the real world is bound up in her ability to project a fantasy world and is illustrated in the fact that she "began creating Dreammask scenarios when (she) was 12" (325). In this fragmented post-apocalyptic environment of 2094 an increasing number of people amass experiences through virtual reality and gaming than through strong communities, and thus, people are more accustomed to mediated experiences through technology. Technology manipulates people in more overt ways in *Parable of the Talents* than we saw in *Parable of the Sower*. Technology is now omnipresent and is used to do everything, which means that people have become increasingly reliant on technology thereby making them subjects of the technology that they have become dependent upon. People have become accustomed to technology mediating nearly every part of their daily experience. Becoming so reliant on technology means that people are reliant on machines rather than themselves or other people and it fosters a loss of agency because they have not learned self-care in a deep way, like Olamina has, for example. Kathleen Woodward explains, "the dominant view of technological development is that of an increasingly elaborated regime of tools and machines, or prostheses, that extend and amplify the capabilities of the human" (97). For Olamina, writing is the technology that extends and amplifies her natural abilities. It allows her to amass followers and to share her beliefs and ideas and experiences with the wider world. Butler seems to be advocating for technological advances like this rather than technological advances in pharmaceutical drugs, for example, which are meant to extend and amplify the more mechanical forms of the human. Woodward addresses the

traditional delineation between computers and humans: “Computers are associated with the task of exchanging information efficiently and with extending the capability of humans to think rationally, while humans are assigned the work of emotions” (96). Similar to the rational function of computers, psycho-pharmaceutical drugs have traditionally been developed to extend the capability of humans to think rationally by balancing emotions and helping people to focus, for example. However, in an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic world, psycho-pharmaceuticals actually extend emotional intensity into the extreme and pose a serious threat to the people who use them and anyone they encounter. They have no reasonable approaches – they live for the thrill and set fires, commit crimes because it makes them high and pushes their emotional potential to an extreme that kicks in adrenaline and pushes them out of the realm of their rational abilities thus foreclosing the possibility for users to think for themselves and realize their detriment.

Used in this way, technology becomes a form of discipline because while it fosters advances in enhanced entertainment experiences, it also allows for a deeper manipulation of people by having control over what people experience. In his study of discipline in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains one of the characteristics of discipline in the modern age: “they become attached to some of the great essential functions (rather than religion) to factory production, the transmission of knowledge, the diffusion of aptitudes and skills, the mad machine” (210). This is evident in the difference between Olamina’s and Asha’s attachments. Olamina is attached to religion while Asha is attached to the transmission of knowledge and integrated with technology as an extension of that. As a form of discipline, technology reduces human interaction to something that is less spontaneous and more controlled, which means that people have to spend less time learning how to be civilized to one another because they can fully

isolate and alienate themselves from one another enveloped in virtual reality if they so choose. Asha chooses isolation and alienation from Uncle Marc and from her mother in part, I argue, because she hasn't had to resolve conflict with other people. The social environment has made it acceptable and the technological environment has made it possible to escape from situations that are uncomfortable. Certainly, the freedom from abusive situations is a positive advancement. However, the means to achieve freedom is one that means personal isolation. So, although Asha is free from an abusive family, she is also free from familial attachments, which may be yet another form of emotional harm that she experiences. Olamina's philosophy is that God is Change and our work is to shape god. Asha doesn't shape her own experiences; she seems to be in perpetual reaction to her situation and to life experiences and can't quite get to a place where she is shaping those experiences.

Technology is a form of discipline in other areas in the novel as well, such as technology used by the military and militant groups alike. In *Parable of the Talents*, maggots are large vehicles, mostly used by the military. The name alone suggests a sinister turn given that maggots in *Parable of the Sower* were what they called people who were parasitically living off of the ruins of other people after communities were ravaged. Olamina describes these machines: "A maggot, nicknamed for its ugly shape, is something less than a tank, and something more than a truck. It's a big, armed and armored, all-terrain, all-wheel-drive vehicle" (186). The naming of this vehicle after the insect, on the one hand, and parasitic people who are living off of the destruction of the apocalypse, on the other hand, connotes its sinister nature. This military vehicle is named "maggot" because its appearance anticipates the destruction of the people that the maggot is under orders to overtake and destroy. They have the ability to wreak havoc and destruction on almost anything because it is well equipped to "go almost anywhere, over, around,

or through almost anything” (186). The purpose of a vehicle like this is to destroy; it is expensive and otherwise unwieldy and earns its value by offering an enormous level of force that can overpower an entire community. The type of technology that the government is developing is the kind that will cause mass destruction that will overpower people and allow control.

In addition to maggots, there is another form of horrendous power of other people that is even more powerful because it permeates the individual inside and out. Collars are “the latest in electronic convict control devices—also known as slave collars, dog collars, and choke chains” (83). Collars make explicit the power that people within social hierarchies already exercise over their subordinates. As the description explains, the original purpose was to exercise control over prisoners. However, just as maggots were meant for the military but are driven by wealthy civilians who can afford to buy them, so collars find their way into the hands of many people in positions of power, especially those who fall outside of the law, like pimps. Technology has advanced to such an extent that they cannot only exercise control over people’s bodies, but they have become sophisticated enough to simulate emotional and biological responses. Olamina explains, “I’ve heard that some collars can also give cheap, delicious rewards of pleasure for good behavior by encouraging change in brain chemistry—stimulating the wearer to produce endorphins” (83). Society is learning ways of exercising more serious and powerful forms of control over people such that their active agency is compromised.

Discipline, Citizenship, Prosthesis

In response to an ever-increasing amount of discipline that permeates social relationships, it seems only natural that citizenship and the role of the citizen is repressed and oppressed in the future of 2094. This significant shift is the result of centuries of that state exercising invisible

forms of disciplinary that inverts the citizens role in democracy such that citizens are not agents of the state, but subjects of the state. Evidence of the subjectivation of citizens can be seen as early as the 1800s. In his discussion of nineteenth century citizenship in the book *Necro Citizenship*, Russ Castronovo examines the evolution of privatization on citizenship and the critical role that puritan religion and spirituality has played in setting this precedent. He explains the correlation between religion and privatization in forming citizenship: “At a more transcendent level, the afterlife emancipates souls from passionate debates, everyday engagements, and earthly affairs that animate the political field. It is precisely such privatization and disengagement that stamps citizenship in the United States of the 19th century” (4). Impressions of afterlife prepare subjects to live as private citizens that are attentive to their acts of morality and virtuousness to ensure their entry into heaven, which permeates the way that they interact in life too. Religious and spiritual beliefs tied to resurrection after death or even to heaven in general breed transcendental beliefs that tell people it is more valuable to work on their heavenly life after death than to improve their present situation because they are not in control, God is in control.

Christianity is the predominant spiritual and religious belief system informing transcendental beliefs of American citizens. Suffering is part of the world and the Christian dogma tells people that suffering is a natural part of this world and should be addressed by looking toward heaven, asking for God’s help and working toward heavenly objectives rather than earthly ones. These teachings breed passivity. According to this logic, people are subjects of suffering and instead of trying to address suffering, people should focus inward and cultivate their private lives and do good works so that they can get into heaven. Christianity breeds passive "subjects" and passive citizens because it tells suffering people to forget about the

"earthly" world and work toward "heavenly" goals. These characteristics that emerge in 19th century citizenship become perfected in future years so that this is part of the foundation of citizenship in the 21st century of Butler's novels. Butler's religion, Earthseed, is invested in the here and now as everything there is while positing that focusing on the present and taking care of the self and others today will lead to union with God in death as "we take root among the stars." Her religion teaches people that addressing poverty is as important as space exploration because the more we know about space, the more we know God. And the more we know God, the better and more knowledgeable people we can be about God and live our lives accordingly.

Castronovo continues what he calls an analysis of the metaphoric relationship between death and citizenship in American culture and institutions by unraveling the politics of privatization: "The private workings of community, whether as utopian farm or 19th century state, collapse the stark oppositions between heavenly and historical spheres. But rather than abject the private as nonpolitical, U.S. democracy celebrates privacy as an ideal political posture" (114). In the novel, Acorn is a self-sustaining utopian farm set away from most of civilization, which collapses the distance between private and public. The utopian community stands outside of the law and builds its own private community relying on each other and those within the community rather than the nation-state. Following Castronovo's analysis, the private workings of Acorn collapse the stark oppositions between heavenly and historical spheres by reproducing the unity promised in heaven on the farm in the private and isolated community thereby replicating the historical condition of privacy and privatization at the heart of American citizenship. Thus, Acorn is an ideal political posture within American democracy because it is private and tends to its own concerns, and although at odds with the dominant power structure, this community does not pose an overt challenge to the system preferring instead to distance

itself from the mainstream. When Acorn is attacked by a militant group, the attack brings Acorn into the political realm. The community is isolated from the horrors of citizenship under Jarret's leadership; the horrors are brought to their community and enacted on the members of Acorn. U.S. democracy encourages this level of privacy and utopian group because, as demonstrated by the overwhelming success of the militant group, privacy isolates the group and prevents them from being aided or rescued or perhaps even known. Olamina alludes to this when she claims: "Jarret can destroy us without ever knowing about us" (154). Olamina understands that power dynamics such as they are allow the state to act upon these people and that because privacy is the norm, and in fact, is the ideal form of political presence, it offers people in power greater control over citizen subjects because people are not united toward causes or communal and open in their interactions. Private communities tend to their own business which allows them a certain amount of freedom, but it is high risk because the more private the community, the more isolated and vulnerable to attack because as a target, the attackers risk of being exposed is minimal.

In *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina and Asha represent two different types of citizenship as result of each woman's different private practices. Olamina is discreet, but she actively builds community outside of the watchful governmental eye in response to state failures. She is involved in civic matters to the extent that she is aware of what is happening in government, but she doesn't organize protests or public spectacles to support her critiques. Instead, her response is to create the utopian farm community that she desires. Castronovo argues that material practices such as these are not apolitical, but in fact are formational elements of political identity: "Citizenship is not merely an abstract relation or a generic cultural placeholder of identity, however. It is also a material process that recognizes specific bodies as well as formal persons, adapting both to broad parameters of inclusion and exclusion" (3). Each citizen's private

practices are a material formation of their citizenship. In terms of identity formation, I understand Castronovo to be claiming that simply being a citizen of a country, holding a particular citizenship status or birthright, does not form a person's identity in and of itself. Citizenship is formed through the actions of an individual in private as well as public matters.

Prosthetic citizenship refers to a model of living in community in which the self and not self are integrated emotionally and materially. As technology changes people's interactions with nature, it also changes our relationships with other people and thus, requires people to re-conceptualize community and interpersonal relationships. The prosthetic citizen understands the reflexive relationship of technology and people as extensions of the self and the self as an extension of technology. Citizenship is a reciprocal process because the state both has to recognize you and you have to determine, within certain parameters, your level of interaction and involvement in the state. The state has shaped Olamina's views as she reacts against the waning space program, for example. She is also attentive to mass suffering due to poverty and hunger, increased drug abuse, and issues of privatization and corporate communities. For all of these reasons, many people, like her friend Joann in *Parable of the Sower* and like Asha in *Parable of the Talents*, become passive citizens who lament the way things are, but find themselves helpless to do anything about it. They live with a certain level of persistent fear that paralyzes them. In American society, Olamina is not apolitical or outside of politics, she represents the ideal form of citizenship by responding privately to her discontents rather than raising a public outcry. She isn't a nuisance to the state, but she is not outside of the state either. She exhibits a type of necro citizenship through social death in which she is left alone and free to build the community she desires, but in her private, utopian community, she remains a subject of the state. There is always the potential for the state to inflict itself on Acorn whenever the community becomes a

problem for them in any way. The state is also abstracted just like citizens are abstracted. This is clear in Olamina's understanding that "Jarret can destroy us without ever knowing about us" (154). She understands the fact that the combination of laws and cultural shifts are bigger than the leaders and people who support or resist them thereby becoming more powerful and unwieldy than the people who administer the laws. The problem with this situation is that it dehumanizes the citizen and state leaders alike.

The notion of prosthetic citizenship offers an integrated form of conceptualizing citizenship as reflexive and as an extension of the self. As such, prosthesis is a productive way of examining the relationship between the body and technology. As modernity and postmodernity have experienced an accelerated pace of technological advances and scientific discoveries and developments, the impact of these developments on individuals, their bodies, and the social systems in which they exist is increasingly transformative. What prosthesis and the idea of prosthetic citizenship suggest is that new technology affects our bodies and minds in a fundamental and material way that has permanent effects that are not as easily reversed, especially in comparison to the ease with which they are consumed. Prosthetic citizens are those who find agency even within a progressively passive society and embrace the opportunity to extend the self through the state and through technological apparatuses by examining and seeking to understand the full effects being integrated into these technologies.

Butler's novels portray a not-so-distant future in which society keeps investing in technology that responds to and regulates human emotional desires and thus, keeps people distracted and preoccupied. Meanwhile, technology that can actually make human life better, like spacecraft and exploration robots, that may make human life better in a fundamental way are underdeveloped. By exploring these novels through the lens of prosthesis, Olamina's hybrid

nature as a sharer, a spiritual leader, and a writer is understood to extend herself despite the divisions of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic America that she lives in. She embodies the concept of prosthetic citizenship in her ability to maintain active agency despite physical limitations, acknowledge and manager her weaknesses, and embrace the outside world as an extension of herself by leveraging the spiritual beliefs of Earthseed to shape her own destiny. It is as a prosthetic citizen that Olamina becomes a rare person who adapts and thrives in the chaos and uncertainty this future America.

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