

Afrofuturism, Science Fiction,
and the Reinvention of African American Culture

by

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ABSTRACT

Modern and contemporary African American writers employ science fiction in order to recast ideas on past, present, and future black culture. This dissertation examines Afrofuturism's cultural aesthetics, which appropriate devices from science fiction and fantasy in order to revise, interrogate, and re-examine historical events insufficiently treated by literary realism. The dissertation includes treatments of George Schuyler, Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler, Colson Whitehead, Nalo Hopkinson, and Chicana/ofuturism.

The original contribution of this research is to highlight how imagination of a posthuman world has made it possible for African American writers to envision how racial power can be re-configured and re-negotiated. Focusing on shifting racial dynamics caught up in the swirl of technological changes, this research illuminates a complex process of literary production in which black culture and identity have been continuously re-interpreted.

In the post-war and post-Civil Rights Movement eras African American writers began reflecting on shifting racial dynamics in light of technological changes. This shift in which black experience became mechanized and digitized explains how technology became a source of new African American fiction. The relationships between humans and their external conditions appear in such futuristic themes as trans-human anamorphosis, cyberspace, and digital souls. These thematic devices, which explore humanity outside its phenotypic boundaries, provide African American writers with tools to demystify deterministic views of race. Afrofuturism has responded to the conceptual transformation of humanity with a race-specific scope, locating the presence of black culture in a high-tech world.

Techno-scientific progress has provided important resources in contemporary theory, yet these theoretical foci too seldom have been drawn into critical race discourses. This discrepancy is due to techno-scientific progress having served as a tool for the legitimation of scientific racism under global capitalism for centuries. Responding to this critical lacuna, the dissertation highlights an under-

explored field in which African American literature responds to techno-culture's involvement in contemporary discussions of race. Rather than repeat nominal assumptions of Eurocentric modernity and its racist hegemony, this dissertation theorizes how modern techno-culture's outcomes—such as information science, genetic engineering, and computer science—shape minority lives, and how minority groups appropriate these outcomes to enact their own liberation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We will make our own future Text.

–Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*.

The aesthetic ventures of contemporary African American artists have designed historical models in order to recast previous ideas on past, present, and future black culture. This futuristic experiment is based on post-Enlightenment skepticism that undergirds postwar western epistemology, yet with significant cultural variations. Through the “imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks” (Wolfe xv), in which the perceptual limitation of Cartesian body/mind dualism has been constantly problematized and revised, Afrofuturism explores the construction of African American identity. It seeks to locate the presence of black culture within the contemporary techno-scientific world, contesting any claims of an essential relationship between human, nature, and technology in the formation of racial identity.

When Mark Dery coined the term “Afrofuturism” (180) in 1994, his primary concern was the postwar aesthetic practices African American artists employed vis-à-vis modern U.S. techno-culture. He used the term to refer to “other stories” of black communities that “tell about culture, technology, and things to come” (182). The expansion of global capitalism, in which western culture’s scientific rationales established themselves as a neutral standard of post-ideological order, enabled African American artists to observe the “images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future” (Dery 180) and challenge the epistemological tendency where dominant rubrics of Eurocentric imagination have engineered and haunted public imagination. Afrofuturism emerged from such a historical milieu.

In a culture where market principles came to be perceived as a natural consequence of historical progress and modern technologies became integrated into consumer practices, the modern techno-world became a site in which new modes of cultural, political, and social signification redefined racial, gender, and sexual experience.

Dery's definition of Afrofuturism not only focuses on the techno-aesthetic practices of modern black culture, but implies that the African American diaspora was a significant source of futuristic imagination. As African Americans are the "descendants of alien abductees" sacrificed by the colonial west, Dery asserts, their captivity history has always inhibited a "sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind)" (180). Such a concept of black futurism comes into contact with the history of the transatlantic diaspora; blackness, which is assumed as symbolically "mutilated" in Hortense Spillers' terms,¹ has always been inherently futuristic.

Futuristic imaginations have been part of African American literature in the sense that, in its own speculative tradition, it has ruminated on the undiscovered space in which black bodies have been sub-humanized as a primitive site of fear. Black American culture, as Mayer asserts, has constantly reenacted its racialized experience in "the fantasy space in-between" (556). This fantasy-like space—such as the bewitched vineyard in Charles Chesnutt's "Goophered Grapevine," the underground space in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and the haunted house in

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*—seizes upon Afrofuturist tropes to reinvent black worlds that conventional rationality might perceive as unreal. As a rhetorical tradition represented in such storytelling forms as African folklore, hoodoo magic, and conjuring, it has served as an important source of aesthetic expression for racial experience.

Such a broader contextualization of Afrofuturism points to how the genre's discursive space keeps expanding. Afrofuturism scholars have continuously attempted to reinterpret the concept in multiple ways, expanding its geographic boundaries to a transcontinental extent and its temporal boundaries back to the advent of seventeenth-century modern industry. Now the term includes Pan-African speculative imaginations, fantasy devices for Jim Crow and racial apartheid in modern U.S. culture, non-autobiographical slave and neo-slave narratives, and Caribbean occult culture. Contextualizing Afro-diasporic futurity in such an extensive manner makes it possible to reread some African American texts not typically categorized as canonical. Martin Delany's *Blake: or the Huts of America*, considered the earliest black futurism piece, takes tropes of allohistory as its base. Charles Chesnutt's folkloric hoodoo stories in *The Conjure Woman*, Sutton E. Griggs's separate American state in *Imperium in Imperio*, and Frances Harper's reimagined south during the Reconstruction era in *Iola Leroy* can be read as early black futurism texts using the tropes of alternate history, which attempt to construct their own utopian visions. In the early-twentieth century within the Harlem literary circle, Pauline Hopkins, Zora Neale Hurston, and other African American writers published speculative short fictions in journals and magazines

such as *Colored American Magazine*, *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *Messenger*, edited and published by African American literati.²

Although located in the same generic territory, there is a discernible distinction between speculative Afro-diasporic texts, which use fantasy tropes to discover what the official historiography might dismiss as supernatural and irrational, and modern black science fiction texts, which focus on exploring the way techno-scientific realignment of the world has reshaped ethnic minorities' lives. Such a distinction is marked by the emergence of techno-cultural, transnational capitalism, whose market principles have transformed the cultural atmosphere into a post-ideological phase that seriously challenges the struggles of minorities. The present dissertation focuses on this pivotal point, a historical era in which African American writers began reflecting on shifting racial dynamics caught up in the swirl of industrial and technological changes. This moment appears in black literature as a potential place where racial power can be reconfigured and renegotiated. George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), the Afro-diasporic futurism of Ishmael Reed and Samuel Delany, and the cultural experiments of Black Arts Movement writers such as Amiri Baraka incorporated technicization and mechanization of social structures into black aesthetics. They experimented with new possibilities of understanding African American culture. In this cultural milieu, black writers witnessed how African American experience had been mechanized and digitized.

Such a critical focus on the socio-cultural logic of technology does not simply reiterate an optimistic vision that cultural borrowing or unexpected distribution of technology helps racial minorities construct their own counter-culture. The

argument made here does not align with the skeptical notion that political struggles of minorities end up reinforcing their dependency upon a dominant culture. Afrofuturist writers have shown that the dynamics of technology and race are embedded in a far more complex process, one in which black culture and identity are continuously re-read and re-interpreted, even through the most regimented technology of social control or the most propagandistic counter-cultural resistance. For instance, in George Schuyler's *Black No More*, an African American scientist re-appropriates German eugenics to achieve morphological freedom for African Americans, but this new trans-human technology plays within the market principle. Phenotypic liberation becomes incorporated into another register of social survival. Media and computer technologies in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada* function as means of panoptic surveillance and domination, but simultaneously they provide tools for social uplift and resistance. These novels not only reject a notion of "demonizing technology as a satanic mill of domination," they also distance themselves from a "postmodernist celebration of technological sublime" (Penley and Ross xii). Technological reformation of society became an aesthetic source for black artistic imaginations. It sheds light on complex social dynamics where racial experiences were captured, contested, and redefined in an optimistic techno-utopianism opposed to a technocratic colonialism. In order to examine the cultural negotiations that new technologies bring, we shall consider how Afrofuturism writers address those shifting conditions in such futuristic themes as trans-human anamorphosis, cyberspace, and digital souls. These thematic devices, which explore humanity outside of its phenotypic boundaries, provide African American authors with tools

to demystify mythical beliefs and deterministic views of race, and to observe how social technologies get co-opted into a regimental social control. Afrofuturist authors have responded to the conceptual transformation of humanity with a race-specific scope, locating the presence of black culture in a high-tech world.

In one sense, such aesthetic practices were closely associated with the changing economic structure of the United States. Since the African American economy in urban areas largely relied on the factory manufacturing system of mega-conglomerates, the economic flexibility in the mid-twentieth century—facilitated by factory automation, global subcontracting of production and distribution, and multi-nationalization of corporate organization³—led to the “acceleration of Black unemployment and underemployment” (Marable 32). In the “general condition of deflation,” aggravated by the “technological change, automation, the search for new product lines and market niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labor control” (Harvey 145), the “new wave of modernization and global industrial reorganization” precipitated a “transition from the rigidly organized and massified system ... to a more flexible regime of accumulation” (Dubey 18). Simultaneously, a “new sector of highly skilled and well-paid technical and professional jobs ... reduce[d] lower-skilled jobs in factories and offices, thus creating a surplus labor pool that [was] partially absorbed into an expanding service sector” in African American communities (Dubey 196). In this way, in gear with the “political drift to the right in the national politics” (Marable 32), African Americans experienced advanced technologies as a moment in which conventional hierarchies were reproduced in

another form of white domination and technocracy, marking a “troubled period of economic restructuring and social and political readjustment” (Harvey 145).

Within this shifting politico-cultural circumstance, African American scholarship observed breakdowns and reorganizations of black literature’s conventions. Science fiction form and themes were introduced to black literature, whose speculative tropes had largely remained in African folklores and archetypal black utopian/dystopian narratives until the *fin de siècle*. The advent of modern techno-culture revised notions regarding literature and its forms, and, likewise, techno-scientific modernization, which during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served the regime of scientific racism, substantially modified the way in which African American experiences and their representations could be interpreted. In their futuristic adventure, African American writers not only represent social and cultural plights of racial minorities whose access to technological resources is limited, but they also explore far more complicated racial dynamics in techno-culture, in which “people of color produce, transform, appropriate, and consume technologies” in their “struggles for economic mobility, political maneuvering, and community building” (Hines 5). In other words, black science fiction writers not only attempt to seize upon how modern techno-culture serves the monopolistic expansion of a globalized free market economy, they also focus on observing counter-cultural practices against the neo-liberal expansion of global capitalism, in which minorities “combat the monolithic picture of the ‘one-way flow’ of Western technoculture” (Penley and Ross xi).⁴ Such representations of counter-totalitarian experience resonate with a claim that marginalization not only creates a “site of deprivation,” but serves as a “location for the production of

a counter hegemonic discourse” (hooks 341). Envisioning a “possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks 341) imagines “the world outside itself,” world isolated from reality (Csicsery-Ronay 2011, 190). In this fashion, African American science fiction has constructed a far more complicated representation than previously been understood.

Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the (Post-)Enlightenment Project

Contrary to the assumption that science fiction customarily depicts a raceless future, its tropes have been steeped with the colonial gaze towards foreign, exotic cultures. The generic tropes of science fiction emerged when evolution and ethnocentric anthropology established the imperial frameworks for European/non-European relations, as recursively observed from what Rieder addresses as prehistoric satires of science fiction. These works range from Cyrano de Bergerac’s *The Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon and the Sun* (1656) and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) to the works of such nineteenth-century scientific romance authors as Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, and Jules Verne, whose rhetorical traits conceived the ideological “impetus behind cognitive revolutions in the biological and human sciences that reshaped European notions of its own history and society” (Rieder 4). With such a historical background, science fiction has been an uncanny site of encountering ‘others’ through which authors keep “imagining the subjugation of white people” (Berlatsky).⁵

As Csicsery-Ronay asserts, science fiction tropes were triggered and fostered by the “technological expansion that drove real imperialism, the need felt by national audiences for literary-cultural mediations as their societies were transformed from historical nations into hegemons, and the fantastic model of achieved techno-scientific Empire” (2003, 231). Science fiction’s reference to colonial history and techno-scientific progress underlines how hegemonic discourses of racial difference served the endeavors of the western philosophical and theological traditions in their attempts to discover human traits which they believed would define humanity as a universal state of being. It was not until western civilization’s encounter with non-European races that Christian humanism oriented itself toward the legitimation of colonialism. Trans-Atlantic contact with Native Americans set western scientific knowledge within an order based on biological essentialism. As Anderson argues, such “racial innatism ...characterize[s] modernity/the Enlightenment” as “a generic structure of othering” (17).

This essentialist view supported the taxonomic practices of racial science. This is why current race scholarship is highly critical of the traditional thinking and reasoning that established the very basis of the modern social system and its political practices. For instance, Bell contests the very foundation of Enlightenment liberalism by saying that “[legal] precedent, rights theory, and objectivity merely are formal rules that serve a covert purpose. Even in the context of equality theory, they will never vindicate the legal rights of black Americans” (364). In a similar vein, Mills argues that “the growth of the Enlightenment and the rise of secularism did not challenge [the] strategic

dichotomization (Christian/infidel)” that identified non-European races as “*humanoid* but not fully *human*” (23, italicized in original). Mills goes on to say that Enlightenment’s liberalism, which “took place simultaneously with the massacre, expropriation, and subjection to hereditary slavery,” was “reconciled through the Racial Contract, which essentially denies personhood [of other races] and restricts the terms of social contract to whites” (64).

In many ways, the Enlightenment has been one of the central objects of analysis for race theorists, who explore the origins of Euro/logo-centric modernity within the combination of scientific knowledge and hegemonic power acquired through imperialistic, cross-cultural contact. They view the scientific legitimization of racism as part of the politicization of Enlightenment ideals. Likewise, technology and science have manifested for centuries as oppressive to minorities. Traditional race scholarship has been highly critical of the aesthetic potential of science fiction tropes in representing race experience. Since techno-science has long served as a tool for the legitimation of imperial regimes within a global capitalism “governed by the laws and right of technoscience” (Csicsery-Ronay 2009, 238), science fiction genre has been a symptomatic site in which western culture’s capitalistic-colonial desire can be observed rather than as a space for representing racial experience.

It is not the goal of this dissertation to disentangle the intricate relations of science fiction, anthropology, and colonialism from the tenets of the Enlightenment. Such issues have already been defended, criticized, and revised by pro-Enlightenment critics such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas, all of whom accused the Enlightenment of totalitarian

practices. Instead, this dissertation explores the double-edged complication of techno-scientific progress and African American experience represented in twentieth-century Afrofuturism novels. Rather than criticizing the projects of Enlightenment for its oppressive politics, it makes better sense to argue that, as Wilkinson suggests, “the interplay of mercantilism, imperialism, religious dogma, manifest destiny, Romantic nationalism, racist anthropological theories, Whig histories, and ... the Enlightenment” has been more responsible for institutional oppression in the modern world. Likewise, it is the transatlantic contact by western culture that transformed “a calmer state of philosophical reflection on the status of the human vis-à-vis nature” into “the affective power of [the] violence” through “the emergent social assemblage of the frontier” (Lester 138). Therefore, not only does this project investigate how science and technology have been incorporated into the knowledge-making practice of Eurocentric modernity, whose hegemonic human/non-human formulation served for *de facto* racial strata, but it examines how the contemporary techno-culture has influenced minoritarian struggles for liberation by analyzing Afrofuturism authors’ responses to this issue. This project inspects the essential relation between technological progress and racial experience.

Technology as Political Practice, Literature as Cultural Practice

Blackness in modern America means more than a theoretical pursuit. As some of the basic notions of race and racism have substantially changed in post-racial America,⁶ race has become a far more complicated site of political discourse. Where the Civil Rights Movement relocated cultural and political meanings of

race, which Jim Crow defined in institutional terms, techno-messianism has made people believe that a physiological body disappears in one's identity formation. In the utopic bliss of technology, some racist doctrines that define "the white body as the somatic norm" (Mills 61), seem to become deconstructed. The "assumption of a long tradition of western humanism" becomes "problematized in relation to societal/technological change" (Anderson 2). The biocultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s restructured the perceptual ground of the biological body and its externals, as captured in Donna Haraway's cyborg theory. The emergence of computers, artificial intelligence, virtual networks, and prosthetic technologies, which might transform the corporeal nature of humanity into a supposedly-artificial state, relocates race discourse to the extent that biological humanity seems to be invisible when thinking of race and ethnicity.

It comes as no surprise that racial experience and its interpretation have changed as technology progresses. Modern techno-culture has provided meaningful moments that allow us to recast the fundamental meaning of being a *physical* human. This is not only because there have been technological innovations that transform the morphological marks of race, which served the purpose of racial taxonomy, but because posthuman technologies such as neuroscience, nanobiology, electrical engineering, and computer science have opened up the possibility of separating human consciousness from its body. This shift calls into question the basic premise of humanness. The famous "Turing Test," created by Alan Turing, alludes to such a cognitive transformation in terms of human/machine continuity. The test requires a human interrogator to engage in simultaneous language conversations with a human and a machine which

imitates the human language, with the purpose of determining which subject is the human and which is the machine. Turing does not simply parallel human to machine, but creates a close proximity between humanity and intelligence. Echoing and revising the classic dualist thoughts, the Turing Test creates technologically-mediated references to the human being. It understands a body as a storage of coded information, a mind as an algorithmic control process, and humanity as the concurrent operational system of both. The basic premise of the Turing Test has reverberated throughout the late twentieth century, especially in Norbert Wiener's cybernetics, Donna Haraway's cyborgism, FM-2030's transhumanism, and Katherine Hayles' posthumanism, all of which understand a human body as intrinsically prosthetic and defy any essentialist view on physical humanity.

Understanding the human being as a hybrid of fluid human/non-human actants does not merely reinterpret Darwinian evolutionism and the Nietzschean notion of *overhuman*, nor does it simply inherit the uncompleted Enlightenment ideal that "the improvement of the human faculties...[and] the perfectibility of man [are] absolutely indefinite" (Condorcet 4). Instead, it dislocates white masculine presence from the place of a conceptual norm, opening up political possibilities for racial and sexual minorities. On this perceptual ground, in which the very meaning of humanness becomes colorized, Lisa Nakamura's cyber-race formation theory explores the reformation of race in the digitized space, and Thomas Foster's vernacular posthumanism examines the racial variation of post-cyberpunk politics. Both attempt to apply posthuman and cybernetic studies towards examining race outside of bodily boundaries. Such attempts consider

that understanding the racial presence of technology would help configure how technological innovations have replaced traditional theories with regard to racial formation; as neuroscience, nanobiology, genetic engineering, and computer science reformulate the body as a cache of codifiable information and structural operation, the conventional premises of race identity are also disrupted to a large extent, taking into consideration "the previously unmarked position of the middle-class male" (Foster xxiv).

Cybernetics, post-/trans-humanism, informatics, and computation theories provide useful tools to investigate shifting conditions in a post-racial era, in which "postnational forces" (Pease 5) are transforming the geopolitical map of the United States. Understanding race as analogous to human-technology amalgamation can offer a perceptual scope to the theorization of race. As Stone points out, it is no different from recognizing cyborgs as "boundary creatures, not only human/machine but creatures of cultural interstice as well" (178). However, although such theorizations of the race-technology nexus prove helpful in understanding the inherently racial nature of technology, race theorists warn of perceptual risks, which may derive from the "founding fiction of the digital age" that "race (and gender) distinctions would be eliminated with technology" (Nelson 1). Nakamura argues that belief in technological liberation from race is misplaced, and that commercial images produced by media corporations have falsely attempted to declare the end of race and gender discrimination. She explains:

The iconography of these advertising images demonstrates that the corporate image factory *needs* images of the Other in order to depict its product: a technological utopia of difference. It is not however, a utopia *for*

the Other or one that includes it in any meaningful or progressive way.

Rather, it proposes an ideal world of virtual social and cultural reality based on specific methods of "Othering"...*"the global Coca-Colonization"* of cyberspace and the media complex within which it is embedded. (25, italicized in original)

Lockard similarly investigates how cyberspace reenacts ethnic traits, arguing "the current conceptual transit into the Internet's techno-universalism relies on the repetition of deep-rooted cultural models of metacommunity," and "the ideology of online nationalism restates racialism...through its transformative identity omission that emphasize[s] unidentifiability and mutability" (172). In the cyber-discursive space, he argues, belief in virtual trans-ethnicity "shifts the political focus away from the material power bases of social elites," in which a "social articulation has been translated into a natural order beyond human challenge" (173). Mullen criticizes the theoretical weakness of outside-of-body rhetoric for anti-racist struggles; because the theoretical malleability of posthumanist approaches deconstruct the conventional body-mind relation, they tend to separate the process of embodiment from its material manifestation. Thus, Mullen believes that thinking of racial identity as non-corporeal might reinforce such misconceptions of race as the "African American subject as a black body with a white soul," which upholds African American subjectivity as a false "interiority comprehensible to white readers" (2012, 148).⁷

This kind of abstraction of race, as Anderson asserts, can "naturali[ze] race and racism" and thereby "displac[e] them from the sphere of culture and politics" (24). Foster terms this issue as "antinomies of posthuman thought," in which, he

argues, technological relations become a “fundamental civil rights struggle” (xxvi). Foster’s theorization of the social aspects of the posthuman future sheds light on the “potential intersection between posthumanism and new social movement” (xxvi). Since a phenotypic race has been the most legitimate foundation of the anti-racist struggle, posthuman thoughts risk “dismiss[ing] such [racial] struggles or even mak[ing] them obsolete” (Foster xxvii).

If “technicity” displaces the “historico-epistemological categories” based on “racial, linguistic, or geopolitical similarities and differences,” which are considered “inborn” and “naturalized” in conventional understanding (Thomas 124), and if this “decontextualization ... results from defining informational patterns as distinct from and superior to material instantiations” (Foster xxiv), we may understand why posthumanism studies have rarely been drawn into political race movements. Since posthuman perspectives share the idea that “technological object” and “actuality of technology” are nothing but “discursive information” or “power of the information” (Hayles 114-15), exploring ethnic morphs on a phenotypic level seems to lose its political validity. This theoretical conundrum can be understood in the “long history of intellectual conflict” between scientific naturalism and social relativism—“the former holding on to the Enlightenment ideal of true knowledge independent of history or context, the latter wagging its finger at the dangers of singular explanations that ignore the contingencies of those histories and contexts” (Bogost 13). Theoretical attempts to examine humanity outside its bio-physiological construction are in contest with the political arena, even though resources from the post-/trans- theories help us reconsider the problematic assumptions of conventional humanism regarding

race—i.e. polygenic origins of races, morphological determinism, and eugenic/scientific racism. As Nelson points out, “blackness gets constructed as always oppositional to technologically driven chronicles of progress” (1).

Technological alterity seems to lead us to a utopic post-racial world; at the same time, incorporeal existentialism might annul the political legitimacy of race movements in the substantial world. This double-edged possibility in interpreting body and identity is one of the reasons that posthuman studies have not been fully accepted by critical race theorists, who deploy what Gayatri Spivak calls a “*strategic* use of positivist essentialism” (281, italicized in original). As Madison points out, critical race theories share a “presupposition that race does not exist solely as a biological fact and is therefore less a product of nature and more a product of social classification and identification” (85). Since the term ‘essence’ refers to a rhetorical space with which to show “there is now pure or essence in what it means to be human,” the meaning of essence here “for useful end depends on who is using it and how it is being used, as well as to what purpose” (Madison 85). As a rhetorical maneuver, strategic race essentialism, unlike the “reductionism or determinism found in many 19th and 20th century essentialized accounts of self” (O’Mahoney 723), provides a theoretical tool for a “sense of collective identity ... in political movements” (Dourish 1) and a “scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 281).⁸

This dissertation explores the confusions and distractions that emerge when the strategic essentialism of contemporary race movements encounter the out-of-body politics of post/trans-human studies, attempting to configure the insufficiently examined possibility of the techno-race’s political validity. By

analyzing the works of five major Afrofuturism authors—George Schuyler, Ishmael Reed, Octavia Butler, Colson Whitehead, and Nalo Hopkinson—this dissertation highlights how those authors respond to techno-culture’s involvement in contemporary discourse on race and racism. Since these authors envision such race agendas as slavery, diaspora, nationhood, and citizenship through science fiction devices such as trans-human machine, time slip, alternative history, virtual reality, and slipstream, exploring their works will answer how science fiction’s supposedly raceless tropes can be used in political struggles.

Afrofuturism: New Frontier of African American Imagination

Afrofuturism is one of the least-examined fields in African American scholarship. Although the modern American pop-culture scene has produced plenty of Afrofuturistic *memes*,⁹ combining “science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs” to discuss the Afro-diasporic experience (Womack 9), critics and the public still tend to recognize this field as a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy. Within literary criticism, such well-known black science fiction writers as Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, and Charles Saunders have been paid less critical attention than William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and Ray Bradbury.

Reading science fiction and fantasy works by African American writers within conventional generic and theoretical frames is not problematic in itself. Like its Euro-American counterpart, Afrofuturism finds a reality in imagined times and spaces that traditional epistemology left undiscovered. This is the location in which black futuristic artworks gain consonance with “post-” theorizations (such

as post-modernism, post-realism, and post-humanism) that laid groundwork for bringing science fiction and fantasy into academic focus, appropriating post-humanism, cybernetics, and cyborg theory as the most reliable sources for the academic interpretation of contemporary black culture's aesthetic venture.

Placing Afrofuturism and its practices alongside the major theoretical currents of the twentieth century, which have served attempts to deconstruct what Jacques Derrida conceives as a phallogocentric system, however, does not provide sufficient explanation regarding its political practices. For instance, Afrofuturism authors of the early twentieth century tended to publish their works in such highly political magazines as *The Crisis* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which were designed to claim black modernism, particularly the aesthetic and cultural practices of Harlem Renaissance, as high literature, unlike their white counterparts who published in "visceral" genre magazines like *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Astounding Science Fiction* (Yaszek 4-5). Such a history of early Afrofuturist literature bears witness to a point of divergence from its generic European counterpart. While science fiction follows the late-twentieth century's common reliance on the doctrinal undecidability, incredibility, and uncertainty, the posthumanistic project of Afrofuturism oriented itself towards reclamation of the basic ideals of classical individualism. What underlies the politics of black futurism is not a modern revision of Enlightenment reason, knowledge, rationality, and the improvement of human condition through them, as mentioned in the above section, but rather focuses on the way their ideal principles, which were adapted into the discriminative practices, have been transformed into its modern variation within the contemporary techno-scientific cultures of

cybernetics, bio/nanotechnology, and information technology. A crossover of posthumanism to black culture positions Afrofuturism within a discursive field in which an alternative time and space and black agency converge to decenter Western logocentric cosmologies and configure a location of black presence in a world where technology plays significant roles in the formation of race and gender.

While posthumanism disintegrates mythic belief in phenotypic or genetic bodies as a fundamental residence of humanity, Afrofuturism's reenactment of humanity brings the anti-phenotypic/genetic epistemology of posthumanism back to its origins, dislocating it by colorizing its seemingly raceless doctrine.

Prototypical black speculative fictions, which deploy science fiction and fantasy tropes to represent slavery and racism before the publication of *Black No More*, bear witness to the basic principles of Afrofuturism. Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of America* is the earliest example of this tradition. Time in *Blake* is "not a future time, a past time, and a present time, but ... a present of future things, a present of past things, and a present of present things" (Ricouer 60). The protagonist, Henry, transgresses against traditional renderings of African American slaves. Henry's militant journey echos the masculine self-construction of Frederick Douglass, but Henry stands in a different space in "peculiar temporalities, resonating with the tension between the utopian impulse's openness and utopia's closure" (Bould 221). The ontological state that Henry occupies goes beyond the conceptual realm of traditional humanity that has claimed white manhood as a universal state of humanness in the American history. Controlling his own historical time and geopolitical space, Henry's agency

surpasses what Euro-American historiography has inscribed upon the black body, imbuing the novel's speculation with strong political content that contests the American motto of *E pluribus unum* to extend narrow nationalist perspectives.

Blake's allohistory treats Henry's subjectivity in stark contrast to post-humanism's reinvention of humanity. While the narrative of *Blake* becomes unrealistic as the plan for a slave rebellion progresses, the historical substantiality of the narrative gains its own reality. Henry aims at becoming a rightful human, which positions him where his humanity comes into existence. Amid such discursive non-existence and ontological existence, Henry becomes an Afro-posthuman, one who surpasses the racist tenets of both modernity and its post-humanistic reformation.

While *Blake* distorts geopolitical time and space of nineteenth century antebellum United States through its masculine black protagonist and his heroic adventure, Edward Augustus Johnson's *Light Ahead for the Negro* (1904) shows a modernized variation of proto-Afrofuturistic practice. At first, the novel appropriates science fiction's device of time travel to build a post-racial future in which the nation's gradual reform has reached an eventual racial equality and mutual respect. Johnson does not ponder typical themes of Wellsian time travel, such as Newtonian cosmology, relativity, or quantum physics. Instead, the novel's imagined future examines the social and political validity of Booker T. Washington's ideas on racial reformation and its idealistic outcomes. At a second level, Johnson envisions the future of racial reconciliation through the novel's white liberal, Gilbert. African Americans are absent from Johnson's ideal United States. *Light Ahead for the Negro* describes a raceless future without depicting

racial minorities. African Americans exist only discursively in the white characters' perceptions. This vests the novel with a *sui generis* trope that views the social standing of African Americans in the early twentieth century through the ethnically hybridized and speculatively trans-conceptualized selfhood of Gilbert. Johnson seems to queer Gilbert's racial identity by colorizing his sociocultural context, reinventing his white manhood as an ethnically post-humanized entity.

As such readings of proto-Afrofuturist texts suggest, time and space in African American history are always racialized. When Henry in *Blake* travels through the nation organizing a pan-African rebellion, the American landscape becomes colorized, yet in a different way than Harriet Beecher Stowe's Christian belief in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The nation's slave economy in *Blake* separates the landscape from a neutral state. Similarly, although African Americans are present only in the storyscape of the utopian future in *Light Ahead for the Negro*, race consciousness prevents black America from disappearing. Not only are the geographical spaces in *Blake* and *Light Ahead for the Negro* racialized in ways that suggest a cognitive map of enslavement, separation, and racial integration, but they place time and space outside of conventional conceptualization. The illumination that *Blake* and *Light Ahead for the Negro* provide allows us to understand the extent to which African American narrative has been predicated on its speculative imagination. By rendering unacknowledged history as visible narrative qualities, these novels attempt an aesthetic conversation with which African American literature has not seriously engaged in realist modes. The racialized geographies that black realism engages with become spatially and chronologically trans-historicized, which in part can be explained by what

Lavender calls an “ethnoscape,” a space which “foregrounds the human landscapes of race and ethnicity as constituted by SF’s historical, social, scientific, and technological engagement with the present” (189).

This dissertation explores the trans-historically racialized geographies that Afrofuturism offers as a critical source of black movements, considering the cultural, social, and political undercurrents of Afrofuturism novels an important source which “shifts our thinking away from the state keeping us safe” by allowing us to recognize “there’s a possibility to exist outside of the current system” (Imarisha). Such a move provides political validation to Afrofuturism and a perceptual ground for African American political movements. As Foster asserts, if we accept that “machine right and the right to control how one’s own body and mind are technologically mediated are continuous with the longer history of social liberation,” and if “the inability to imagine the possibility of truly intelligent machines demonstrates the same narrow concept of personhood used to legitimate racism, sexism, and homophobia” (Foster xxvi), then the aesthetic practices of Afrofuturist artists set a new direction for such social movements.

Chapter 1 explores the trope of transhumanism in George Schuyler’s *Black No More*, the first full-fledged Afrofuturist novel. Schuyler writes a speculative passing narrative, in which an African American protagonist transforms into a white-skinned man through genetic engineering. The story contains transhumanist ideations of technology and human body, yet with substantial racial variations. Schuyler’s racial constructionism frames physical human bodies as what recent post/transhumanism scholars might call an original prosthesis, where material instantiation of mind comes into being by accident. But Schuyler

does not simply illustrate a mythic techno-utopia that would promise an annulment of atavistic inheritances of race or introduce a technology-mediated, race-less universe as a result of technological progress. Instead, in *Black No More*'s race-centered transhuman universe, he revises the genealogical tradition of human evolution, from Enlightenment ideals forward in order to excavate the meaning of race and its sociopolitical context in a techno-industrial world. More specifically, this chapter argues that Schuyler's appropriation of Nietzsche's notion of Overhuman transplants its colorless evolutionary sense into Booker T. Washington's race reformation model, which strategized mastery over the dominant culture's practices by means of education. It thereby imbues the traditional meaning of intelligence, education, and survival with strong racialized meanings. In this way, Schuyler's tropes of Afro-diasporic futurism in *Black No More* resonate with extropic transhumanist ideals of biotechnological forms of human evolution, while further extending the history of technical alteration of human capacities into the arena of Afro-transhumanism.

Chapter 2 analyzes Ishmael Reed's biocultural and computational tropes in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada*. *Mumbo Jumbo* allusively juxtaposes the pandemic spread of the African-origin virus, Jes Grew, with the informal communication networks of antebellum African American communities. Serving as an alternate communication channel in the antebellum political milieu, the grapevine telegraph re-established the physical body as a foundation for storing and delivering knowledge and information orally, using the preexisting landscape as a hardware platform for communication. Similarly, *Mumbo Jumbo* locates itself in the 1920s, an era when blues, jazz, and ragtime evolved into an integral part

of American culture. By comparing Jes Grew's capacity to store and transfer Harlem's cultural information in a viral form to the physicality and orality of grapevine technology, the novel places African American history in a context where the biological human body becomes a codified medium of information storage and transfer. The relationship between the biological human body and cultural information in *Mumbo Jumbo* reminds us that "the combination of ... the digitality of DNA sequences and the analog process of protein folding gives the gene its remarkable power of information storage and transmission" (Hayles 29). This chapter argues that *Mumbo Jumbo* places black U.S. culture within a paradigmatic shift regarding the biological human body, computational language, and material reality, where "code is elevated" into a status of the "*lingua franca* ... of all physical reality" (Hayles 15, emphasis added).

Mumbo Jumbo's description of 1920s Harlem revolves around the epistemological frame of modern techno-culture where biological research is considered a "textualization of nature," and molecules of DNA act as "texts, namely as information storage and transfer system[s]" (Kay 34). However, *Mumbo Jumbo* not only treats the biological human body as an outcome of dynamic interactions within information networks, in which social, cultural, and biological relations can be scripted to textual and coded platforms, but the novel also describes the virus as an acoustic/musical entity propagated through radio technology. Such a sonic construction of Afro-diasporic experience reminds us of what Steve Goodman terms as the "politics of frequency," an "ethico-aesthetic paradigm" (xv). That has been marginalized in the construction of sound ecology in western culture. By dramatizing the production and transmission of black

tonality, Jes Grew's vibrational forces counteract a cultural design where certain sound structures – epitomized as "Waltz," a "suitable vaccine" for Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo* (22) – have been constructed as a cultural norm. In this way, *Mumbo Jumbo's* viral narrative participates in the aesthetic politics of Afrofuturism. Jes Grew's "illegible hieroglyphics of flesh" (Weheliye 110) and the "audio virology of [its] contagious rhythmatcs" (Goodman 158) enable us to contest the paradigmatic euro-biopolitics, a cultural and discursive practice that tends to maintain a narrow definition of humanity. Reed's biocultural trope in *Mumbo Jumbo* draws from Deleuzian sonic materialism and the Agambenian concept of bare life, but simultaneously offers a race-specific alteration. *Mumbo Jumbo's* bioinformatic presence and its vibrational force rewrite the grapevine telegraph theme in the language of cybernetics, genetics, information theory, and sonic/vibrant materialism.

In a similar way in which *Mumbo Jumbo* recasts the fundamental relation between a physical body and its informational construction, *Flight to Canada* describes how a physical body disturbs the dominant culture's linguistic system, demonstrating how the storage and transfer of cultural information can be transcribed to a process of textual inscription within the material body. As in *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Flight to Canada* describes the grapevine telegraph as a cryptic way in which African Americans are able to "pass codes to one another ... through some kind of intricate grapevine" (34). Further, *Flight to Canada* uses anachronism to reconfigure the antebellum political milieu through the language of computational codes—a social and cultural platform designed to capture perceptual architectures of modern digital culture. By speculatively transplanting

modern electro-mechanical technologies into the antebellum United States, Reed articulates an inheritable structure of slavocracy in the language of code, one whose decoding reveals a white male regime reproduced within a putatively enclosed loop of meanings, symbols, and their material embodiments. In this way, Reed reads U.S. slavery through the socio-political formation of computational languages, which constructs a “cycle of ownership that always posits a master and a collection of properties” (Chaney 271).

Chapter 3 centers on the time travel trope in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. As a historical novel adapting post-realist tropes in a racial context, and as black genre fiction contesting colorblind frames of mainstream science fiction, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* has been one of the richest texts for of critical exploration in black science fiction scholarship. Many critics have sought to identify the author’s political stance on U.S. race history represented in the novel’s science fiction tropes. While critics pay particular attention to the antebellum scenes of the neo-slave narrative, seeing the novel as an historical document deeply anchored in the antebellum political milieu, the novel’s future setting, 1970s California, remains much less observed. Reading *Kindred*’s time travel trope simply as historical realism’s post-modern variation falls short of recognizing Butler’s critique of persistent racism in the supposedly post-racial world. It fails to notice, for example, modern U.S. culture’s false claims of racial blindness, depicted in the interracial marriage of Dana and Kevin. Reflecting the cultural climate of the decades around the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement, in which neoliberal apologetics of race shaped ethnic minorities’ social standings in the post-Jim Crow era, *Kindred* illustrates modern white supremacist practices. Butler places the

interracial couple within the post-civil rights era where racial inequality becomes invisible in the supposedly non-racial market dynamics and the decline of welfare socialism.

This chapter highlights historical continuities in the racist nature of American democracy. The novel represents the 1970s as a culture where neoliberal market universalism is prevalent, and the 1830s as a germinal era of *Herrenvolk* republicanism. Butler uses the time travel trope to highlight the invisible continuity between those two historical eras. In doing so, the novel inherits and revises the generic inheritances of Richard Wright's social realism and Ralph Ellison's mythic epicism. Wright revisited the nineteenth-century fugitive slave narrative tropes in *Native Son*; Ellison revised conventional notions of empirical experience in *Invisible Man*. Butler expands the geographic space of *Native Son*'s fugitive narrative into a speculative time passageway through which Dana escapes enslavement. This trans-historical space serves as the same race-epistemic site as the underground in *Invisible Man*, enabling protagonists to realize their socio-existential standings. *Kindred*'s alternative time/space continuum shares with its literary ancestors a common concern for the adequacy of novel genre in representing racial experience, locating itself within the formal tradition of modern African American literature. Since the time travel transfigures the 1970s into a never-happened past, *Kindred*'s 1970s creates its own future-universe, a universe that enables us to dispute the seemingly invincible universality of market reductionism of modern America.

Chapter 4 focuses on two major late-twentieth-century Afrofuturism writers, Colson Whitehead and Nalo Hopkinson. This chapter analyzes Whitehead's *The*

Intuitionist and Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, in order to inquire how these authors illustrate the racial climate of the decades following the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement, especially in metropolitan areas. Geographical spaces are important in thinking about race in these two novels, which feature systematic spatialization of space and geographical gentrification. Both works use genre fiction to describe class hierarchies alongside color lines. *The Intuitionist* uses a detective fiction plot to conceptualize race as an intangible ghost inside a machine, placing race in the tradition that contest mind/body dualisms. *Brown Girl in the Ring* dramatizes an organ-trafficking story in a Caribbean Canadian community, and strongly alludes to such U.S. minority slum areas as Detroit. It employs the conventions of spirit-possession and zombie narrative to highlight the way in which slums in modern metropolises have been made into spaces of racial segregation. By setting a modern city as a default background to explore race dynamics in the post-Jim Crow era, *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* locate twentieth-century U.S. race histories within a cultural climate where industrial transformation, techno-scientific progress, and geographical modernization have underwritten racial dynamics in a supposedly post-racial world.

Chapter 5 analyzes science fiction works that "interrogate the parameters of Hispana and Chicana cultural identity," one that Ramírez terms as "Chicanafuturism" (2004, 57). Chicana/ofuturism borrows heavily from Afrofuturism to explore the "ways that new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture" (Ramírez 2008, 187). In spite of Chicana/ofuturism's conceptual debt to Afrofuturism, science fiction

imagination has been an epistemological frame in Chicana/o culture for decades. Chicana/o scholars and artists have constantly conceptualized the U.S.–Mexico border experience as akin to the ontological status of alien, cyborg, and other human-nonhuman amalgamations. Anzaldúa’s concept of “alien consciousness” (77) and Sandoval’s “cyborg consciousness” (375) provide an important nexus of science fiction and Chicana/o literature. They enable us to reconfigure the U.S.–Mexico border as a site constituted by multiracial experiences in terms of science, technology, and their influences on race dynamics. Chicana/ofuturism not only takes Afrofuturism’s aesthetic paradigms and devices, this chapter argues, but the genre has created its own space in which Chicana/o artists articulate “colonial and postcolonial histories of *indigenismo*, *mestizaje*, hegemony, and survival” (Ramírez 2008, 187). This racialization of cyberpunk provides a fertile ground to consider the discussion of race-technology in the United States.

In doing so, this chapter first briefly investigates the genre’s origin within the tradition of magical realism, which uses fantasy tropes to represent experiences that western realism has been unable to capture, and then moves on to discuss the Chicana/o cyberpunk tradition, which uses posthuman tropes of cyberpunk to represent a flexible Chicana/o identity caught in the history of the U.S.–Mexico border. In the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) especially, Chicana/o artists have found means to represent their experiences of neoliberal and neocolonial economies in ethnic renderings of such cyberpunk themes as cyberspace, robot engineering, and information technology. Not only are Chicana/o science fiction works by Ernest Hogan, Sesshu Foster, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita important texts in this tradition, but Guillermo Gómez-

Peña's multimedia performances and Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* will also be drawn into the discussion of Chicana/ofuturism.

Chapter 2: Techno-culture, New Negro Modernity, and Genre Fiction:

Afro-transhuman Politics in George Schuyler's *Black No More*

Introduction

Until his work was rediscovered in the post-Civil Rights era, George Schuyler's literary achievements were not fully recognized. This was perhaps due to his political conservatism, which stood in stark contrast to dominant cultural movements in Harlem. In *Black No More*, with its rejection of any homogenous understanding of art and culture, a rejection that reflected skeptically on Harlem's prevailing ideas of art and race politics, Schuyler satirized the New Negro Renaissance. The race loyalty of New Negro Renaissance considered any "aggressive irony toward other blacks" as radically rejecting "everything that signified the black American past in slavery" (Ferguson 57). *Black No More's* cynical satire of racial identity was not readily accepted as a particular mode of representation. For this reason, Schuyler did not closely work with such Harlem artists as Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, and Claude McKay whose tropes of New Negro modernism led the black aesthetic movements of the time. As Retman puts it, "for all its modern-day relevance, Schuyler's writing has often been neglected in the conventional historiography of the Harlem Renaissance" (1449).

However, in spite of insufficient critical attention paid to *Black No More*, the novel's biocultural notion of modern U.S. society in which techno-scientific progress becomes social and cultural experience, has led to scholars counting the novel as the earliest full-fledged work of Afrofuturism. Afro-diasporic futurism participates in the traditions of African American literature in multiple ways. First,

its science fiction tropes—which take genetic transformation of the human body as a major theme—experiment with the possibilities of technology-mediated evolution of black people. Such Afro-transhumanism revises the genealogical tradition of human evolution from the ideals of the Enlightenment forward. Schuyler’s appropriation of Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of “Overhuman” (2005, 11) transplants its colorless evolutionary sense into Booker T. Washington’s race reformation model. Nietzsche considered humanity “something that shall be overcome” (2005, 11) amid the process of reaching beyond humanity. His notion of human progress can be read as consonant with Booker T. Washington’s race uplift model, which strategized mastery over the dominant culture’s practices. Schuyler explores this pivotal point in his satiric bio-passing narrative in *Black No More*. The transracial machine in *Black No More* dramatizes a moment in which the educational uplift of ethnic minorities can lead to mastery over the dominant culture’s technologies. In this way, Schuyler’s race-centered transhuman universe imbues the traditional meanings of intelligence, education, and survival with strong racialized meanings.

Considering race as fluid signification outside biology, Schuyler’s racial evolutionism understands race as open to multiple cultural determinants. Schuyler’s criticism of Harlem’s celebration of African cultural heritage, most visible in his 1926 essay “The Negro-Art Hokum,” was based on his skeptical views of Harlem’s black primitivism that admired mythic authenticity of African inheritance and rejected multicultural origins. Describing the primitivist belief of racial identity as susceptible to capitalistic market principle, Schuyler locates race within two different dynamics in *Black No More*. On the one hand, he represents

an historical era where Fordist mass consumerism has heavily shaped African American culture, and where construction of race can be understood as a practice of consumption constructed alongside free-market economy. This view of race suggests the fundamental instability of primitivist beliefs of black culture prevalent throughout major Harlem discourses, a racial essentialism claimed by such figures as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson. While the novel's theme of Fordism demonstrates how racial identity is constructed through intercultural mixtures where different cultural practices become constitutive to each other, Schuyler also suggests that black primitivism served class-based male bourgeois regimes in the formation of modern African American communities. By representing the radical social restructuring that Crookman's transracial technology brings, he dramatizes how black elites in Harlem constructed cross-class, intra-racial solidarity. It lays bare that what New Negro modernism proclaimed as racial authenticity is in fact unstable. Those two different cultural strata in *Black No More* – consumerism and primitivism that undergirded modern African American culture – illustrates how Harlem's New Negro modernism legitimized itself by employing a sense of race-based communality.

In this context, phenotypic differences of race register as different social practices, illuminating that skin color does not solely shape racial identity. Rather, race "is intersectionally constituted by a range of cultural, historical, political, linguistic, and economic practices" (Chang 138-39). By representing race as cultural hybridity, Schuyler's *Black No More* gains its significance in the African American literary tradition, especially in the sense that the novel captures an

embryonic moment when techno-scientific progress began permeating minority lives. Combining technology, economy, and their influence on one's identity formation in a literary narrative is nothing new, given the ways in which Western fantasy and science fiction tradition has contested conventional premises of humanity. This has occurred from the gothic descriptions in *Frankenstein* through the cybernetic renderings of a dystopic future in such contemporary cyberpunk pieces as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. *Black No More* colorizes Western science fiction conventions not only to demystify scientific doctrines regarding race, but also to describe the social dynamics in which technological innovation manifests itself in its close proximity to ideas concerning race in the modern United States.

Technological transformation of ethnicity is crucial to understanding *Black No More*'s position in modern African American literature. Schuyler's techno-fantasy creates a different resonance of racialized African American subjectivity, especially in comparison with other writings from black literary circles of early twentieth century Harlem. Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen, for example, tried to reinforce race pride through racial essentialism. *Black No More*'s narrative and tropes demonstrate that the novel can be located alongside the post-New Negro skepticism that distrusted any presumed traits of black universality. Max Disher, the novel's trickster protagonist, enjoys "greater geographic and financial mobility as a white man" (Retman 1456) after he mechanically decolors his skin using Crookman's transracial machine, eradicating the hypervisibility of his racial phenotype. Such a story departs from passing narratives such as James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored*

Man and Nella Larsen's *Passing*, in which a genetic skin color is irremovable.

Max's transracial self-construction seizes upon the instability of racial inheritance.

By describing racialization as easily variable, *Black No More* lays bare a race politics built on unstable grounds yet quite different from the instabilities found in Johnson and Larsen.

Black No More's bio-passing narrative provides an important opening for interpretation of race and technology. Crookman's machine does not promise a utopic post-racial world. Rather, Schuyler describes the machine as an unexpected outcome of transatlantic expansion of eugenic practices, since Crookman's research is based on German eugenics. The novel examines democratic possibilities that unconventional distribution of technology can bring. Such possibilities underline how technology played multiple roles in U.S. nationalism. This nation-building process associated scientific modernization with an imperialistic impulse and race-specific construction of technology. *Black No More's* dystopic notion of technological colonialism embodies its own counter-political potential, one that can provide an alternative to hegemonic paradigms of modern Western techno-culture. In this setting, modern techno-culture does not merely serve the monopolistic expansion of a globalized free market economy, but can also become a site of cultural translocation in which second-hand users of technology "combat the monolithic picture of the 'one-way flow' of Western technoculture" (xi).

Such a speculative imagination of racial hierarchies in *Black No More* opposes conventional understanding of modern U.S. techno-culture, where technological progress served to reproduce and stabilize class-, race-, and gender-specific

hierarchies. If the “machine in all of its manifestations – as an object, a process, and ultimately a symbol – became the fundamental fact of modernism” (23), as Richard Wilson argues, then a modernity based on techno-scientific progress cathected the nation’s turn-of-the-century ideology. Taking into consideration discrepancies between these two modes of perceiving modern techno-culture, this chapter reads how Schuyler represents the potential of a technology that militates against dominant social regimes. Interconnections between race, technology, American modernity, and Harlem’s New Negro aesthetics in *Black No More* will be examined for the extent to which socio-political aspects of techno-culture in the early twentieth century paralleled the restructuring of race relations in the modern U.S. economy.

Such an analysis addresses a critical lacuna in which the underlying mechanism of race economics, especially in terms of U.S. techno-culture, has remained inadequately addressed in relation to *Black No More*. At best, it has been noted in passing by such scholars as Millar, Turker, and DeGraw, while much more critical attention has been paid to the novel’s representation of Fordist mass consumerism and race capitalism, its science fiction tropes, and Schuyler’s position in Harlem’s literary circles. The present chapter examines how the story takes advantage of transhumanist ideations of technology and humanity. After analyzing Schuyler’s representation of techno-cultural U.S. modernity in *Black No More*, and contextualizing it within recent scholarship, we explore the unique publishing practices of the black community that established black genre literature alongside the propagandist ideals of contemporary politics. This approach not only underlines the inherent art-propaganda nexus in African

American culture, but also suggests that the inception of black genre literature, unlike its Euro-American counterpart, lay in the socio-political design of an anti-slavery/anti-racist tradition that shaped the outlook of African American literary.

Theorizing Technology, Evolution, and African American Culture

Schuyler places the passing narrative in *Black No More* alongside “post-” ideations of technology and human identity that have contested conventional theorizations of humanity. Schuyler’s notion of the human body and its role in identity/subjectivity formation foreshadows post-World War II theorizations of humanity, famously conceived by such thinkers as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Katherine Hayles. Schuyler shares an intimate intellectual acquaintance with the trans/posthumanist epistemology that frames physical bodies as a kind of “fashion accessories rather than the ground of being” where the “material instantiation” of mind comes into being by accident (Hayles 2). In such theoretical templates, where bodily existence is perceived as an “epiphenomenon” incidentally ingrained within humanity as abstract “informational patterns” (Hayles 2), humanity encounters the physicality of its existence but not necessarily inside physical boundaries. As Katherine Hayles writes, “the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to *both* the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman, which *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body” (2-4, italicized in original). In *Black No More*, when Max transforms his racial traits into another social indicator, his liberal agency surpasses the limitation set by socially stigmatized phenotypic marks: his “smooth brown complexion” and “slightly full lips and Ethiopian nose”

(Schuyler 35).¹⁰ Rejecting the conventional formula in which body and mind work naturally together for the construction of humanity, Max's transformed identity reduces his body to what Hayles calls an "original prosthesis," rather than "the inevitability of life" (2-3).

Serving as an instrument for the social liberation of minorities, Crookman's machine seems to promise annulment of the genetic inheritance of race and ethnicity, introducing a technology-mediated raceless universe as a default social norm. As it turns out, however, the machine does not eradicate biological atavism. Schuyler observes this imaginary cultural transition in language that inherits the Enlightenment ideal that "no bounds have been fixed to the improvement of the human faculties; [and] ... the perfectibility of man is absolutely indefinite" (Condorcet 4). Schuyler's description of the physical appearance of the machine aligns with a perceptual tradition that understands existence external to the biological human organism as an extension of humanity:

[Max] quailed as he saw the formidable apparatus of sparkling nickel. It resembled a cross between a dentist's chair and an electric chair. Wires and straps, bars and levers protruded from it and a great nickel headpiece, like the helmet of a knight, hung over it. The room had only a skylight and no sound entered it from the outside. Around the walls were cases of instruments and shelves of bottles filled with strangely colored fluids. (34)

In this description, Schuyler treats technology as an external condition of humanity linking *Black No More* with the Enlightenment's synthesis of machine-worship and fear. Despite the disturbing construction of the scene, Schuyler correlates the machine with devices designed to supplement humanity on varying

levels. Genetic engineering exists somewhere between life (a dentist's chair) and death (an electric chair), and the machine resembles what is designed to protect the feeble human body from physical harm, "the helmet of a knight" (34). Max feels a sense of disconnection from the outer world in the room, yet what underlies the scene is a transhuman sensibility that takes its basic idea and tropes from the Enlightenment ideals of non-human actants of technology as an extension of humanity needed to help humans evolve. This ideal developed further with the notion of the Overhuman, which Friedrich Nietzsche introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche defines humankind as "something that shall be overcome ... the ebb of the great tide," in order to "*stay true to the earth*" (2005, 11, italicized in original). Nietzsche understands humankind as "a rope over an abyss... fastened between beast and Overhuman" (2005, 13). Placed as "a bridge and not a goal" in the teleological process of evolution towards an eventual singularity, humanity has ceaselessly transformed into a greater-than-before (2005, 13). A struggle to survive and self-overcoming drive inherent in human history premise Nietzsche's evolutionary triumphalism.

Recent scholarship focuses on exploring "the structural analogy between genetic enhancement by alteration and classical education" (Sorgner 22) and has proclaimed *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* a poetic transhumanist manifesto. Such a theoretical contextualization is inadequate in explaining how social practices shape ethnic minorities in *Black No More*. Max's mutation is not a transhuman evolution so much as it is a point of social transfer and uplift. Genetic transformation means nothing for Max unless scientific assumptions regarding humanity come into the social context. Schuyler is clear in his intent to use

evolutionist tropes when he associates Max's mutation with his social standing within U.S. racist culture. Max's desire for phenotypic metamorphism is structurally identical to his socio-psychological *jouissance*, in which he is forced "to look up to white folks as just a little less than gods" (63) and fetishistically seek "three things essential to the happiness of a colored gentleman: yellow money, yellow woman and yellow taxis" (19). This color fetishism explains much of Schuyler's conjugation of evolutionary tropes of transhumanism; it suggests the novel's basic premise that social evolution of ethnic minorities inherently attaches to group psychology.

Max's wish for racial transformation does not begin with a genuinely evolutionary impulse but is stimulated by his desire for Helen, a white girl who rejects Max at a bar at the beginning of the novel but becomes his wife after he whitens his skin. As she has "longed for the companionship of an educated man, a scientist, a man of literary ability" (107), Helen accepts Max's courtship when he passes himself off as a member of the New York Anthropological Society. For Max, his phenotypic transformation is inherently associated with psychological satisfaction.

This modified form of transhumanism in *Black No More*, one that links evolution to race psychology, places the theme of human evolution in the discursive realm of black uplift, which Schuyler tried to defend in many of his publications. His 1937 essay, "Reflections on Negro Leadership," reflects the philosophical tradition of Nietzschean evolutionism, and simultaneously reframes its basic sensibility in the paradigmatic language of the African American social uplift model.

Intelligence is the ability to adjust oneself to constant change, to survive in a shifting society, to turn with the tide of time. Education is, or ought to be, the lever that lifts obstacles from the path we pave for posterity. The educated are the mechanisms that steer the Ship of State off the shoals of sorrow into the harbor of happiness, the compasses that chart the way to contentment, the implements of the *will to power*. (327, emphasis added)

Putting will and survival in close proximity, Schuyler's rhetorical construction not only echoes the teleological progress of humanity that Nietzsche promotes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but also revises the basic assumptions of Nietzsche's "will to power" by repositioning it in the arena of minoritarian struggle. For Nietzsche, the *will to power* of humankind by nature "resist[s] all sentimental frailty" for survival of humankind, and evolves by itself towards "invent[ing] a life form that would refrain from all organic functions" (1998, 153). However, while Nietzsche essentializes the "exploitative character" of *will to power* as "part of the fundamental nature of living things," thereby naturalizing the exploitation drawn from the "will to life" of humankind against nature by rendering it as "the *original fact* of all history" (1998, 153, italicized in original), Schuyler uses the term "will to power" to refer to race consciousness and its struggles against racist practices. This will, he argues, can be cultivated through education to remove social obstacles on the way towards racial liberation.

Schuyler's appropriation of Nietzsche demonstrates the consistency of his belief that African American social uplift could be achieved through Booker T. Washington's race uplift model. That model was a middle class-centered political mechanism that strategized mastery over practices such as media manipulation,

fund raising, and cross-racial financial networks. Schuyler found the philosophical root of Washington's model in Nietzsche's evolutionary ideas, yet rejected its view of an essential hierarchy in nature. This racial variation on Nietzsche becomes clearer when one takes into consideration its racist interpretation, which was prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Significantly, H. L. Mencken—with whom Schuyler maintained a close relationship—interpreted Nietzsche in a conspicuously racist way. In *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1908), Mencken suggests:

The history of the hopelessly futile and fatuous effort to improve the negroes of the Southern United States by education affords one such proof [of division of classes naturally imposed on humankind on the basis of natural state of mind]. It is apparent, on brief reflection, that the negro, no matter how much he is educated, must remain, as a race, in a condition of subservience; that he must remain the inferior of the stronger and more intelligent white man so long as he retains racial differentiation. Therefore, the effort to educate him has awakened in his mind ambitions and aspirations which, in the very nature of things, must go unrealized, and so, while gaining nothing whatever materially, he has lost all his old contentment, peace of mind and happiness. Indeed, it is a commonplace of observation in the United States that the educated and refined negro is invariably a hopeless, melancholy, embittered and despairing man. (99)

Mencken closely worked with African American organizations to promote anti-lynching bills and worked for African American writers' publications during the era, but his essentialism on racial hierarchies was controversial.¹¹ Mencken's

interpretation of Nietzsche suggests how deeply racist assumptions were ingrained in the tradition of western philosophy and shaped modern American culture. While Mencken adopts common assumptions of scientific racism that essentialize racial inferiority, Schuyler redirects the same ideas to call the black community's attention to constructing stable economic and social circumstances for African Americans.

Inheriting Booker T. Washington's uplift model, Schuyler draws basic premises of his black evolutionism from what African American separatists sarcastically called the "Tuskegee Machine," accommodationist politics centered on financial self-improvement over social rehabilitation of the black community, especially in regards to education. Schuyler's intellectual debt to Washington—whom he called a "conciliatory and farsighted Negro teacher and statesman" (1947a, 87)—resonates in Washington's 1896 essay, where he remarks:

Nothing else so soon brings about right relations between the two races in the South as the industrial progress of the negro. Friction between the races will pass away in proportion as the black man, *by reason of his skill, intelligence, and character*, can produce something that the white man wants or respects in the commercial world. (326)

Washington's notion of racial progress by means of education and technical mastery finds echo in Schuyler's belief in racial evolution, which he insists upon for "enlightenment, training, organization for economic advancement and self-confidence ... to become alert and valuable citizens" (1947a, 90). Schuyler made his notion of race evolution explicit in his accusation against the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) that it failed to promote the

general advancement of the black community. He alleged the organization erred in three different ways: failure to establish institutions that “reduce illiteracy in the Corn Pone Belt,” to ameliorate health conditions in order “to arrest the ravages of disease by traveling clinics like that financed by one of our sororities which has done such excellent work in Mississippi,” and “to improve the health and morals of Southern Negro youth and through physical culture or sports organizations in each community” (1947b, 31). Schuyler’s idea of social uplift touches upon the basic concerns of transhumanism, which center on an “evolution in human psychology, capacities, and (perhaps) morphology” (Blackford ii). Schuyler revises this transhumanism through his interests in educational enhancement, medical activism, and psychological rehabilitation of the African American community, resonating with “extropic transhumanist ideals and goals” (More 2010, 2).

Centering on the social practices of the marginalized group of “illiterate, frustrated, unskilled and poverty-stricken masses” whose “survival [was] being strongly questioned and their rights and privileges as citizens severely curtailed” (1947a, 87), Schuyler imbues his tropes of Afro-diasporic transhumanism in *Black No More* with the tradition of social evolution in African American history. While Max’s evolution aligns with his psychological recovery and dramatizes Schuyler’s Afro-transhuman visions, Crookman’s educational background and mastery over technology underline how African American social uplift is not human progress so much as a specific history of community progress. Once a “hungry medical student around Harlem” (25), Crookman’s professional success is deeply associated with his parents’ efforts to educate him and “protect him ... from the

defeatist psychology so prevalent among American Negroes" (29).¹² Schuyler's depiction of Chuck Foster, one of Crookman's financial sponsors, can be read in the same socio-historical context in which the postbellum black population has evolved through education. As his life has been "colorful", Foster's financial success owes much to "educational advantages" subsidized by the community for "darker brethren" (53). Vocational skills have helped Foster through to a series of professional experiences, from school teacher to social worker, enabling "the son of a Birmingham barber" to become a successful realtor in New York City (53).

Schuyler was consistent in supporting the idea of social self-optimization and its role in the improvement of an entire race's social conditions. Regarding Washington's race politics, politics that Harlem's mainstream dismissed with skepticism, Schuyler believed that "education is the process of developing to the fullest the potentialities of individuals so that they may survive in environment and make a worthwhile contribution to it in whatever field of endeavor he chooses" (1947a, 86). Individual endeavors towards one's fullest capacity play a central role in social survival. Echoing the evolutionary principle of the "survival of the fittest," Schuyler revises the notion of evolutionary singularity, arguing that the status of ethnic minorities can evolve into a higher level of social liberation. This social evolution, he seems to believe, can be achieved by means of "enlightenment, training, organization for economic advancement and self-confidence" (1947a, 90).

Schuyler's focus on African American social evolution underlies the basic narrative of *Black No More*. Crookman's invention of transracial technology not only seizes upon a technology-mediated vision of ethnic liberation, but also

constructs a theoretical framework through which the possibility of black transhumanism can be examined. Crookman's biomedical machine, which contemporary transhumanists would call a "non-biological ... robotic system" (Roden 27) designed to increase the integration of human beings with technology, embodies the epigenetic enhancement of ethnic minorities. Crookman's faith that the machine will achieve "what agitation, education, and legislation [has] failed to do" (54-55) resonates with a vision of multi-racial techno-sapiens, revising and coloring the reductionism of transhuman singularity, in which all human traits are supposed to be reduced into a single utopic phase of evolution by extropic complementation. *Black No More's* transhumanist tropes revolve around this thematic complexity. While appropriating the transhuman theme of techno-genetic modification of the human body, Schuyler does not rely solely on the assumption of a teleological singularity to human progress. Rather, his variation on themes speaks to the cultural hybridity of an African American society that has been historically shaped through its close contact with Western culture.

In *Black No More*, light skin color not only refers to an unfulfilled wish for African Americans or an obstacle that must be overcome, it symbolizes what had already taken a substantial part of their cultural identity, even before the transracial machine's advent. What first intrigues Crookman's research was "a black girl on the street ... [with] several irregular white patches on her face and hands," which he presumed was due to vitiligo (26). Crookman believes that artificial manipulation of the disease by means of "electrical nutrition and glandular control" (27) will lead to the eradication of race problems. Along with

such cross-categorical interfacing of medical expertise and social symbols of skin color, Crookman's hypothesis imbues neural malfunction with cultural significations of race.

Since white skin color functions as cultural hybridity for the African American community, Madame Blandish's hair-straightening business¹³—which “[makes] Negroes appear as much like white folks as possible” (59) and has proved highly profitable in Harlem for years—offers a similar textual clue towards a skin-as-culture symbol. Financial success from her enterprise not only promotes her to “a person of consequence in the community” (61) as Vice-President of the American Race Pride League and head of Woman's Committee of the New York branch of the Social Equality League. Her business also has become a significant financial resource for local newspapers, which are now “full of skin-whitening and hair-straightening advertisements” (103).¹⁴

Describing the possible consequences that the advent of a radical techno-revolution may bring, *Black No More* does not simply place technology at the center of its thematic structure. While transhumanism has oriented its main concerns towards a technology-centered future, the machine in this novel recalibrates a deterministic vision towards a post-racial world by refracting cultural anxieties that have loomed over the African American community. This is how Schuyler handles the technocultural regimentation of race dynamics under Jim Crow. The underlying mechanism of technology-mediated racial liberation in *Black No More* creates a different resonance for ideations of techno-culture compared to the religiosities of transhuman ideals and their doctrinal beliefs on immortality and transcendence of the human body. These beliefs are implicit in

the ongoing discussions of technological singularity that center on “well-being of all sentience, including humans, non-human animals, and any future artificial intellects, modified life forms, or other intelligences to which technological and scientific advance may give rise” (Vita-More 54). Taking its political basis from the notion that understands a techno-scientific evolution as a “personal choice ... of self-directed technological transformations” (More 2013, 13), this techno-reductionism considers different social standing merely as diverse determinants of cultural identity formation, not a social force that shapes actual life.

Schuyler was skeptical of such messianism. He did not believe that the “scientific fusion” of phenotypic racial traits would lead to eventual equality of races (2001e, 110). What underlay U.S. racism was not the genetic origins of skin color but the “vested interest” of a “dominant white caste” associated with the myth of race, Schuyler argues. Phenotypic skin transformation was no more than “a panacea of extremist dreamers” (2001e, 117). What will permit different cultures to coexist “amicably in juxtaposition,” he believed, is the necessity of “a greater national unity” to survive the changing human condition (2001e, 117). Schuyler’s techno-world does not operate on the premise of a singular universality of humanness, but is instead on its diverse origins. The Eurocentric transhumanist thesis that “*descendants of current humans could cease to be human by virtue of a history of technical alteration*” (Roden 28, italicized in original) does not work in *Black No More*. Instead of promising an ultimate utopia for racialized humanity, in this novel, technology is deeply involved in cultural dynamics between inventors and hijackers of Western technology.

Schuyler observed that race problems cannot be approached genetically because skin color in U.S. racist culture was closely associated with “belligerence of uniformed custodians of Caucasian race integrity” (1928, 59). Schuyler’s observations explain much of his basic notion of modern technology. The Afro-diasporic representation of modern America in *Black No More* catches another significant implication with regard to race and modern techno-culture; dominant cultures have appropriated technology as another way to serve their social governance for centuries through scientific racism. *Black No More*’s bio-passing narrative revises this conventional scenario, crafting a reversed formula where biopolitical power as a means of social governance paradoxically transforms into a point of social resistance.¹⁵ It is paradoxical in the sense that the products of disciplinary social regimes can lead contradictorily to what Michel Foucault calls *heterotopia* (24)—a non-hegemonic, heterogeneous status where a singular dominant symbolic system has been deconstructed. Foucault uses the term “technology” with rather negative references that refer to the mechanization of the human body by social surveillance. Schuyler’s notional variation provides an important discursive tool to reconstruct social significations of technology where technology’s Eurocentric theorizations have been based on a narrow concept of universal humanity. This assumption becomes a major premise in the theoretical arenas of cybernetics, cyborgism, and posthumanism, but Schuyler colorizes theoretical norms that laid substantial groundwork for mainstream theories of humanity. He inserts an African American sociological perspective into the discourse of science and technology.

Sociological aspects of technology are significant in reading Schuyler on techno-scientific progress. Schuyler's view of technology and human society in *Black No More* does not simply inherit the utopic belief of transhuman sensibility, but rejects its reductionist tenets relating to genetic transformation of the human body. The novel instead depicts a world in which technology reveals a multi-layered construction of race. Michael Adas' analysis provides a useful frame. He discusses socio-political functions of technology alongside the hegemonic structuring of race relations in U.S. history. He writes, "scientific and technological superiority became integral components of their own version of the civilizing mission," equating social and cultural progress to technologized modernity (408). More specifically, techno-scientific modernization has been deeply associated with an imperialistic impulse embodied by "medical missionaries and military advisers" to the Third World (406).

Competing theories of the dynamics and stages of the transition from "tradition" to "modernity" were debated by academics, and their jargon-laden discourse played a major role in policy formulation with respect to the "underdeveloped," "developing," or "emerging" nation of the "Third World." New hierarchies of the levels of social development – the first, second, third, and (somewhat later) fourth worlds; postmodern, modern, traditional, primitive; mature, developing, underdeveloped – replaced the civilization/barbarian/savage scale that had long served as the standard. (Adas 411)

Adas's explanation addresses the underlying mechanism of techno-scientific progress, which has been deeply associated with producing and maintaining social

and cultural hierarchies. Especially in the nation-building process of modern United States, Adas asserts, the underlying expansionist impulse came to the fore while disguised as “[divine] instruments for building the nation and strengthening its moral resolve” and the “objects of aesthetic pleasure” (406). This modernization of the U.S. economy was the mechanism of the nation’s restructuring during the interwar period, where terms such as democracy, modernity, and economic support were appropriated to conceal the colonial nature of Western culture.

If we take into consideration such an argument, then the race-specific construction of technology can be viewed as a political device that “superimposes American or, more broadly, Western cultural choices upon other societies, as in the tendency to subordinate all other consideration (save political stability perhaps) to the technical requirements of economic development” (Tipps 210). Such an idea allows us to read the implied relationships between race, technology, and American modernity in *Black No More*. However, Schuyler distances his notion of technology from a determinist view that technology serves for the exploitation of capitalist economy and hegemonic surveillance of the oppressive regimes, as theorized in Manuel Castells’s “network society.”¹⁶ Instead, Schuyler’s representation of modern techno-culture in *Black No More* comports with contemporary cultural studies that attempt to highlight possibilities of re-appropriating technology for “larger struggles for economic mobility, political maneuvering, and community building” (Hines 5). In other words, the novel observes the way “people of color produce, transform, appropriate, and consume technologies” (Hines 5). Crookman’s racial re-appropriation of eugenic biology

and Max's genetic-social evolution reflect a notion that technology serves to "offer a more democratic alternative" to the "historical exclusion and continuing inequality" (Hines 5). Implicit in this formulation is that modern techno-culture distinguishes itself from its previous stage, in which science and technology are exclusively occupied with justifying the equation of scientific advancement and eugenic superiority.

New technologies arguably arrive parallel to their counter-cultural potential, one that can provide an alternative to a hegemonic paradigm of modern Western techno-culture. Penley and Ross examine such a radical restructuring, highlighting the practice in developing Asian countries of re-appropriating Western technology through the "anti-Western practice" of "cultural piracy" (x). In these developing countries, where modern systems of social technology—such as media industry and publishing that normally operate under the copyright system in Western countries—have not been fully stabilized, "*samizdat* technologies" have served to deter "the efforts of the transnational monopoly producers and brokers to control profitably and politically the flow of news, scientific data, educational materials, and entertainment" (x). This, they argue, fuels counter-cultural practices against the neo-liberal expansion of global capitalism. Penley and Ross, however, do not jump to the hasty conclusion that hijacking copyrighted Western technologies necessarily leads to a better distribution of technological resources for the construction of localized networks based on their own community needs. Instead, they attempt to seize upon the extent to which modern techno-culture does not merely serve for the monopolistic expansion of a globalized free market economy, but can also become a site of cultural translocation in which secondhand users of

technology “combat the monolithic picture of the ‘one-way flow’ of Western technoculture” (xi).

Schuyler’s notion of techno-science in *Black No More* can be interpreted in this socio-historical context of imperialistic deployment of technology and its countercultural redistribution. While technology does not promise the liberation of racial minorities in *Black No More*, the novel detects democratic possibilities that such an “illegitimate” distribution of technology can bring. Schuyler crafts this notion not through the advent of transracial technology, but by deconstructing the inherent colonial tenet of Western technology. Ironically, Crookman’s idea of the transracial technique is based on his research on phenotypic biology in Germany.¹⁷ This hijacking of technology promotes substantial restructuring of the African American experience. Schuyler illustrates such a counter-political mechanism of technology that stimulates radical social reformations in Chuck Foster’s life, along with its historical reference to African American migration in the early twentieth century. Foster’s transition from Georgia, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh to New York, along with “the tide of migration” (53), epitomizes what Alain Locke celebrates as “a deliberate flight ... from medieval America to modern” in search of “the larger and more democratic chance, ... a new vision of opportunity, ... [and] a chance for the improvement of conditions” (6). Schuyler captures this historical moment, along with its depiction of a “general exodus from the locality” (58), which results in a significant breakdown of local businesses, fueling the black community’s desire to gain the “great advantage of being white” that their “lifetime of being Negroes in the United States” has taught (57). Such desire for social uplift is exemplified in Schuyler’s description of “the

mechanics of race prejudice” that govern African American urban life. They are forced to pay “exorbitant rentals” in “the congested Harlem area ... for a smaller number of rooms and worse service” (58). The expansion of the Black-No-More business, which Schuyler refers to as “the greatest migration of Negroes in the history of the country” (87), does not simply historicize the collapse of the local black economy and culture. It discloses a sensibility stimulated by the same desire prevalent throughout the Great Migration era “to achieve a better life in a new place—a new region, a new city, or a new neighborhood—and a willingness to uproot themselves in search of that opportunity” (Tolnay 210). This massive movement of African Americans established new political and economic opportunities for African American community, procreating financially strong black middle classes in some of the major metropolitan cities.¹⁸ In this way, rather than accepting techno-messianism, Schuyler’s social evolutionism gains context within the history of African American social uplift.

Harlem Renaissance and the Black Bourgeois Patriarchy

One of the most frequently discussed issues regarding Schuyler and his *œuvre* has been his conservatism and its relationship to the Harlem literary circle. As Ferguson highlights, since Schuyler experiments with racial “antiessentialism” and “post-World War II conservative values” in his “slippery significations of race” (218), he was labeled an “outspoken archconservative ... play[ing] his favorite game: flirting with the status of ‘race traitor’” (6).¹⁹ His opposition to Harlem’s race politics was consistent. Schuyler stated famously that Negro art was nothing other than American art, and the “rest of this [was] hokum” (2001b, 143). He

defied the ideas of New Negro aesthetics that Alain Locke promoted, sarcastically remarking that "the so-called Golden Age of the Negro Renaissance was largely a phoney, with mediocrity puffed up as genius" (1950, 4). Such skepticism is most visible in his essay "Negro Art Hokum," wherein he argues against Harlem's obsession with uniform style and theme. Opposing the essentialist belief in a uniquely African American quality and its aesthetic politicization in Harlem, Schuyler emphasizes black aesthetic diversity irreducible to any homogenous tenet of art and culture. He highlights the African American world's cultural hybridity in which the ethnic traits become indistinguishable. "Negro art made in America," he asserts, is "non-existent," but the African-ness of black art in the United States comes into being not in spite of but largely because it is a cultural hybrid with Euro-American tradition:

True, from dark-skinned sources have come those slave songs based on Protestant hymns and Biblical texts, known as the spirituals, work songs and secular songs of sorrow and tough luck known as the blues, that outgrowth of rag time known as jazz (in the development of which whites have assisted), and the Charleston, an eccentric dance invented by the gamins around the public market-place in Charleston, S.C. No one can or does deny this. They are foreign to Northern Negroes, West Indian Negroes, and African Negroes. They are no more expressive or characteristic of the Negro race than the music and dancing of the Appalachian highlanders or the Dalmatian peasantry are expressive or characteristic of the Caucasian race. (2001d, 13-14).

In "Negro-Art Hokum," Schuyler takes his rhetorical position alongside the cultural constructionism in which the "peculiar psychology of the Negro [and] ... the art of Homo Africanus" (13) materialized through the "same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white American" (15). *Black No More* echoes such a view of African American cultural identity where Crookman explains:

There is no such a thing as Negro dialect, except in literature and drama. It is a well-known fact among informed persons that a Negro from a given section speaks the same dialect as his white neighbors. In the South you can't tell over the telephone whether you are talking to a white man or a Negro. The same is true in New York when a Northern Negro speaks into the receiver. I have noticed the same thing in the hills of West Virginia and Tennessee. The educated Haitian speaks the purest French and the Jamaican Negro sounds exactly like an Englishman. There are no racial or color dialects; only sectional dialects.

(31)

Crookman's remark suggests Schuyler's rejection of mythic beliefs about "Negro features," which he believes were due largely to "[the] cartoonists and minstrel men" who tended to exaggerate each race's physical features and ancestral lineages without any scientific grounds (31). Schuyler's much-ridiculed comment that "Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon" (2001d, 14) underlies his critique of Harlem's race essentialism and the risk that its separatism might ironically support the scientific racism of "the vociferous scions of slaveholders ... [racist] 'scientists' like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, and the patriots who

flood the treasure of the Ku Klux Klan" (2001d, 16). Rejecting such an essentialist notion of race, Schuyler argues that distinctive racial traits interface with social and economic forces that commodify black art through the marketplace.

Schuyler supported the idea that Harlem's race politics lost their political charge due to a failure to understand race as a cultural construction shaped by social practices. The modern cityscapes in *Black No More* describe the way race is constructed under a market-driven economy. The interaction between race and consumer capitalism is most conspicuously referenced in the novel when Chuck Foster expresses his concerns about the consequences of genetic engineering:

Charlie Foster, small, slender, grave, amber-colored, and laconic, finally spoke up: "Seems all right, Junius, but there'll be hell to pay when you whiten up a lot o' these darkies and them mulatto babies start appearing here and there. Watcha gonna do then?"

"Oh, quit singin' th' blues, Chuck," boomed Johnson. "Don't cross bridges 'til yuh come tuh 'em. Doc'll fix that okeh. Besides, we'll have mo' money'n Henry Ford by that time.

"There'll be no difficulties whatever," assured Crookman rather impatiently.

"Let's hope not." (29)

The identification between Fordist mass production and Crookman's mass passing business suggests significant implications regarding the economics of race in the modern United States. Since the Fordist economy established capitalist mass stylization as a norm, the economy-race nexus in the early twentieth century registered the meaning of race into another social practice.

This economic rendering of race in *Black No More* has not gone unnoticed. Campbell highlights the degree to which a race-specific consumer society can be contextualized within modern U.S. capitalism, where “identity and political recognition were understood and expressed through patterns of consumption coded according to a complex semiotics of economic and racial stratification in these decades” (164). He points to how the practices of consumption were redesigned to be an “effective means of segregating the practice of consumption itself” (164) under a class-based racial division. Retman suggests that *Black No More* shows that race was constructed alongside the free market economy as a “commodity form during the Fordist era” (1449). If race cannot be defined “as something outside the market-place” (1452), she concludes, Schuyler’s cynicism militates against the primitivist idea of black culture that “situates race outside of capital instead of understanding it as constitutive of capital” (1460). Joo positions the novel alongside a similar critical strand that gives close attention to the commodification of race in a hyper-capitalistic world, asserting that the novel showcases the struggle of racial minorities for “entry into the labor market” that served “in the interest of protecting capitalistic accumulation,” and “the ongoing political implications of color-blind consumerism and late capitalist consumption” (170).

While these critics address the novel within modern economic system, Kuenz focuses more on discovering the “structural instability” of racial categories in the “industrial and market economy” that became “increasingly willing and able to manipulate and finally obliterate any semblance of culture, tradition, and individual identity, racial or otherwise, among the people it needs to keep itself

going" (171). Implicit in these arguments is that, contrary to the primitivist view of race prevalent throughout major Harlem discourses, the concept of race was transiting into another social and cultural signification that rendered it far more fluid and flexible than had been traditionally accepted.

Disappearance of phenotypical marks of race does not annul racial distinction but transmits it into another social form. *Black No More* references the industrial modernization of the United States as it shifted the meaning of race "away from biological justification of racial difference toward an understanding of racial difference as the result of economic processes" (Warren 32). However, of equal importance to this economic treatment of race is the way Schuyler illustrates the complicated dynamics of cross-class racial alliances between black and white bourgeois and working-class groups. Max, after whitening his skin, infiltrates the Knights of Nordica – the white, chauvinistic organization led by the Reverend Henry Givens. He receives a report from South Carolina that workers at Paradise Mill will strike in order to improve their working conditions. Schulyer introduces a plot device that redirects working-class consciousness towards racial issues by inciting them to believe that Crookman's technical manipulation of race is a new threat to their white privilege:

[Max] reminded them that they were men and women; that they were free, white and twenty-one; that they were citizens of the United States; that America was their country as well as Rockefeller's; that they must stand firm in the defense of their rights as working people; that the worker was worthy of his hire; that nothing should be dearer to them than the maintenance of white supremacy. (124)

Max's provocation makes "class conscious workers ... terror-stricken by the specter of black blood" (127) and "more satisfied with their pay, their jobs and their little home town" (129). His intervention dissipates a nationwide "spirit of revolt" (127) among the white working class, instead keeping them "thinking of the menace of the Negro to the Caucasian race purity and political control" (65). The mass industrial model of American modernization bears witness to an inseparable class/race formulation: "Blackness is used to give evidence of class difference," Eric Schocket writes, while "whiteness ... can be claimed as common property in a nation economically divided" in the mutually constitutive interplay of race and class where race becomes "a mode of social identification that avoids more painful economic realizations" (64). This scene in *Black No More* echoes what Joel Olson calls a "*cross-class alliance* between the capitalist class and a section of the working class" (16, italicized in original), yet with a much broader historical reference to modern black urban culture, which is "exuberantly exploited to feed global commodity capitalism" (Dubey 7). This can be attributed to the race-based double-world political system of *herrenvolk* democracy that led to "white unionism under the Negro-phobic direction" that "exclud[ed] Negroes from mechanical pursuits" (1947a, 88).

Schuyler's class-based construction of race, however, seems not so much a critique of the reproduction of the color line in the United States as it is a disclosure of the "nefarious appropriation of African-Americans' unique history in America in an attempt to satisfy a market that had developed with an interest in 'authentic' black art" (Campbell 188). For Schuyler, the cultural separatism of the New Negro paradigm "profit[ed] on the grief" of black working class, and "[made]

a profession of it." He criticized the "indifference, hostility and open opposition of so many 'educated' Negroes holding positions of trust and leadership in their respective community" (2001b, 141). Harlem's racial essentialism and its reclamation of African heritage obscured "the socioeconomic plight of the black lower class" by "romanticizing images of racial authenticity in American culture" (Jarret 96). The black elites showed, according to Marable, "two divergent and often contradictory levels of consciousness, which represented two very different kinds of uneven historical experiences" (25). This class formed a "privileged social stratum" in the black community, "fashioned its religious rituals, educational norms, and social structures on those of the West," and "sought to accumulate petty amounts of capital at the expense of their Black sisters and brothers" (24). Schuyler's critique of the bourgeois elites in Harlem can be understood in this light. In his 1937 essay "Reflections on Negro Leadership," Schuyler criticized Harlem's obsession with intra-racial solidarity at the expense of black working class. He pointed to where Harlem's elites denounced "[interracial] unions as radical," and were "belligerent in siding with the employers and in some instances openly recruited strikebreakers to take the jobs of black unionists" (328).²⁰ Such antipathy explains why he believed that the New Negro Renaissance sublimated the black male bourgeois regimes of modern black U.S. culture, reflecting what Soja and Hooper call "modernist identity politics," a single-dimensional social and cultural politics "strategize[d] from the assumption of the primacy and privileging of one or other set of agents in the process of radical social transformation" (186).

Schuyler's skeptical view of Harlem's "idealized and unrealistic notions about African history and culture," which concealed "the harsh reality of modern urban life ... [of] the lower economic groups" (Leak in Schuyler 2001c, xxii), reveals a central concern of *Black No More*. In *Black No More*, Schuyler expresses sarcastic views on Harlem politics that relied upon "pleas for racial solidarity and unity of action" (90) for the stabilization of class-based black bourgeois regimes. This is described in the mass restructuring of racial demography that disintegrates the "usual sources of graft" (87) of the black elite. His sarcasm concerning Harlem's politics reaches its climax in a scene where "all of the outstanding Negro leaders of the country" are present, "boasting of each other's accomplishments" (89). For them, what genetic engineering triggers is not the "chromatic emancipation" (87) of racial minorities, but a collapse of the black community's traditional class division that relied on "the sable proletariat's race patriotism" (1930, 216). Crookman's machine lays bare the modern black community's "master-narrative essentialism and binary totalization" (Soja and Hooper 187).

Warren places *Black No More* at a similar nexus of modernity, racial identity, and African American nation-building, asserting that the novel suggests that "the idea that black literature could preserve black differences (or that there was a black difference to be preserved in the first place) was a scam perpetuated by a black elite for securing its dominance" (28). Warren argues that the whole body of African American literature has been retroactively built, especially at the turn of the century during the New Negro Renaissance, upon the political basis of a "postemancipation phenomenon." That "gained its coherence as an undertaking in the social world ... [that] ensued after the nation's retreat from Reconstruction"

(1). This political formulation of African American community, he argues, was invented in response to Jim Crow segregation in order to create race-conscious intracommunity bonding. What is problematic for Warren is the way in which black elites and literati appropriated black nativist essentialism to enhance cross-class solidarity within black culture. The satiric representations of black leaders in *Black No More*, he asserts, criticize the black male bourgeois class for its political exploitation of an African aesthetic heritage.²¹

Black No More makes close observations regarding intra-racial, multi-layered specificities, and differences irreducible into a singular black universality. The novel rejects what Walter Benn Michaels criticizes as “nativist modernism” (2) or what Cornel West calls the “homogenous unity or monolithic totality” of black cultural nationalism (35). In what Lightweis-Goff terms the “Schuylerverse”—a psychological universe Schuyler constructs in *Black No More* in which “every standard by which race can be assessed is deemed inadequate” (62)—race does not have any independent meaning outside the hegemonic context of American modernity. Likewise, in Schuyler’s demystified world of race, the aesthetic and cultural practices of the Harlem Renaissance, which largely embraced doctrinaire belief in the authentic and genuine African traits of black patriarchy, lose their political charge. Schuyler represents such anxiety of Harlem’s hegemonic race pride where when Napoleon Wellington Jackson, who arguably satirizes James Weldon Johnson, observes that Crookman’s business has “prove[d] disastrous to [their] organizations,” and “something drastic must be done to preserve the integrity of Negro society” before “there are no longer any-ah groups to support [them]” (94). Walter Williams, who caricatures Walter Francis White, expresses a

similar sense of uneasiness at “the loss of pride and race solidarity among Negroes North and South” based on “ancient glories of Ethiopia, Songhay and Dahomey, and their marvelous record of achievement since emancipation” (94). Through the fear of collapsed race solidarity, Schuyler represents a world where the liberating power of transracial technique restructures a presumably unified black culture.

Black No More captures the historical moment when a mythic trans-class racial community collapsed,²² then later metamorphosed into extreme economic bipolarity and conflicting interests within urban black communities.²³ Such conflicts were caused mainly by economic restructuring and deindustrialization in the 1940s and 1950s, an era roughly referred to as the inception of the postmodern world.²⁴ If black modernity can be understood as a cultural journey for the postbellum African American community, one tied to the rural South at the nadir of race relations during and following the Reconstruction, then *Black No More*’s description of modern black urban life radically revises the way in which the primitivist essentialism of the Harlem Renaissance structured the political idea of race. This is the ground upon which to interpret Schuyler’s vision of transracial techno-humanism in *Black No More*. Schuyler’s techno-human embodies an historical movement where “the political ascension of black elites [would] not automatically advance the interests of the lower strata of African-Americans” and “racial politics [could] no longer be premised on models of unmediated representation or of monolithic racial community” (Dubey 30). Schuyler’s techno-cultural rendering of modern black culture in *Black No More* seizes upon modern

black culture's transition to its postmodern structure, making it possible to read the novel as one of the earliest Afro-postmodern works.

Genre Fiction, Print Literature, and the Rise of African American

Magazines

Black No More epitomizes post-New Negro skepticism of the 1930s. It reflects critically on Harlem's cultural gentrification when the subversiveness of the Black Renaissance had become conventionalized and lost its political charge. As a 1930 issue of the *Saturday Evening Quill* states:

Through the efforts of these and their satellites Harlem, the Negro quarter of New York, has been relegated to the place of a satrapy of Babylon or Sodom; it is the epitome of the bizarre and the unregenerate asylum of Vice in capitals, if we may trust these literati; it means somehow knowing nods and winks, and suggests forbidden diableries. (Harrison 6, 8)

African American literary culture underwent radical change in the post-Harlem Renaissance era. Black modernism became inadequate to explain the condition of the African American community, whose economic foundation increasingly relied on the industrialization of the U.S. economy.²⁵ But the industrial basis of modern black society disintegrated due to deindustrialization beginning in the mid-twentieth century. By the 1940s and 1950s, the socioeconomic restructuring of African American society rendered the New Negro paradigm invalid. *Black No More* reflects on the way the modern African American world became dislocated from its bourgeois-patriarchal basis. It does more than capture black culture in transition to a postindustrial world.

Schuyler's denaturalization of racial categories does not foreshadow the "post" conceptualization of African American identity/subjectivity formation. Neither does analytic difficulty regarding *Black No More's* literary position come from the fact that the novel does not fully describe how African American society was transformed in the post-Fordist era. For this reason, it is not easy to categorize the novel in a single aesthetic mode of modernism or postmodernism. Rather, Schuyler's political view in *Black No More* makes it possible to classify the novel as a prototype of black postmodern literature. The novel's involvement in African American literary tradition cannot be fully understood unless its *sui generis* science fiction tropes are set in the liberation-through-literacy foundation of African American literature, from which the rhetorical basis of black pulp/science fiction can be drawn.

Although *Black No More* is considered the first full-fledged black futurist novel, the novel stands in the wholly different context of U.S. print culture. Lisa Yaszek points out this difference in noting that black science fiction and pulp fiction writers were expected to publish their works in major black magazines such as *The Crisis* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which claimed New Negro modernism as an expression of high art. Their white counterparts, on the other hand, normally published in genre magazines such as *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Astounding Science Fiction*, and were rarely accepted into major literary circles (Yaszek 4-5). These differing publishing practices imply that black genre fiction writers were expected to be "an agent of social advancement and social improvement" within the "uplift paradigm" (Dubey 6), while white writers

working with the similar literary tropes formed their own marginalized circles.

African American speculative traditions manifest crucial differences from the early white pulp magazine market. This market displayed “an uneasy rapprochement between a residual artisan culture” and “an emergent consumer culture,” arising at an historical stage when white proletariats were suffering difficulties in negotiating individual subjectivities with the homogenizing forces of industrial society (Smith 11). According to Smith, the “utopian impulses [of] ... nostalgia for a disappearing artisan culture and visions of a differently gendered world” (12) established a psychological nucleus for the ego construction of those whose artisanal specialties became simplified factory or office labor. White genre fiction “participated in the social construction of a class- and race-specific masculinity that was enmeshed with larger changes in the economy and the structure of work” (Smith 12). The stigma imposed on the struggles of white workers for the utopic revitalization of their masculine selfhood that capitalistic mass-consumer culture was destabilizing suggests an interesting point of comparison. While the marginalized white genre fiction industry can be read as sublimation of male anxiety caused by industrialization, a device that sought to satisfy nostalgic desires for the lost utopia of pre-industrial culture, black pulp/science fiction can be located within the political design of proto-postmodern black culture, which sought to overcome the boundaries of African American bourgeois life.

However, Afrofuturism’s literary designs and imaginations, represented by such figures as Charles Chesnutt, Schuyler, and Zora Neale Hurston, and followed by other lesser-known writers, did not merely serve to bridge speculative

sensibilities in modern black culture to its postmodern adaptations. Although Schuyler distanced himself from the New Negro Renaissance, his editorial involvement in mainstream black magazines such as *The Messenger* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*, as well as non-black magazines such as *American Mercury* and *The Nation*, underlines how early Afrofuturism writers were working at the intersection of political struggle of Harlem and aesthetic politics of Afro-diasporic futurism. It is these politico-cultural designs of New Negro modernity in which black genre fiction writers in the early twentieth century constructed their own authorship alongside propagandism that “encourage[d] black consciousness, believing that advancement lay primarily in group solidarity” (Johnson 4). Given the proximity between aesthetic achievement and political subversiveness during this era, formal aesthetic innovation of early twentieth century black futurism was deeply associated with strategizing the cultural politics of modern black society. Such race consciousness appears in the editor’s announcement of the first issue of *Colored American Magazine*, the first major African American journal of the twentieth century. Pauline Hopkins, founding editor of the journal from 1900 until 1904 when Booker T. Washington took control, declares:

American citizens of color, have long realized that for them there exists no monthly magazine, distinctively devoted to their interests and to the development of Afro-American art and literature. ... [we] aspire to develop and intensify the bonds of that racial brotherhood, which alone can enable a people, to assert their racial rights as men, and demand their privileges as citizens. (60)

It is worth noting that Hopkins herself was one of the pioneers who adopted genre literature's tropes as a rhetorical strategy. She serialized her fantasy work *Of One Blood: or, the Hidden Self* (1902 – 1903) in *Colored American Magazine*. Since the novel explores color lines in mythic ancient African settings that evoke a speculative ambience, recent Afrofuturism scholarship considers the novel one of the earliest black speculative experiments. It comes as no surprise that her early short fiction pieces include mystery stories. "The Mystery within Us," published in the first issue of *Colored American Magazine*, depicts Tom Underwood's paranormal inspiration from a deceased prominent physician through his dreams, which leads to his real-life professional success. "Talma Gordon," another early Hopkins mystery piece, appeared in the same journal a few months later. This mystery story considers themes of passing, interracial marriage, and the legacy of slavery with the character of Talma Gordon, a mulatto woman who falls under suspicion for the murder of her father, Captain Gordon. Like *Black No More*, which participates in black aesthetic politics along with genre fiction's literary design, those early pieces of Pauline Hopkins represent African American cultural experience through genre literature's unconventional setting.

Early black genre literature remains the least-examined area of modern black literature. In spite of the absence of extensive archival research, a brief survey of publications by black writers from Harlem shows that black genre literature had distinct differences from Euro-American circles even before Schuyler crafted his literary monument to Afrofuturism. Charles Chesnutt first published "The Marked Tree" (1924) in *Crisis*. This short work of fiction complemented the mystery stories of a postbellum southern plantation in his 1899 collection *The Conjure*

Woman, where he deals with race issues in the post-Civil War era through supernatural stories narrated by Uncle Julius McAdoo. Based on an African American “hoodoo” tradition, Chesnutt describes the Spencer family’s fate as bound to a marked tree on their plantation. Using similar tropes deriving from African folklore heritage, Arthur Huff Fauset also describes the gruesome tale of a tree that stretches across the North Carolina woods through the voice of Queen of Sedalia—an old, lunatic woman—in “A Tale of the North Carolina Woods” (1922). As it turns out, the tree fed on the death of a son of Squire Mark, a landowner who refused to build a bridge through his land for villagers’ convenience to cross a huge stream.

While the speculative pieces of Chesnutt and Fauset rely on tropes from mythic African folktales, one of the major rhetorical foundations of Afrofuturist literature, Frank Horne’s “The Man Who Wanted to Be Red” (1928) unfolds an allegorical fantasy tale about Greeners who are enslaved by the Great Red Men, and Whites who are born through violent miscegenation between red men and green women in the Kingdom of Ur. The story tells of the scientific mutation of skin color. Juda, a young white man born from a red father and a green mother, discovers a mysterious reagent that converts green to red, only to realize that skin colors themselves do not construct the essential differences between races. Eric Walrond published “The Voodoo’s Revenge” in *Opportunity* in 1925. This story concerns Nestor Villaine, a hoodoo doctor who, after being imprisoned unjustly, takes revenge on the governor of a Caribbean island. In 1926, *Opportunity* reprinted Zora Neale Hurston’s first short fiction “John Redding Goes to Sea,” which first appeared in *Stylus* in 1921 and introduces the adventurous

John Redding whose fate is brought down by his mother's superstitious belief that evil hoodoo forces control her family's fate.

The African American folklore tradition highlights modes of thought that remains unrecognized by western rationality. Anita Scott Coleman's "The Eternal Quest" (1931) participates in this rhetorical tradition. It describes the story of Evan Givens, a famous English surgeon who seeks to understand transcendent of faith after losing his wife and daughter. He believes he can find its clue from a faithful, old African American woman who prays to God on her son's deathbed. John F. Matheus's "Coulev' Endormi" (1929) deals with a perceptual dissonance between what is perceived as real and its verity through the mythical experience of a visitor from Louisiana in a Haitian bar. Theophilus Lewis published "A Deserter from Armageddon" and "Brief Biography of Fletcher J. Mosely" in *Messenger* in 1924. These stories respectively describing an African American laborer's struggle against his tragic fate, and the conjured fate of an African American waiter born with a prophecy of his death.

These early black genre literature pieces provide a theoretical ground in which Afrofuturist tropes of *Black No More* and its aesthetic foundation can be contextualized. *Black No More's* science fiction trope paralleled the use of literary themes such as African folklore, hoodoo magic, and fatalism of conjuring. Locating *Black No More* in the context of genre literature publications in Harlem does not merely highlight its inherent art-propaganda in an era where race consciousness undergirded the African American community's politics and culture. It also discloses a crucial difference that derives from the anti-slavery/anti-racist tradition that shaped African American literary history. The underlying sentiments

of *Black No More's* transracial narrative fundamentally resemble nineteenth-century fugitive slave narratives, and the science fictional technology in the novel serves as a literary device to describe this underlying source.

Black No More's rhetorical contributions to African American literature can be found in a cultural location where early African American futurism's involvements in the formation of modern black culture took part in anti-racist discourse, yet reshaped the picture of black modernity at the same time. While futurist authorship in the black magazine industry bore substantial affinity to the propagandist ideals of their contemporary black politics, celebrating Harlem along with such catch phrases as "Negro's Zionism," "a race capital," and "the sign and center of the renaissance of a people" (Johnson 70), tropes of black futurism surpassed New Negro modernism's aesthetic premises.

Afrofuturism's characteristics as a genre literature germinated from the earliest anti-slavery tropes, which colored literacy and writing practices themselves as a political gesture. Early autobiographies of African American writers from the nineteenth century, such as that of Frederick Douglass, refer to literacy and its acquisition by African Americans. The publication of early black futurism lies in the political conflict between racist white culture and black primitivism, conceiving Harlem's political struggles and tropes of speculative realism as its aesthetics and questioning any assumption of realistic frames. Although social realism in representing racial experience took a central position in mainstream black literary history, black speculative tropes provided other forms of cultural inheritance.

Such a conclusion begs reconsideration of the theorization of black genre literature, which has been largely marginalized by black nationalist imperatives.²⁶ Although black genre literature did not come to the critical forefront in African American culture until the late twentieth century, the genre's aesthetic sensibility and its political power lay latent. Schuyler's speculative representation in *Black No More* of modern black culture's internal complexity in *Black No More* provides a link between prototypical tropes of Afrofuturism and postmodern reconceptualization of African American culture in the following decades. The golden age of black genre fiction in the mid-twentieth century can be contextualized within such a critical view. Chester Himes's prison novels, the Afro-diasporic futurism of Ishmael Reed and Samuel Delany, and the cultural experiments of other Black Arts Movement writers such as Amiri Baraka incorporated the tradition of anti-racist/slavery tropes into their speculative imaginations. Schuyler's distrust of New Negro politics represented in *Black No More* can be located here, where proto-postmodern sensibilities in modern black culture during the interwar period turned towards exploration of structural transformation in black communities.

Conclusion

What would society be like if there were no visible racial differences? Schuyler does not prescribe any single utopian or dystopian vision. Instead, his imagined present-future suggests that race relations are not simply constructed along with phenotypical markers, but are inextricably bound to what traditional racial politics might consider inessential or external to understanding racial identity. The

national crisis that technological power to obscure visible racial markers causes in *Black No More* constitutes not only the crisis of a polygenetic notion of race within white culture. It also reveals the inner anxieties regarding possible consequences of an expansion of anti-essentialist technology that might destabilize traditional black identities. Schuyler's view of 'authentic' blackness is highly sarcastic. This sarcasm assumes an inner impulse of African Americans towards racial assimilation, one that "links [race] hysteria with the parallel essentialist and primitivist rhetoric that emerged among Harlem Renaissance artists and intellectuals" (Kuenz 171).

Transracial techno-humanity and a technophobic black elite in *Black No More* dramatize how essentialist politics within the black community adopted race-conscious and cross-class ideals to legitimate black male bourgeois dominance prior to World War Two. Crookman's trans-phenotype technology emerges from Schuyler's skepticism about African American primitivist doctrines. Schuyler instead introduces his proto-postmodern construction of race and culture to suggest that capitalistic consumer culture and techno-scientific modernization can create a technology-mediated black subjectivity. To achieve this goal, Schuyler imbues themes of evolutionism with racial implications. Borrowing its basic concepts from western epistemology, *Black No More's* evolutionist tropes stand apart from a triumphal notion of teleological human evolution towards an eventual singularity. Instead, Schuyler grafts Booker T. Washington's uplift model and its philosophical roots to this idea to explore meanings of African American social evolution.

Black No More's Afro-transhumanism stands on this perceptual ground that echoes intellectual sources of diverse origins. Such intellectual hybridity in the novel's narrative structure challenged racial reductionism in early twentieth-century U.S. black culture, which manifested in the propagandizing declaration of the New Negro. Schuyler's Afro-transhumanism provides a new concept of black culture. Since *Black No More* took part in the formation of modern black culture of Harlem, Schuyler stands at a transitional location in which the inner contradictions of modern black aesthetics transferred into the post-New Negro era.

Chapter 3: Textual Body, Biological Language, and Algorithmic Code:

Reading Techno-culture in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to*

Canada

The "grape-vine telegraph" was kept busy night and day. The news and mutterings of great events were swiftly carried from one plantation to another.

—Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*

Since matter receives accidentally the mark of a vital activity, a series of objects that are manufactured over a period of time does nothing but report an evolution:

a technical being belongs essentially to mechanics, doing little more than conveying the vital behavior of which it is but a thin trace

—Bernard Stiegler, *Technic and Time vol. 1*

Introduction

When Ishmael Reed mentions "Booker T. Washington's Grapevine Telegraph" in *Mumbo Jumbo* (13),²⁷ he allusively juxtaposes the pandemic spread of the African-origin virus, Jes Grew,²⁸ with the communication networks of antebellum African American communities. Washington, in his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901), describes the grapevine telegraph as a long-distance oral information system that "kept [African Americans] informed of events" (19). Since the white polity took exclusive control of institutional means of information interchange, "the news and mutterings of great events" transmitted through this person-to-person knowledge net were of great importance to the security of the black community, allowing them to be forewarned of unexpected "Yankee invasions" (Washington 19). Similarly, in his conversation with President Lincoln in *Flight to*

Canada, Arthur Swille—a slaveholding plantation owner in Virginia—reveals his anxiety about the cryptic ways African Americans are able to “pass codes to one another,” knowing that his slaves are “in contact with [other] slaves in the rest of the country, through some kind of intricate grapevine” (34). In this way, the physical body disturbs the dominant culture’s linguistic system, showing that the storage and transfer of cultural information can be transcribed onto the material body.

While paying particular attention to techno-scientific allusions in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada*, the present chapter highlights the way Reed explores the black experience, which he describes as having been historically captured in diverse semiotic systems, from ancient hieroglyphics to modern cybernetic languages. Making an analogy between the genetic structure of DNA and digital hardware, the culture-informed virus in *Mumbo Jumbo* points to the twentieth-century epistemological shift in which biological human bodies came to serve as a serialized set of information sequences, possessing “remarkable power of information storage and transmission” (Hayles 2005, 29). *Mumbo Jumbo* not only perceives the biological human body as an outcome of dynamic interactions in information networks in which social, cultural, and biological relations can be inscribed in textual and coded platforms, but the novel also describes the virus as an acoustic entity that vibrates through radio technology. Such a sonic construction of Afro-diasporic experience challenges western culture’s sound paradigm in which certain tonal qualities serve as a norm. While resonating with the basic notions of Deleuzian sonic materialism and the Agambenian concept of bare life, this audio-hieroglyphic virus offers a race-specific alteration of these

concepts, contesting paradigmatic euro-biopolitics. It revitalizes the force of African-origin sounds.

Flight to Canada reconfigures the antebellum political milieu by using the language of computational codes, a social and cultural platform designed to capture a perceptual architecture of modern digital culture. The colonial white male regime reproduces through a phallogocentric textual system, a “cycle of ownership that always posits a master and a collection of properties” (Chaney 271). Reed’s appropriation of computational codes in an Afro-diasporic context disputes universalizing claims of cybernetics and posthumanism, criticizing them as akin to the Western phallogocentric language system. In *Flight to Canada*, when Robin, an African American slave, describes himself as the computer for his dyslexic master Swille, the human-computer interface becomes the central site of contemplation for race relations. Here conventional master-slave dynamics can be understood within a mechanism “designed primarily to solve preformulated problems or to process data according to predetermined procedures” (Licklider 5-6).

Both novels distort time and space. *Mumbo Jumbo* places the culture of 1920s Harlem in the spectacle of the bio-cultural revolution of the mid-twentieth century; meanwhile, *Flight to Canada* transplants modern electric and mechanical technologies into the antebellum United States. Such a time and space continuum, one “not tied to linear time” (Harris 114), can be read as Reed’s response to 1970s United States, which witnessed the legal, economic, and political turbulence of the post-civil rights era, and the subsequent transformation of discourse and criticism on African American culture and literature. Black artists

and critics began reconsidering the radical politics of black power, to which—as Nathan Hare notes—the Black Movement of the 1960s was drawn as a result of an “ultra-nationalism that was mystical, messianic and hence dysfunctional” (26). Literary experiments in *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada* reflect Reed’s aesthetic response to the African American experience. Reed’s fictions provide an “alternative lexicon for historical reconstruction” (Carpio 563), while contesting “the accepted protocols of African American discursive tradition,” and reject “any definition of the black experience as monolithic” (Rushdy 1994, 113).

A Bio-cultural Reading of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*

In spite of the unreliable nature of oral dissemination due to its lack of written forms, the grapevine telegraph was considered a source of information that could substitute for the dominant culture’s formal communication technologies. As Butler defined it, the grapevine telegraph served for “secret communications” through which “news [came] to the rebels,” and African Americans believed such informal information to be “hardly worse than some which were authentic” (510). This racialized communication channel established a semantic system structured in cognitive patterns recognizable within African American communities.

As the grapevine telegraph operated without the knowledge of the dominant white culture, oral communication became cultural *telesthesia*, carrying racialized knowledge through plantation-to-plantation contact. This “coded speech” which transmitted “an elaborate critique of the plantation system” and “information about the war” (Lewis 14), established an alternate antebellum semantic structure and communication channel. It rearticulated the national landscape—

cities, roads, and their geographical structure—in ways that established black bodies as a foundation for storing and delivering knowledge and information. In a similar manner, Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo* shapes the geographic network of 1920s America with race-specific meaning. The virus infects its host with “ebullience and ecstasy” that “enliven the host” (6), an epitome of “the Essence and Symptoms” (20) of an era when blues, jazz, and ragtime evolved into an integral part of American popular culture. As a repository of African American culture, Jes Grew inscribes the racialized geography of the Jim Crow United States in an African American historical context. The virus biologically reproduces its *hoodoo* information through genetic inheritance. PaPa LaBas, a hoodoo houngan, “carries Jes Grew in him like most other folk carry genes” (23). This virogene is inherited from his African lineage. His grandfather brought “African religion to the Americas” on a slave ship, and the slaveholders who purchased him encountered the brutal fates of “insanity, drunkenness, disease and retarded children” (23). While LaBas’s father was running his “Root business” in New Orleans, a boy who damaged LaBas’s “HooDoo 2 Cents ... spent a night squirming and gnashing his teeth” (23). In his office, called the “Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral,” LaBas “size[s] up his clients to fit their soul” (23).

The analogy between Jes Grew and the grapevine telegraph is significant to reading Reed’s notion of material reality and racial experience in modern technoculture. On the one hand, just as the antebellum grapevine telegraph appropriated the semantic structure of the dominant culture’s language and inscribed it into an enslaved body, Jes Grew uses a biological human body to host African American information. The relationship between the biological human

body and cultural information posits a biocultural assumption in which “the combination of ... the digitality of DNA sequences and the analog process of protein folding gives the gene its remarkable power of information storage and transmission” (Hayles 2005, 29). Biological codes become a universal language of physical reality. Where DNA patterns become decipherable “texts, namely as information storage and transfer system[s]” (Kay 34), *Mumbo Jumbo* alludes to an historical era in which “digital flexibility and information networks” transform economic, cultural, and political orders alongside paradigmatic shifts in science, biology, information, and a cybernetic understanding of society (Parikka 6).

While representing how biosemiotic networks establish a mode of perception in which African American experience can be understood within techno-epistemic platforms, Reed also describes the virus as an acoustic entity. The sonic nature of Afro-diasporic experience in this novel underlines what Goodman terms as the “politics of frequency,” an “ethico-aesthetic paradigm” (xv), whose forces rehabilitate what has been marginalized in the construction of western culture’s sound ecology. By dramatizing the production and transmission of black tonality, Jes Grew’s vibrational forces counteract a cultural design where certain sound structures—epitomized as “Waltz,” a “suitable vaccine” (22) for Jes Grew—have been arranged as a cultural norm.

Jes Grew’s “illegible hieroglyphics of flesh” (Weheliye 2014, 110) and “audio virology of [its] contagious rhythmatcs” (Goodman 158) contest paradigmatic euro-biopolitics, a cultural and discursive practice that tends to maintain a narrow definition of humanity. Major scholarship on *Mumbo Jumbo* has largely focused on the novel’s Afrocentric postmodernism, failing to notice Reed’s biocultural

representation of a world where bioinformatic presence and vibrational forces rewrite the grapevine telegraph theme in the language of cybernetics, genetics, information theory, and sonic materialism. The most representative reading is Jameson's evaluation of Reed as one of the "most significant postmodernist artists," whose "schizophrenic" texts counter "the signifying chain ... the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers" (26) defined by the "high-modernist imperative of stylistic innovation" (2). Hutcheon places *Mumbo Jumbo* within the postmodern tradition, asserting that the novel's formal and thematic experiments "expose ... the myth- or illusion-making tendencies of [western] historiography" (16). Similarly, Hogue suggests that the novel's "deconstructive" form criticizes "the logocentric value in Western society ... by overturning binaries and undermining hierarchies, suggesting a postmodern or dispersed way of defining history and reality" (93). Dubey evaluates the novel's counter-textual practices, arguing that since the Book of Thoth and its contents, written in a hieroglyphic anthology format, as well as the novel itself, counter "modern conventions of the singular author, holder of copyright and source of textual meaning," *Mumbo Jumbo's* postmodern quality evokes "synesthetic, kinetic, and multimedia dimensions that are said to distinguish postmodern textuality" (50).

Early scholarship on *Mumbo Jumbo* concerned the novel's formal experiments and their deconstructive quality. Harde argues that *Mumbo Jumbo's* "allegorical iconoclasm" negotiates "a hermeneutic of reverence for language's spiritual impulse" by reappropriating the "weapons" of modernism (362). McCoy focuses on the "citational desire" (605) of the novel's form, asserting that the novel's quasi-academic quality demonstrates Reed's "poststructuralist" strategy to "bring

political subject into being" (605). Thus, Reed establishes "paratextual spaces" to show the racial condition in a "post-civil rights era" when "power ... as white supremacist has been diffused" (607). In a similar context, Fox highlights the "heterophany of elements" and the "polyglot quality" (50) of *Mumbo Jumbo*, which offers a "liberational aspect" (58) to the African hoodoo tradition. Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo*, she argues, illuminates "the contradictions inherent in American society and, by extension, Western civilization in general" (52).

Other scholars read *Mumbo Jumbo*'s unconventional form as ingrained within Reed's Afrocentrism, which offers an alternate frame to Eurocentric modernity. Swope points out that *Mumbo Jumbo*'s metaphysical detective story evokes "an obvious transgression of the Western detective genre" (612) and revises the "Enlightenment-based cultural logic out of which the detective story was born" (613). Ingram places *Mumbo Jumbo* in the tradition of folklore anthropology, addressing the novel as a black ethnographic metafiction that "offers an opportunity to begin unpacking the colonialist narratives" (183).²⁹

Most criticism of *Mumbo Jumbo* has taken as axiomatic two strands of reading: postmodernism and Afrocentricity. These theoretical approaches properly offer frames through which the historical dynamics between two heterogeneous cultures in the novel can be understood. If the novel's formal postmodernity contests the problem of monolinear western historiography, represented as the Atonist doctrine of "White man's destiny" (58), their "American fetish" on "Progress" (135), and their belief in "the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission" (136), the novel's Afrocentrism offers heterogeneous qualities in an African-diasporic context. Postmodern and Afrocentric readings, however, have

not addressed *Mumbo Jumbo's* depiction of the emergence of a techno-cultural world and African American identity shifts. While outlining the novel's basic narrative in the form of Afrocentric postmodernism, Reed also places the backdrop of the neo-hoodoo narrative within what Parikka calls "information capitalism," a "new global order" in which digitalized information networks make up a substantial part of the transnational economic system (6). The restructuring did not merely transform the early twentieth-century economy into a system deeply associated with high-technologies—such as computer science, virtual networks, information digitalization, and high-speed wireless telegraph—but it gave way to a paradigmatic shift towards regard for the biological human body, social structure, and collective cognition of the world. This trend perceives a biological human body as an outcome of dynamic interactions in information networks, in which "value of data, images, and ideologies has surpassed that of material acquisitions and physical territory" (Rushkoff 3). Viral contagion can be interpreted as a transmission of biological codes in this perceptual frame

Such a reading makes it possible to better comprehend the novel's viral narrative. Just as the antebellum grapevine telegraph took advantage of semantic discrepancies, Jes Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo* is a parasite on the dominant culture's media ecology. Jes Grew "tie[s] up the tubes" (154), which Lee De Forest—a founder of the modern electronic industry—invented to "make big-time radio possible" (94). As the virus spreads mainly through radio networks, radio technology stands at the center of the novel's main conflict. Allusions to technology and hoodooism spread throughout the novel. Since Haitian *loas* "adapt to change," they attain a "technological bent" within media networks (137). This

"Radio Loa" is "high-powered" with "a Yellow Back to symbolize its electric circuitry" (151). The Wallflower Order is aware that Jes Grew "slips into the radiolas and Dictaphones" (64), and they use telephone and television "to scan the U.S. for Jes Grew activity" and "the progress of the epidemic" (63). As Monson-Rosen points out, a "radio becomes a contested, mechanical embodiment of the virus. Echoing the paranoia about brainwashing and contagion, *Mumbo Jumbo* casts radio as a tool of biopower caught in a struggle for the control of media technologies and the control of information" (39).

Such an understanding of *Mumbo Jumbo*'s viral techno-world narrative allows us to read the novel through what Kay calls a "*technoepistemic*" lens, a "representational space" in which cultural, economic, and biological processes become inscribed in "the new biosemiotics of communication" (xvii, italicized in original). Reed represents techno-culture through perceptual frames of cybernetics, genetics, molecular biology, and information theory. These methods write a natural world in scientific languages such as mathematical formulas, matrices, and computer codes so their approaches can be understood as textualization of the material world. *Mumbo Jumbo*'s treatment of history, text, and biological inscription of culture implies such a relationship between a natural reality and its textual embodiments. This historicization is visible in the novel's description of the political struggle to occupy the Text, that being the Book of Thoth, a hieroglyphic anthology from ancient Egypt that contains Osiris's dances and spells. Jes Grew seeks "The Work of its Word," "its Text" (33), without which it "peter[s] out" (34). African spirituality within Jes Grew has been "so deep in race soul ... for 1000s of years" as "part of [their] heritage" (34). Since the

inheritance of African spirituality that Jes Grew carries remains undecipherable to western empiricism, the virus permeates through and stimulates the dominant culture's anxiety. Eurocentric historiography understands the worship of *loa*—spirits in Haitian voodoo—as “hysteria,” whose “host[s]” should be “electrified ... [or] lobotomized” (50), or “X factor ... the stumper of *Psychic Epidermologists*” (208, italicized in original). Jes Grew's syncretic unification of polytheism and the *loa*-worship opposes Western monotheism, which in the novel is controlled by the Atonists within the Wallflower Order—a secret Free Mason society. Jes Grew is an “anti-plague” because it does not cause its host “to waste away” but “enliven[s]” it (6). However, Atonists understand Jes Grew as an epidemic “germ” (20) designed for “the end of Civilization” (4) so as to “make an orderly world” (153). In a world where “Exorcism becomes Psychoanalysis, Hex becomes Death Wish, Possession becomes Hysteria,” the Atonist view moves for the “untampered word” (213) of African origin.

Jes Grew is part of these recurring historical struggles. The revised Egyptian myth in *Mumbo Jumbo* describes the dynamics between Euro-centric hegemony and African cultural resistance as a centuries-long war. Since Reed frames the Jazz Age through these historical struggles to capture African cultural heritage in scripted form, the mythological origin of cultural history becomes transformed into the histories of hieroglyphic cultures. Reed describes the Book of Thoth as “the 1st anthology written by the 1st choreographer” (164). As the Text and its contents, full of “hieroglyphics and strange drawings” (81), remain indecipherable to modern Western literacy, the novel's narrative represents modern black popular culture in the early twentieth century as counter-textual to conventional

logocentric textualism. Thus, the grapevine telegraph theme illustrates the moment in which the politico-historical conflict surrounding the Text begins to be mediated through biological agents. Physical bodies and their sensory organs carry out a crucial role in constructing a cryptic storage for African American culture in the antebellum political milieu.³⁰ As the term's etymology indicates,³¹ the grapevine telegraph was politically significant in antebellum anti-slavery struggles, offering "geopolitical literacy, like alphabetic literacy, [which] represented specialized skills" (Troutman 207).

In representing the textual war between the two cultures, not only does Reed describe Jes Grew as a "message without a material substrate, a randomness seeking expression in a symbol system or pattern" (Chaney 274), but, more notably, he renders this symbolic entity as biologically inscribable. It extends the biological and textual to the extent to which an organic body can be textualized and material reality can be transcribed into scriptural form. As Chaney points out, Reed writes of "virological associations with information, transmissions of black culture, blackness itself, and hoodoo possession," recoding African aesthetic heritage in a "mysterious programming" (273). In this cybernetic interpretation, while "white hegemony ... functions as a universalizing code" (Chaney 277) for the Atonists, Jes Grew inscribes African-rooted U.S. culture in a biological system of codes, "[becoming] a carrier of the information (virus) that destabilizes the linearity of Western Judeo-Christian epistemologies" (Chaney 274). Mason-Rosen reads *Mumbo Jumbo* similarly, asserting that the novel "intervenes in the contemporary information discourse of 'biochemistry philosophy math,' and associates this ancient linguistic code with the cutting edge of information

research" (51), which is consonant with the "contemporary discourse of media theory and information technoscience" (31).

Reed glosses *Mumbo Jumbo's* Afrocentric outlook with notions from modern biocultural anthropology, which interprets what was considered the physical construction of social relations as cultural and biological construction. This critical notion references an era when scientists began exploring physical, cultural, and biological constructions of social relations as translatable into coded data. In this theoretical formula, the historical war between African and Western cultures in *Mumbo Jumbo* can be transcribed as "recursive loops between physicality and textuality" (Hayles 2005, 207), in which "code is elevated to the *lingua franca* ... of all physical reality" (Hayles 2005, 15, emphasis added). *Mumbo Jumbo* dramatizes such an epistemological shift as regards computational language, biology, and material reality. The viral contagion of black culture and its genetic inheritance in *Mumbo Jumbo* resonates with Fredkin's assertion that "information processing in living things begins with the informational process of sperm and egg combining and continues with differentiation as a kind of computation based on inherited information and finally, as is obvious for all creatures that move, behavior involves information processing on a more familiar level" (199).

Understanding the basic structure of the biological human body as a serialized set of genetic codes helps reconfigure black culture in *Mumbo Jumbo* as encodable in "molecules of DNA" which perform "with standard protocols and enzymes" (Adleman 1021). Further, this analogy between the biological human body and cultural codes reminds us of Dawkins' assumption that a human body is a "survival machine" that can be understood as akin to the codified structure of a

"digital computer," a "large and versatile electronic device" whose "complex timed patterns of movements" are identifiable as a neural system (48-9). Recent digital-culture philosophers have developed the term "computationalism" (Golumbia 7). It refers to the premise that "our brains are fundamentally the same thing as personal computers" and "human mind is ultimately characterizable as a kind of computer" (Golumbia 8). This analogy between human and computer assumes that the basic mechanism of the human brain is similar to the operation of an "on-board computer – data processing, pattern recognition, short-term and long-term data storage, operation coordination, and so on" (Dawkins 276). Kay further extends such notions of informational biology, asserting that new scientific information discourses such as "information theory, cybernetics, systems analysis, electronic computers, and simulation technologies" (5) have altered the basic scope of understanding biology and information. This view makes it possible to read biological research as a "textualization of nature," treating "molecules and organism as texts, namely as information storage and transfer system" (Kay 34).

So genetic code becomes charged with cultural meanings. Kay understands the genomic structure of DNA as a language of "informational and scriptural representations of heredity," which is older than the ancient hieroglyphic language of human civilization (14). This bio-hieroglyphic ur-textuality of genetic code illuminates *Mumbo Jumbo's* representation of the viral contagion of black culture. While Reed shapes the novel's basic narrative within an Afrocentric hoodoo tradition, he also examines the translatability of black culture into diverse languages, codes, and textualizable scripts. Abdul Hamid, a black Muslim

eclecticist, personifies such an attempt to transcribe mythic Afrocentric culture into "something that people will understand" (38):

I went through biochemistry philosophy math, I learned languages, I even learned the transliteration and translation of hieroglyphics, a skill which has come in handy recently. ... I would hungrily devour the intellectual scraps and leftovers of the learned. Everyday I would learn a new character and learn how to mark it. It occurred to me that I was borrowing from all of these systems: Religion, Philosophy, Music, Science, and even Painting, and building 1 of my own composed of their elements. (37-38)

Skepticism towards LaBas's "HooDoo psychiatry" (37) and Hamid's "Griffin politics" and "chimerical art" (39) places this Afrocentric narrative at an intersection where black primitivism, prevalent throughout major Harlem discourses in the 1920s, becomes hybridized in the techno-cultural episteme. As it turns out, "an anthology" in "Hieroglyphics" (39) that Hamid was translating is the text of Jes Grew. Since Reed's notion of the human body is located outside a biological construction, his revisionist view of 1920s Harlem culture appears to reference what Moravec calls a "postbiological world" (5), in which the progress of computational technologies lays perceptual groundwork towards viewing human society as algorithmically structured. In this techno-epistemic design, semiotic networks of high-tech systems become an interpretive frame for human society and its complicated cultural dynamics.

Mumbo Jumbo links culture, language, and biology into an algorithmic circulation of information in the modern African American community. Race becomes "an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-

informational entity" (Hayles 1999, 3). Such a biocultural view of racial identity invites us to contextualize *Mumbo Jumbo's* narrative within Dawkins's assumption that "cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission," and "language seems to 'evolve' by non-genetic means" (189). Dawkins sublates traditional Darwinism's view of human evolution, which centered on genetic inheritance and its trans-mutational variation. Instead, he explains the history of human civilization in the evolution of "memes." "Meme" refers to sets of cultural information that propagate "in the [semiotic] pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which ... can be called imitation," unlike genes transmitting "via sperms or eggs" (192). Dawkins explains:

If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. ... memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically." (192)

Dawkins finds the spread of cultural information in memes and their successive historical inheritance in the inherent "survival value" inscribed in its "biological advantage." This biologically-designed instinct gives existential reasons to humankind. He goes on,

For more than three thousand million years, DNA has been the only replicator worth talking about in the world. But it does not necessarily hold these monopoly rights for all time. Whenever conditions arise in which a new kind of replicator *can* make copies of itself, the new replicators *will* then take over, and start a new kind of evolution of their own. Once this

new evolution begins, it will in no necessary sense be subservient to the old. (193-94, italics in original)

Dawkins's view of biocultural evolutionism, which links cultural inheritance to the survival instinct of human existence, echoes Reed's description of Western culture's struggle to survive in *Mumbo Jumbo*. A hierophant of the Wallflower Order says to Hinckle Von Vampton,

People do the Charleston the Texas Tommy and other anonymously created symptoms of Jes Grew. The Wallflower Order remembers the 10th-century *tarantism* which nearly threatened the survival of Church. Even Paracelsus, a "radical" who startled the academicians by lecturing in the vernacular, termed these manias "a disease." ... The Teutonic Order is of no use. You must use something up-to-date to curb Jes Grew. ... Luckily your scientists are working on microorganism; minuscule replicas of yourself capable of surviving the atmosphere of any planet. Your inventors are preparing a spaceship that will transport these microorganisms to 3 planets you've had your eye on. (64, italics in original)

Western culture's anxiety over the spread of African culture in this scene links the manifestation of Harlem culture to Western culture's survival instinct. When the hierophant mentions tarantism, an "epidemic mania of raving, jumping, drinking, and wild dancing" (Millon and Simonsen 17) which spread through 10th-century Europe, he links the neuro-psychological symptom from mediaeval Europe to African cultural heritage. Reed further associates Paracelsus, a fourteenth-century medical scientist who first noted some of the diseases that modern psychology terms "mental disorder," with the discourse of racial identity and biology in the

twentieth century. Paracelsus marks a discernible beginning of what is known as biological racism, a pseudo-scientific practice elevated by the nationalism of nineteenth-century Romanticism (Temkin 225). West regards Paracelsus's medical research as the "emergence of modern racism" (55). If we assume that modernization is understood as "new practices of institutional forms, ... of new way of living, ... and of new forms of malaise" (Taylor 91) which brought about a transformation from medievalism, *Mumbo Jumbo* asserts that Western modernity was shaped alongside the "genealogy of race in the modern West" and its "classificatory categories and the descriptive, representational, order-imposing aims" (West 55). As the "fate of Western Civilization" determines the "survival of Church" (64) in the hierophant's explanation in *Mumbo Jumbo*, the Wallflower Order's survival becomes analogous to the "biblically based accounts" of race hierarchy that were "consciously projected and promoted by many influential Enlightenment writers, artists, and scholars" (West 53-54).

The Eurocentric modernization that Reed illustrates in the above passage places the entire span of human evolution within a new techno-genetic process. The Wallflower Order's survival needs "something up-to-date," a scientific breakthrough to transport "minuscule replicas" to other "planets" (64). Such a description of human futurity reminds us of what Stiegler calls "epiphylogenesis, a recapitulating, dynamic, and morphogenetic (phylogenetic) accumulation of individual experience" mediated by "organized inorganic" technologies (177). On Stiegler's account, genetic inheritance and transmission of culture and knowledge become dependent on this "technicization of the world" (3), in which "pursuit of

the evolution of the living” can be supplemented by “means other than life” (135).

Placing the survival instinct within the post-biological process might offer a fertile ground for rethinking the nature of humanity, but Reed does not merely portray the liminal moment of techno-genetic evolution as a site for exploring the way in which humanity comes to reach a higher level of material existence. Instead, he further illuminates a moment in which biological life becomes a racialized battlefield. Drawing its basic scope from Foucault’s notion of neoliberal biopolitics—a modern regime that establishes “a biological-type caesura ... within the biological continuum addressed by biopower” (80)—*Mumbo Jumbo*’s virus narrative investigates a point of historico-political divide. That is the point where the “incorporation, production, and politicization of *zoe* (mere biological life), as opposed to *bios* (‘full’ human existence), forms the core of political modernity and increasingly comes to define the scope of state power” (Weheliye 2008, 67, italics in original).

Further, bio-warfare in *Mumbo Jumbo* is framed in and through the sound arts and musical cultures of two different origins—ragtime and waltz. The Wallflower Order’s biopolitical regime’s obsession proves that “the flesh is nothing less than the ethereal social (after) life of bare existence” (Weheliye 2014, 72), gains epistemological resonance with what Goodman terms as an “ecology of vibrational affects” (xviii), a geopolitical environment in which “sound contributes to an immersive atmosphere or ambience” (xiv). In other words, Reed invests 1920s Harlem in *Mumbo Jumbo* with “virosonic war” (Goodman 158), in which a sound wave “take[s] advantage of [the] chaotic and organic qualities” of a virus

(Rushkoff 35). As Reed illustrates, African racial experience revolves around a certain set of tonal qualities at its ontological level; the audial patterns of Jes Grew are addressed as “‘heathen sounds’ (timbrel’d anthems dark, boogie, jazz, down-home music, funk, gutbucket)” (187), whose rhythmic traits change “metropolitan life,” by “[speeding] up the tempo of things” and “rapidly spread[ing] into daily—and nightly—activities” (115). This sound flow is of an African origin. PaPa LaBas believes that African descendants retain another communicative sense called “Knockings,” an “ultra ultra high frequency electromagnetic wave propagation,” which the “New Negros [have] lost” (25).

Musical sound is not merely an aesthetic construction in *Mumbo Jumbo*; it defines ontological status, forcing “the domains of sound art, generative music, and the sonic aesthetics of artificial life into the context of a politics of frequency” (Goodman xix). Similarly, understanding the tonal quality of the human voice in such politico-cultural dynamics helps read *Mumbo Jumbo*’s Afro-diasporic rendering of soundscape ecology. Particularly, the radio metaphor in the novel shows a historical moment when phonographic recording supplements and simultaneously confiscates phonetic and acoustic abilities, previously confined to the physical human body. This move from “orality to media” reduces what was the “signified spirit” of voice, or the “translatability of soul and body,” into “pure matter” (Connor 5). The “material marks” and “neurological sparks” that phonograph technology leaves on human organs separate the “inscription system” from written forms of practice, spatializing the temporality of aural information into eternity (Connor 5). In this shift, where “machines take over functions of the central nervous system,” what was “essence” becomes

"apparatuses," and "so-called Man is split up into physiology and information technology" (Kittler 1999, 16).

Reed further elaborates this separation of voice-as-soul from its physiological nature within the multi-axial dynamics of sound, voice, and technology in the African American historical experience. The Talking Android, for instance, is a cyborg "Human Vaccine" that Hinckle Von Vampton, the villainous head of the Atonists, designs "to make Jes Grew seem harmful to the J.G.C.s [Jes Grew Carriers]" (137) and to "prepare the New Negro to resist Jes Grew and not catch it" (190). He says,

We will feature the Talking Android who will tell the J.G.Cs that Jes Grew is not ready and owes a large debt to Irish Theatre. This Talking Android will Wipe That Grin Off Its Face. He will accuse it of verbal gymnastics, of pandering to White readers. He will even suggest it abandon the typewriter completely and create a Black Tammany Hall. He will describe it as a massive hemorrhage of malaprops; illiterate and given to rhetoric. And if the Talking Android is female she will shout before the Caucasian club, "They just can't write, they just can't write," but then when pressed she might break into her monologue – you know the one – "My no good nigger husband who left me with these kids." (69-70)

Described as a "speaking skull [*sic*]," a "rapping antibiotic" (17), and a "pet zombie" (139), who will work "within the Negro ... to drive [Jes Grew] out, categorize it analyze it expel it slay it, blot Jes Grew" (17), Talking Android is programmed to repeat messages of the Wallflower Order in African American vernacular language. The Talking Android is originally intended to be played by

Woodrow Wilson Jefferson, an ambitious but naïve young New Negro who, fascinated by Marxism's "objective" and "scientific" style, "would abandon [the] darkness" of rural black community that still believes in "haints and things; and spirits and 2-headed men; mermaids and witches" (29). After Vampton's plan to use Jefferson as a mouthpiece falls through, Hubert "Safecracker" Gould, Vampton's "old comrade-in-arms" (72), substitutes for the android's task, blackening his face with skin-lightener. This racial alloy would then metaphorically show a moment, with strong racial implications, where an organic nervous system, which once was "full of living sounds" (Kittler 1990, 43), is reduced to functional apparatuses, and a natural human body is replaced by media technologies. What was the marginalized sound of a black body paradoxically materializes as a meaningful voice in this android minstrel show, taking over the white body's original sense, soul, and voice. Chaney explains this paradox, asserting—

"Talking" not only makes Reed's particular invention that much more sinister, it also implies cognition and thus renders a sort of paradox:

"Talking" implies agency; "Android," thralldom. However, taken together, the speech of the talking android finally deciphers a kind of tape recorder, or two-way radio; combine with this the spectacle of the black face, and the result is television programming and cinema. (278)

Although the Talking Android is not a machine but is performed by a human host, this mechanization of race shows how a natural human can carry out what a robotic machine is meant to perform.

The trans-racial inscription of black culture epitomizes the tension between a biological body and the cultural codification of race in a signification process initiated by modern media technologies. This process of racial transcription, in which the subjectivity of the white body seems to be lost in inscribing the black soul, highlights an amalgamation of racial identities that has been made possible through the “technological grafting of white body and black soul through the mechanical synchronization of filmic image and soundtrack” (Mullen 84). Media technologies “encode” the black/white assimilation fantasy so “powerfully” that one might falsely see an “unachieved racial integration” as achieved in nostalgic representations of “a synthesized synchronicity of images and voices drawn from disparate sources” (86). *Mumbo Jumbo* illuminates such an obscure amalgamation of racial images in a scene where Hubert “Safecracker” Gould, in “white gloves, blackface, black tuxedo,” reads a black epic poem, “Harlem Tom Toms,” in African American vernacular (157). This black-faced android delivers a “Negro Viewpoint” (75), one that is deliberately filtered through the “Freudian angle” of the *Benign Monster* (71), a magazine that Hinckle Von Vampton edits. Vampton designs the magazine to debilitate a cultural leverage of black arts in Harlem. He “familiarize[s] himself with Afro-American literature of the 20s” (77) to disguise himself as a “Negrophile” (78) and carry out this plan.³² Whiteness is conversely inscribed in a black body during the production of blackness in a white body, signifying the nostalgic racial integrationism that modern media technologies make possible.

In this way, the sound ecology of *Mumbo Jumbo* becomes charged with multiple cultural meanings. This sonic materialism theorizes after Nietzschean and

Deleuzian traditions in which sound and music are “not an aesthetic choice but an ontological commitment: the commitment to the primacy of becoming, time, and change” (Cox 157). *Mumbo Jumbo* places black ethnic sound within a “war of vibration and the production of vibratory field.” This “bring[s] forth from before the theory of information a sensing of noise as weapon, blasphemy, plagues, dirt, pollution and destruction” (Clough 68).

Like the antebellum grapevine telegraph, Jes Grew exploits already-established feedback and iteration systems with which to share “common experiences, assumptions, and cultural practices” (Troutman 208), infiltrating and counteracting the dominant culture’s ideological vacuum. Jes Grew’s viral nature creates such a cultural intersection, in which “audioviruses are deployed in affective mobilization via the diasporic proliferation of sonic processes” (Goodman xix).

Arthurian Legend, Man-machine Symbiosis, and the Social

Construction of Technologies in *Flight to Canada*

In *Flight to Canada*, while conversing with President Lincoln, Virginia plantation owner Arthur Swille reveals his anxiety about the cryptic ways African Americans are able to “pass codes to one another” (34). He is aware that his slaves are “in contact with [other] slaves in the rest of the country, through some kind of intricate grapevine” (34). As in *Mumbo Jumbo*, this system works against the dominant culture’s linguistic system. Correspondingly, Raven Quickskill, the trickster slave protagonist, refers to his fellow slave Stray Leechfield as African Americans’ “greased lightning,” “telegraph wire,” and “wing-heeled Legba,”³³

working “under [white] eyes” (73-74). This body/language attachment enables us to read Reed’s concept of a secret communication channel as part of a process of the textualization and scriptualization of bodies. Further, when Reed describes Josiah Henson’s *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave*—the original story of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that Reed explains Harriet Beecher Stowe stole—as Henson’s “gris-gris” and “Ethereic Double” (8), physical existence gets closely linked to the textual representation of experience in *Flight to Canada*.

The close proximity of text and body provides *Flight to Canada* with a basic framework. Uncle Robin, Swille’s house slave, who refers to himself as Swille’s “reading and writing ... computer,” has the capacity to decipher the “scrambled and jumbled” words in order to supplement Swille’s “dyslexia” (171). Such a description of the user/computer dynamic arguably informs the cultural notions from cybernetics, which have tried to interpret biological organisms and their relationships as translatable to “numerical and computational methods...designed to find patterns and meaning in large datasets” (Arbesman). Reed articulates the inheritable structure of slavocracy in the language of *code*, a social and cultural architecture that establishes ontology on the epistemological platforms of modern digital culture. Following contemporary assumptions that codes are “cultural objects embedded and integrated within a social system whose logic, rules, and explicit functioning work to determine the new conditions of possibilities” (Cheney-Lippold 167), the term *codes* refers to new modes of practices regarding the cognition, definition, and interpretation of mundane life-processes in a highly-advanced techno-scientific milieu. The rhetorical construction of codes in *Flight to Canada* dispute the “paradoxical tendency” of cybernetics and posthumanism

theories, which “re-universalize their critique of universality” (Foster xxv). It criticizes the historical inheritance of master-slave technology for reliance on the enclosure by Western language systems.

The proleptic placement of modern technologies in the antebellum era in *Flight to Canada*—such as airplanes, helicopters, Greyhound buses, motor-equipped yachts, air conditioners, Xerox machines, telephones, microphones, cassette tapes, transistor radios, and satellite televisions—can be read as Reed’s rhetorical strategy to employ the premodern U.S. milieu to interpret antebellum culture as a systematic circulation of data organized alongside traditional colonial regimes. Critics have considered the distorted time-space in *Flight to Canada* as part of Reed’s postmodern politics. The anachronistic presence of Raven—who flies to Canada in a “non-stop Jumbo jet” (3)—Levecq asserts, identifies him as a “potential representative of postmodernity” who seeks “to go beyond the limitations of modernity, including its narrow, race-bound concept of the nation” (289-90). Thus, Raven’s mastery over aviation transcribes his geographic migration into a “historical movement, from the archaic, pre-modern South” to a “reflexive modernity” in the North (Levecq 290).

Major scholarship on *Flight to Canada* focuses largely on the reconfiguration of time and history, and, as in *Mumbo Jumbo*, this postmodern practice provides the most axiomatic reading of the novel. Its representation of a conflated time continuum, Spaulding representatively argues, “blur[s] the distinctions between American slavery and late-twentieth-century commodity culture” (26), challenging traditional historiography’s “impulse to bury the past with willful ignorance or abstraction” (25). Reed’s trans-time tropes in *Flight to Canada*,

similarly, are based on his rhetorical experiment to invalidate any “monolithic” definition of black experience and to “reconfigure the accepted protocols of African American discursive tradition” (Rushdy 112). While shedding light on such new inventions of post-Jim Crow black literature—called “neo-slave narratives”—these readings have largely failed to notice the novel’s exploration of the enslavement experience within a process where human experience is describable as a relationship between the physical body, textual letters, and computational codes. The presence of modern technologies in *Flight to Canada* not only aims to reference a particular historical era of the twentieth century, but it provides an epistemological frame with which to understand slavery in the algorithmically-designed language of computation. This creates a discursive space in which slavery is interpretable as a “technologically-mediated and culturally-situated consequence” (Cheney-Lippold 167).

In other words, at the heart of the trans-historical vision and the presence of techno-cultural episteme in *Flight to Canada* lies a perceptual shift mirrored by increasing interests in a cultural understanding of the modern digital world. This echo is not merely fortuitous. *Flight to Canada* is centrally concerned with the logocentric nature of slavery and the political legitimation necessary to reproduce itself. The most conspicuous description of slavery as a systematic logocentric technology comes with Swille’s family history. Having above-the-law authority, the Swilles epitomize a masculine, Anglo-Saxon, slavocratic desire. Reed describes a white male regime as inherited from the legend of King Arthur: “[treating] their serfs like human plows, de-dubbing their women at will; torturing and witchifying the resistance with newfangled devices” (15). When Arthur

Swille's grandfather—a "zealous slave trader, breeder and planter" (15)—died, his dream of an "Anglican Grand Design" (16) is adopted by his son, Rockland Swille. Arthur Swille, who "obey[s] no nation's laws" (16), succeeds such a symbolically-enclosed, white male regime. When he notices that his wife is going to mail a subscription letter to the *National Era*, a magazine that "carried the work by that fanatical Beecher woman" (21), he asks his house slave Mammy Barracuda to destroy it. As Chaney highlights, Swille is "both the figurehead of slavocratic power ... and the medium through which that domination *replicates* itself" (271, emphasis added). As a "pivotal text in a textual system," Chaney goes on to argue, Swille embodies "a cycle of ownership that always posits a master and a collection of properties" (271).

The Swille lineage contains a socio-cultural mechanism in which ancestral kinship is combined with symbolic white male power. It fulfills its role in the colonial regime by inscribing certain linguistic orders. Reed extends the attachment of a biological body and its political signification into the argument that "a great deal, perhaps all, of human and social experience can be explained via computational processes" (Golumbia 8). This rhetoric of computation explains the social fabric in what Katherine Hayles calls the "Computational Universe," which claims material reality to be "generated through computational processes running on a vast computational mechanism underlying all of physical reality" (2005, 3). Reed places the relationship between Swille and Robin in such a perceptual ground, a central premise of which defines human consciousness and natural reality as constructed on "feedback loops" between "human and machine,

dominator, and dominated, subject and object" (Hayles 2005, 241). After Swille dies, Robin says,

Swille had something called dyslexia. Words came to him scrambled and jumbled. I became his reading and writing. Like a computer, only this computer left itself Swille's whole estate. (171)

Robin explains his relationship to Swille as a user-computer interface, and, in this analogy, conventional master-slave dynamics translocate into a conceptual realm of codes where "materially specific ways in which flows across borders create complex dynamics of intermediation" (Hayles 2005, 242). Swille's literacy is mediated through Robin's ability to encode and decode textual information. This thought-data process is structurally identical to the function of a "calculating, data-processing, and information-storage-and-retrieval machine ... designed primarily to solve preformulated problems or to process data according to predetermined procedures" (Licklider 5-6). Reed's description of Robin as Swille's personal workstation corresponds to the contemporary idea of a computer as an "intelligent assistant" that "gather[s] data and attend[s] to such tasks as noise filtering, data smoothing, outlier rejection, and data storage" (Waltz and Buchanan 43).

The human-computer dynamics represented in *Flight to Canada* share the language of the cyberpunk genre, which depicts future technologies as artificial intelligence, android, or brain emulation. Outside a legal boundary of humanness in the antebellum milieu, Robin serves as Swille's artificial intelligence. He embodies "intelligence in human behavior, such as perception, natural language processing, problem solving and planning, learning and adaptation, and acting on

the environment" (Tecuci 168). Robin's intelligence replaces what Swille alone cannot achieve, becoming Swille's "cognitive nonconscious," a process of systematic human-machine interactions that aim to "arrive at solutions difficult or impossible to achieve by explicit means" (Hayles 2014, 200). Simultaneously, this artificial machine gains independence by taking advantage of his master's inability. This is how *Flight to Canada* grafts cyberpunk tropes onto antebellum America, glossing the slave narrative with an epistemological frame in which computation is not understood as "merely simulat[ing] the behavior of complex systems" but is "envisioned as [a] process that actually generates behavior in everything from biological organisms to human social systems (Hayles 2005, 19).

Such computerization of the biological body in *Flight to Canada* parallels cyberpunk notions, such as digital body-alteration, cyborg prostheses, and brain-computer emulation which serve to transform the "supposed 'essence' of humanity, ... minds and souls" (Foster xi). Foster understands cyberpunk tropes as inherently pertaining to race since the "cultural implication[s] of ... 'techniques,' specifically the ways they define 'the nature of humanity, the nature of self'" interrogates the "dualistic habits of thought in western epistemology" (xii). He explains:

The cultural work of cyberpunk fiction can only be fully grasped and evaluated in relation to a longer history speculations about, for instance, evolutionary theory's challenge to the idea of 'the body' as a stable and unchanging ground for human identity, or the origins of the figure of the cyborg in speculation about how humanity might survive an ecological

collapse by adapting ourselves to extraterrestrial environments (rather than changing those environments to suit ourselves). (ixxx)

Foster pays particular attention to cyberpunk body politics and its posthuman ontology, which celebrate “‘fluidarity’ in general” and converts it to a “more specific political context” (xxi). Rethinking cyberpunk and posthuman narratives as a vernacular language of race provides “new possibilities for cultural diversity outside the universalizing framework of the normative human form, which increase[s] possibilities for external control and manipulation of those same uses and possibilities” (Foster 244).

Foster’s reading of cyberpunk colorizes the genre, a purpose found in Reed’s cybernetic depiction of the antebellum United States. In this racial variation of cyberpunk, an algorithmic process of computation pertains to “almost any of kind of material substrate” (Hayles 2005, 17). Read in this light, the King Arthur romance, a sacred text for the Swilles, represents how a white male regime has been reproduced within a putatively enclosed loop of meanings, symbols, and their material embodiments. Swille’s belief in the pseudo-scientific authority as “Dysaesthesia Aethipica,” which he believes causes “Negros to run away” (18), epitomizes such semiotic enclosure and recursiveness. Chaney-Lippold calls such social and cultural normalization of hierarchy a “modulation,” in which a “series of guiding, determining, and persuasive mechanisms of power” function as an “axiom of control” designed along with seemingly open but in fact exclusively “coded language” (169). Such a cultural modulation makes Swille believe himself to be “the last man to go against science,” and the abnormal mental state of a runaway slave to be “rejuvenated” (18-19). Reed represents slavery as a

historically accumulated set of meanings, whose circulation relies distinctively on a combination of different social components: an “information provider who amass [the] data,” a “third-party industry who gather and purchase [the] data as a commodity,” and those who “traffic in [the] data” (Gillespie 174-75). Reed’s representation of the complexity of slavery translates these antebellum dynamics into a process of storing and transmitting certain forms of cultural experience and, more importantly, their hierarchy in the digitalized language of codes. *Flight to Canada*’s cybernetic allusions, therefore, highlight the history of autopoietic slave economy.

Flight to Canada’s assumption that social, cultural, and historical experience can be inscribable in scriptural form is based on the premise that an ontological presence gets mediated through an act of writing. Reed consistently makes analogies between the material human body and the textualization and codification of bodily existence throughout the novel. The act of writing—from grapevine telegraph to algorithmic codes—takes a significant role in Reed’s understanding of African American cultural identity. As Moraru highlights, “processing of specific texts and textual references” makes a substantial contribution to the “production of African American subjects” in the novel (99).

In representing African American subjectivity in language borrowed from modern computer culture, however, Reed’s notion of technological progress and scientific knowledge does not simply transplant techno-cultural tropes into antebellum America. Instead, the novel’s cybernetic allusion sheds light on the way in which textual and scriptural symbolism includes and excludes individual bodies. In other words, *Flight to Canada* not only mirrors a transformation

towards a cybernetic view of world, the novel also captures the moment when the monolithic flow of a slave market economy becomes a site of cultural relocation by second-hand users of Western technology. This challenges the conventional notion that technology serves to reproduce and stabilize class-, race-, and gender-specific hierarchies. That is to say, technology in *Flight to Canada* does not follow what could be called "demonizing technology as a satanic mill of domination" but simultaneously rejects "postmodernist celebrations of the technological sublime" (Penley et al. xii).

Robin represents such dynamics and anxiety that "whenever logical processes of thought are employed ... there is an opportunity for the machine" (Bush). As Robin "dabble[s] with [Swille's] will" to inherit his whole estate (170), he becomes a machine that can "manipulate premises in accordance with formal logic, simply by the clever use of relay circuits" (Bush). While the King Arthur romance and its inherent cultural and social hierarchies have been the family bible that "structures the boundaries, as well as regulates the flows" of slavery, Robin manipulates this slavocratic design through the computer's "pre-configured but also reflexive programmed logic" (Cheney-Lippold 166). In this flexible architecture of computation, what once was a "willing slave, yet more powerful and smarter than humans" (Dinello 64) turns out to be an anti-phallogocentric machine whose ability to "recod[e] communication and intelligence ... subvert[s] command and control" (Haraway 175).

The subversion of master-slave relation that Reed depicts in the metaphor of computation makes it possible to understand *Flight to Canada* as the social dynamic of technology in a technophobic assumption where "technologized

creatures ... often seek to destroy or enslave humanity" (Dinello 2). Echoing the primal fear that the monster's exclamation in *Frankenstein*—"You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!" (134)—this anxiety reveals a fatalistic view that "whether by an inherent property or by an incidental set of circumstances," "technology is a source of domination that effectively rules all forms of modern thought and activity, ... [which] looms as an oppressive force that poses a direct threat to human freedom" (Winner 3). In this novel, an African American slave embodies the subversive nature of such non-human presences as cyborgs, androids, and artificial intelligence.

In the same way in which technophobic implications serve as a central device in representing a master-slave relation in *Flight to Canada*, Raven's mastery of aviation can be understood as technological progress providing minority groups with tools to challenge dominant systems. Raven's airborne escape echoes the diasporic ethos of transatlantic slave-transportation through the Middle Passage, captured in the Flying African myth. This myth reflects the "desires for freedom, cross-Atlantic return, and even death shared by enslaved Africans and their descendants" (Thorsteinson 259).³⁴ Reciting the "African struggle for freedom in the New World" and reflecting "Black affect and need" (McDaniel 36), this diasporic sensibility "evolved from the desire for freedom" to a "narrative of resistance" (McDaniel 38). It addresses the shared African experience of enslavement and the desire for the transcendence over their physical reality. Further, since Raven does not consider a cross-Atlantic flight as a viable route for escape, the theme of magical human flight gets transformed into anti-Garveyism.

While Robin's manipulation of Swille's will transplants a science fiction theme— "supercomputers and programmed androids that revolt their human creators" (Dinello 11)—to the antebellum milieu, the aviation technology points to how airmanship was associated with African American upward mobility from the interwar period through the Civil Rights era. Raven's flying skills allude to the Tuskegee Airmen, the first military pilots group consisting solely of African Americans. Since enlistment in the American military during wartime confirmed full-fledged citizenship (Takaki 36), mastery of flight meant African American social uplift. In a broader sense, it made possible for African Americans to believe that "wartime mobilization unleashed eventually [would break] down barriers of racial segregation and discrimination in American life" (Moye 14). As greater citizenship rights would "help belie ... the basis for racial discrimination in America - white supremacy" (Hooks in Scott xii), the success of African American airmanship was closely tied to the civil rights movement.

In *Flight to Canada's* anachronistic time frame, African American mythic imagination and a techno-epistemological interpretation of antebellum slavery capture a moment where new technologies challenge social regimes that deprive marginalized groups of resources for their own cultural production. Far from neutral, technology serves the dominant culture's information gathering, large-scale deployment of surveillance and control, and maintenance of a panoptic social system. However, Reed not only describes modern technologies as either fatalistic machines or as messianic devices. Rather, *Flight to Canada* engages in the speculative re-creation of "techno-cultural activism" (Penley xiii), which

contributed to the formation of techno-counterculture in the late twentieth century United States.

Conclusion

Mumbo Jumbo and *Flight to Canada* illuminate the moments in which modern techno-culture intervenes in African American cultural identity, pointing to the paradigmatic shifts in thinking about biology, information, machines, and cybernetics. The novels' revisionist historiographies, depicted through Afrocentric myth-rewriting and historical anachronism, can be read as rhetorical tropes representing the recurring manifestation of African cultural heritage. This occurs in a society where media technology's capacity to store and transfer cultural information re-defines racialized experience as digital sonic ecology and computational codes. Conventional perceptions of materiality and textuality change. In doing so, Reed transplants Western epistemology into a racial context where production and consumption of techno-science are deeply embedded in certain cultural and social norms.

Mumbo Jumbo and *Flight to Canada* participate in the aesthetic politics of Afrofuturism. Inheriting George Schuyler's futuristic experiment in *Black No More*, in which he employs a trans-human trope of morphological freedom, bioinformatics in *Mumbo Jumbo* and computation in *Flight to Canada* provide a fertile terrain to consider African American experience in modern techno-world. They not only reconfigure black bodies as a place in which multi-layered dynamics of race become visible, but attempt to explain the historically uneasy relationships between regimental technologies and the ideological positions they

evoke. This rhetorical strategy establishes the Harlem of *Mumbo Jumbo* and the antebellum South of *Flight to Canada* as potential locations to explore African American history and identity in the contemporary world. In this world, it is increasingly difficult to ascertain what constitutes and defines an individual identity. In this intersection, information technology, computation, biopolitics, bio-acoustic materiality, African folklore, and Haitian hoodooism come to redefine black ontology.

Chapter 4: Contesting the Post-Civil Rights United States: Post-Realistic Reconfigurations of Colorblind Racism in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Concrete utopia stands on the horizon of every reality.

–Ernest Bloch, *The Principle of Hope Vol.1*

Introduction

Octavia Butler's *Kindred* has been a rich text for critical exploration. Scholars of African American literature interpret *Kindred* as an historical transcript that adapts post-realism tropes in a racial context. For scholars of the black genre fiction, especially those with an interest in colorblindness of mainstream science fiction, the novel's formal variation on the antebellum slave narrative provides an opportunity to explore the time travel trope in representing U.S. race history.³⁵ Such critical work reflects the cultural climate of the decades following the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in which new racial conditions altered the political discourse of race.³⁶ This shift in cultural atmosphere gave rise to the necessity of new aesthetic modes of racial representation within which science fiction's descriptive plausibility came into consideration.

Due to its unprecedented trope of a trans-time fugitive slave narrative, *Kindred* is involved in the racial debate of science fiction more actively than any other ethno-science fiction works from the late-twentieth century. Critics paid particular attention to the novel's antebellum scenes, treating the novel as an historical document deeply anchored in the antebellum political milieu. Sandra Govan argues that *Kindred* conforms to Lukacsian historical realism, offering a "broad delineation of manners and circumstances attendant upon events" whose "artistically faithful images of concrete historical epochs, ... whole chapters of

African American history, [keep] us spellbound all the while" (95). For Govan, Dana is "a reporter" who "[sketches] a far less romanticized portrait of plantation life" (89), and Butler uses the form of speculative fiction to "extrapolate" realistic observations on a "historically grounded African-American past" rather than to ruminate on "a completely speculative future" (79). Robert Crossley similarly asserts that time travel, however fantastic, provides "the continuity between past and present" through which Butler draws readers' attention to "a lesson in historical realities" (in Butler 279).³⁷ While those scholars weigh the time travel trope's usefulness in offering a new model of history in ways that help readers engage with historical experience, the novel's future space, 1970s California, remains unobserved.

Other scholars have found problems in the way time travel frames the readers' perception of 1970s. They view with skepticism Butler's political treatment of racial minorities in post-Jim Crow America. Especially, they warn of a possibility that the scenes of Dana's antebellum enslavement cloak, or even idealize, the racist nature of modern U.S. culture with the doctrine of post-racial integrationism. They argue that Dana's impersonation of a female slave is secured by her "ideal" life in 1976 California, where "she can be free ... to choose an interracial marriage with Kevin" (Knabe and Pearson 61), or the novel's time travel conceals "racist foundations" of the "liberal discourses of citizenship" and the "progressive logic of capitalism" of the modern United States (Hua 392). This critical notion distinguishes between the cultural realism of the novel's historical passage and the apparently apologetic politics revealed in the novel's celebratory images of post-racial 1970s.

The novel's time travel trope can be read as either a postmodern variation of historical realism or as an apologetic treatment of white masculinist history of the United States. Such dichotomous readings of the novel's two different time periods, however, stop short of recognizing Butler's critique of persistent racism in the supposedly post-racial world. They fail to notice modern U.S. culture's racial blindness depicted in the interracial marriage of Dana and Kevin. *Kindred* critically illustrates modern white supremacist practices, reflecting the cultural climate after the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement, a period featuring an apologetic neoliberal politics of race. Butler places the interracial couple within the post-CRM era where racial inequality becomes invisible in the supposedly non-racial market dynamics and the decline of welfare socialism.³⁸ The present chapter argues that Butler appropriates the time travel trope to expose historical continuities in the racist nature of American democracy. Nineteen-seventies culture in *Kindred* is characterized by neoliberal market universalism established upon a furtive consensus of white supremacist politics following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Alexander, Bonilla-Silva, Lipsitz, and Olson). Butler indicts the post-racial 70s as an inheritor of the *Herrenvolk* republicanism beginning in 1830s, a regime that is "democratic for the master race but tyrannical for subordinate groups" (Berghe 18).

Butler's indictment of the American democracy for racism and its historical connection to the antebellum political milieu echoes David Walker's clarion call in *Appeal*. Walker wrote his *Appeal* to salvage the "truth" and "the strictest rules of morality" (5) from widespread Christian belief that African Americans inferiority was God's will. He tries to awaken his people who were "blinded by the God of

[the Western] world" (6). The blindness that Walker denounces as a principal cause of degradation echoes the color-blind culture of post-CRM United States. This intersection between Butler and Walker is crucial to understanding Butler's racial consciousness and representation of that consciousness. Her speculative overlapping of two distant historical periods, post-CRM United States and the antebellum South, hinges primarily on Butler's perception that white supremacist politics have found their way continuously into the *racist ideal* of American democracy throughout its history. *Kindred* alludes to the political circumstances of those eras, along with specific historical references to race, slavery, and American democracy. In 1976,³⁹ the anti-racist impetus of the CRM had tapered off by the time Jimmy Carter was inaugurated; in 1831, the political reformation led by Andrew Jackson gave rise to a racially-contradicted *Herrenvolk* democracy. Dana feels, in one allusion, that her white husband "look[s] a little like a heroic portrait ... of Andrew Jackson" (240). By locating them in juxtaposition, Butler links two different eras. Just as the 1970s mark the period where residual Jim Crow racism was about to be reformed into what became color-blind racism, the 1830s mark a time when the concept of race was going through political reformation and enhancement within American democracy.

Kindred's narrative is centrally concerned with this historical connection between *Herrenvolk* ideology and modern colorblindness. That historical continuity marks *Kindred's* major strategy, which takes science fiction genre as a platform to highlight the invisible connection. If *Kindred* can be read as an historical novel with its realistic representation of US history (Govan, Steinberg,

and Vint), how is its unrealistic time travel to be understood as part of historical reality?

Kindred adopts post-realism's aesthetic quality, which lends its own reality to the text by reconnecting 1970s culture with 1830s democracy and its contradictions, revitalizing Walker's *Appeal*'s claims in the mid-twentieth century. Butler identifies the underlying mechanism of colorblindness of the post-CRM United States, recoloring and repoliticizing nominally color-blind but racist modern US culture and connecting it to the early nineteenth-century democratic practice that depended on slavery. By doing so, Butler lays groundwork for the possibility of post-realist aesthetics contributing to twentieth century racial discourse.

However, the novel's generic engagement cannot be fully understood in light of science fiction rubrics. *Kindred* also operates through a broader reverberation with the generic inheritances of Richard Wright's social realism and Ralph Ellison's mythic epicism. Wright revisited the nineteenth-century fugitive slave narrative tropes in *Native Son*, yet in a strictly realistic manner, eschewing the tradition's sentimentality. Ellison revised conventional notions of empirical experience in *Invisible Man*, seeking to overcome the limitations of realism. Butler expands the geographic space of *Native Son*'s fugitive narrative into a speculative time passageway through which Dana escapes enslavement. This trans-historical space serves the same racialized epistemology as the underground in *Invisible Man*, enabling the protagonists to realize their socio-existential conditions. *Kindred*'s alternative time/space continuum shares with its literary ancestors a common concern for the adequacy of novel genre in representing racial experience.

This chapter's examination of Butler's formal experiment in *Kindred* analyzes how the novel's chronopolitical tropes respond to the tradition of African American literature in a way that reveals a profoundly racialized historical continuity. However, such an analysis of *Kindred's* form also raises a question regarding the nature of the present-ness of the 1970s in the novel. Since time travel transfigures the 1970s into a never-happened past, *Kindred's* 1970s is not only descriptive in the sense of consensus reality. It creates its own future-universe. It is this speculative universe that enables us to dispute the seemingly invincible universality of market reductionism of modern America. The 1970s in *Kindred* becomes a space, not only of past and present, but of another chronological register, the future. This particular construction of time relocates the 1970s into another stratum of reality, forming an ontological knot that constitutes "another universe in line, waiting to be born" (Csicsery-Ronay 78).

Such futurity charges the unborn, yet ontologically present, historical reality in *Kindred* with what Fredric Jameson calls "utopian politics," "a representational mediation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systematic nature of the social totality" (xii). The future serves as a "narrative convention" designed to provide "distortions of the present" (Csicsery-Ronay 71). In this generic complexity, *Kindred's* time travel takes part in historical progress. Intervening into the agreed-upon empirical world of realism, the novel's science fiction form claims itself as a "political slogan and a politically energizing perspective" (Jameson xii) in a way that contests the status quo of post-racial United States. This critical negativity, or dialectical negation, by the novel's form reaches what

Ernst Bloch calls an "*Ultimum*" of humanity, "the progressive newness of history" (202, italicized in original). Such a newness, or *Novum* in Bloch's terms, is not external to history itself, but remains inherent in the historical process until it "break[s] through out of mere incubation and suddenly gain[s] insight into itself" (124). Butler finds the political possibility of speculative imagination in such materialistic utopianism, which converts an empirically-verifiable 1970s into an unfulfilled yet immanent future. By representing the radical alterity latent in irrepressible racial consciousness, Butler counters the cynicism abundant in the post-racial world, and *Kindred's* trans-time narrative laces Butler's historical proclamation with timely optimism from science fiction utopianism.

The present chapter will first analyze Butler's critical representation of white supremacist culture in *Kindred*. Then we will discuss Dana's time travel to the past in terms of the inherent historicity of the post-realistic imagination of science fiction and its political potential. Finally, similarities between the political situations and underlying racial mechanisms of the 1970s and 1830s will be considered.

Racism without Racists⁴⁰

Kindred inscribes the racialized and sexualized experience of an African American woman onto the intersection of the multi-axial operative power of racism, slavery, and white masculine democracy in modern US history. Butler represents modern American racist culture, in which "public policy and private prejudice work together to create a 'possessive investment in whiteness' that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies" of the contemporary color-blind US

(vii), yet within a significant sexual/gender scope. The transition from Jim Crow to a post-Civil Rights era not only transformed American democracy by decolorizing its racist culture, but concealed the collaborative operation of racial and sexual marginalization. Dana's sexualized racial experience within this dominant culture locates the novel in the context of a womanist discourse and brings into focus "the multidimensionality of Black women's experience" that "the single-axis analysis" of the major contemporary race study has failed to highlight (Crenshaw 23). This narrative underlines how anti-miscegenation sentiment in the post-Jim Crow US depended on sexualized black female bodies.

In spite of the novel's profound involvement in contemporary color-blind racist culture, however, critics have failed to notice Butler's engagement with contemporary racism. For example, Yaszek reads *Kindred* as Butler's "search for a mode of historical memory...appropriate to the experiences of African-American women" (1061) and "struggle to reconstruct African American women's history" in a metaphorical sense (1063). Rushdy asserts that Butler describes "a performance of history" to revitalize the slavery of the past as "the remembered event" ("Families" 137-38). For Govan, it is "the large, panoramic slice-of-plantation-life" that lays the groundwork for "authentic verifiable historical fact" in the novel (91). Even though those critics have constructed meaningful conversations regarding the narrative structure of the novel and the political significance of Dana's subjectivity in African American women's history, they have given little attention to the mid-twentieth century culture of *Kindred* and its relation to Dana's enslaved experience of past.

In response to critical indifference towards 1970s culture in *Kindred* there has been increasing interest in its political implications. Taking skeptical views of Butler's racial consciousness, those critics warned of a potential risk of false consciousness. For example, Reed points out that the novel's antebellum scenes serve to solve Dana's racial and sexual anxieties, which remain repressed in her contemporary life. He asserts that Dana's observation of Rufus's paranoid attachment to Alice suggests "Dana's secret resentment towards her husband" (70) and that "in killing Rufus she has satisfied the secret rage she has harbored against Kevin" (74). Taking a similar perspective, Knabe and Pearson argue that *Kindred's* depiction of interracial marriage "as loving, enduring, and devoid of race-based sexual fetishism...effectively normalizes interracial relations, which had been discursively rendered as queer by a racist, sexist, homophobic culture" (57). Knabe and Pearson continue that Dana's enslavement in the past secures her present life and elides her racial and sexual instability by romanticizing the post-Jim Crow United States as an "ideal" place in which "she can be free, and free to choose an interracial marriage with Kevin" (61).

Paying more attention to Dana's subjectivity impersonating a female slave, Hua argues that her misguided heroism conceals the novel's "white supremacist entertainment" under the guise of what she calls "a black feminist sentimentality" (392). According to Hua, the identification between Dana and Alice serves to alleviate the tension between them provoked by Dana's "prerogative to leave antebellum Maryland with [Kevin]" (394) and her "ability to deny Rufus" (397). Unlike Dana, Alice has to endure sexual negotiation for her survival as a female slave, so Dana's sentimentality does not challenge "the continual violation and

management of black female subjects" (392). On the contrary, it lays bare the novel's "speculative capitalist trajectory," which entrenches "the very nature of a secured future legally, socially, and conceptually for white persons" (392). In Hua's reading, Dana's experience of enslavement is superficial, and for the same reason the novel does not memorialize what it is intended, and expected, to memorialize. Dana's time travel to the antebellum past is reduced to a historical "alibi" (393) that successfully romanticizes Dana's life in 1976.

While these critics focus on revealing how Dana's experience under antebellum slavery construct her subjectivity and how it is falsely related to her contemporary life, Foster calls into question the cultural and political implications of the contemporary scenes in *Kindred*. He takes the same skeptical view of Butler's political consciousness as other critics. Forster insists that early scholarship on *Kindred* "center[ing] the historical narrative of interracial rape, represented by Rufus and Alice's forced relations, do[es] so at the expense of marginalizing the narrative of consensual interracial desire, represented by Dana and Kevin's marriage" (148). Foster focuses more on Butler's description of the life of an interracial couple in mid-twentieth century California. He contextualizes the novel in the racial discourse of post-World War II United States, highlighting "the deep anxiety that circulates in the novel around interracial sex and intimacy" (144). *Kindred's* "narrative ruse," which is enhanced by time travel to the past, "conceals the subversive nature of what initially appears to be a genuinely loving, healthy interracial relationship" (143). Therefore, he concludes, what *Kindred* actually reveals concerns "how black Americans learn to renegotiate the history of slavery within their present-day circumstances" (147). Foster's analysis points out

that reading *Kindred* as a heroic struggle of an enslaved woman does no more than satisfy the expectations of a contemporary liberal belief that the legacy of slavery still haunts the lives of minorities.

It comes as a surprise that in examining *Kindred's* political consciousness none of the critics has paid any substantial attention to how Butler participates in the contemporary race discourse. This discourse has directed its political efforts at disclosing the invisible power structure that has perpetuated white privilege and the marginalization of racial minorities by delegitimizing the political achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. It is no accident that Butler sets the historical background in the 1970s, after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a period when, "although no longer an officially recognized form of standing, whiteness, or the American society as a norm that sediments accrued white advantages onto the ordinary operations of modern society" (Olson 66). Butler's representation of post-CRM racial dynamics is based on her perception that contemporary US culture has created an ideology that has replaced traditional in-your-face racism. As Bonilla-Silva notes, "regardless of the name given to whites' new way of framing race matters, ... the new racial ideology is still about justifying the various social arrangements and practices that maintain white privilege" (211). Dana and Kevin live in a world where there is an invisible racial ideology that "rationalize[s] minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations,...the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (Bonilla-Silva 2).

Kindred first mentions such racial tensions in its description of the asymmetrical social standing that Dana realizes when she first meets Kevin at a

labor agency that is called "a slave market" (*Kindred* 52).⁴¹ The name 'slave market' does not simply reveal "similarities between the past and the present, particularly in economic terms" (Mitchell 64), but denotes a paradigmatic shift in thinking regarding the social standings of ethnic minorities. As the name obscures the differences between Dana and Kevin by symbolically enslaving Kevin as well, it deracializes the different social standings between ethnic groups by reducing them into economic conditions under a market-driven social structure. The invisible color-line in *Kindred* dramatizes the social framing of post-CRM culture, within which the subordinate condition of racial minorities gets transformed into an economic status. Such a shift causes Dana's anxiety regarding Kevin, whose career as a writer and financial success is greater than hers: "He'd not only gotten his book published, but he'd made a big paperback sale. He could live on the money while he wrote his next book. He could give up shitwork, hopefully forever" (54). The invisible racial tension denotes the political and cultural circumstance that "the putatively race-neutral, liberal, social democratic reforms" (Lipsitz 5) have brought about in order to pursue nominal equality.

The 1970s not only demarcate the transition to a state of color-blindness, it is also the decade following the 1967 landmark case of *Loving v. Virginia*, which annulled any provisions that "automatically void[ed] all marriages between a white person and a colored person without any judicial proceeding" (388 U. S. 4). In its decision, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional (2), after which legal prohibitions against interracial marriage transformed into an invisible racist sentiment. In depicting the cultural transformation of antipathy towards race-mixing, Butler lays bare the notion that

hatred of miscegenation is essentially based on the hyper-sexualization of the black female body. When Buz, the alcoholic supervisor from the agency, sneaks up behind Dana and Kevin, he whispers twice,

“You gonna write some poor-nography together!” (54).

Buz, coming back from the coffee machine, muttered, “Chocolate and vanilla porn!”

I closed my eyes in exasperation. He always did that. Started a “joke” that wasn’t funny to begin with, then beat it to death. “God, I wish he’d get drunk and shut up!”

“Does getting drunk shut him up?” asked Kevin.

I nodded. “Nothing else will do it.”

“No matter. I heard what he said this time.” (56)

Buz’s jest reduces the interracial relationship to market-driven consumption of sex and race, placing the coupling within a multi-referenced (race/sex/class) voyeurism, inherently inscribed in the post-bellum US culture where an interracial relationship indicates an abnormal erotic preference. The pornographic rendering of interracial relationships highlights some distinctive traits of colorblind racism. First, it shows how the social, economic, and modern political structure of heterosexual white patriarchy reformed anti-miscegenation sentiments. Shifting racial dynamics within the modern United States created room to reproduce antebellum master/slave sexual exploitation. While a white heteronormative bourgeois regime sanctioned the voyeuristic experience of slavery, the cultural design of modern racism can be found in the intersection of capitalistic sex consumerism and post-Jim Crow color-blindness. As Williams argues, interracial

sexuality became “a new commodity, acknowledged not for the first time, but in a way that explicitly foregrounded the context of the master/slave dynamic of power as an erotic pleasure grounded in the taboos it transgresses” (299). Such commercialized cultural design sanctions white male desire.

The implicit consumption of interracial sex in post-CRM culture underlines how institutional Jim Crow racism transferred into a private realm.⁴² Buz’s jest underlines a colorblind reconstruction of anti-miscegenation sentiment in the post-CRM United States, one where racist ideology hides itself beyond *racial normalization* and, as Olson notes, “race is cast into the private realm” (72). Olson explains one significant trait of colorblind racism as such a “pre-politicization of race.” That “redefines racial domination from white supremacy to abstract discrimination” (73). The term “‘racist’ no longer describes a social structure but individual characters,” and “the problem is no longer segregation but ‘hate,’ not systematic inequality but individual ‘intolerance,’ not privilege but individual ‘extremism’” (73). This transition implies an important historical shift. Racial colorblindness rearticulates whiteness as a politically neutral concept, and systematic white privilege, which had been maintained for centuries, gets relocated outside the political realm. Butler represents this cultural climate, one where systematic discrimination is transformed into a set of individualized emotions or personal choices, when Dana’s female coworker says that Dana and Kevin are “‘the weirdest-looking couple’ she [has] ever seen” (57). It is not until Dana hears of the female co-worker’s “candor” that she “[thinks] of Kevin and [her] as a couple” (57), which in turn showcases the way in which their relationship had already been sexualized even before they actually began it. Buz’s

racist attitude is not just a personal moral deviation. It serves, instead, as an ideological umbrella expressing the dominant post-CRM culture. What was the institutional segregation in the Jim Crow era becomes a mere reference to individual morality.

However, it is not only Buz's voyeuristic racism that represents the cultural atmosphere of color-blindness, but Kevin's racial naivete as well. Dana's anger parallels Kevin's naïve reaction, which visualizes an invisible undercurrent of emotional attachment between Buz and Kevin. Kevin does not understand Dana's racial and sexual depression, ironically resulting in his participation in Buz's racism. Foster highlights this in asserting "Kevin's passivity, his absolute unwillingness to offer any words of solidarity or take any action on Dana's behalf towards Buz, serves as a foreshadowing of future conflict for the lovers" (149), although his overall skepticism of Butler's racial consciousness stops short of discovering *Kindred's* criticism of colorblind racism. The same sentimental discrepancy caused by Kevin's naïve racial consciousness is also visible where they watch slave children imitate nineteenth-century slave auctions.

"The kids are imitating what they've seen adults doing," he said. "They don't understand..."

"They don't have to understand. Even the games they play are preparing them for their future—and that future will come whether they understand it or not."

"No doubt."

I turned to glare at him and he looked back calmly. It was a what-do-you-want-me-to-do-about-it kind of look. (99-100)

While Dana confirms the “diseased” (99) nature of the place in which enslavement naturalizes African Americans’ social subjugation, Kevin thinks Dana is “reading too much into a kids’ game” (100).

Kevin’s naïve understanding of race gains explicitness in his defense of his sister, Carol, who flatly refuses to meet Dana and says she will not meet Kevin again if he marries a black woman. To justify his sister’s racism and ease the tension that it raises between the couple, Kevin uses what Bonilla-Silva calls “the language of color-blindness” (53).⁴³ He first attributes his sister’s racism to her “pompous little bastard” husband who, Kevin believes, “would have made a good Nazi” (110), as if it is not her own racism but her husband’s that constructs her attitude. Furthermore, Kevin goes on to bring up the story of Carol’s “black and fat and homely” friend with whom Carol spent all her time together when they were in a high school. Kevin explains that when Carol and her black friend went on to different colleges she “wound up marrying the first dentist she ever worked for – a smug little reactionary twenty years older than she was” (111). Kevin connects Carol’s racism to her marriage and broken interracial friendship, using what Bonilla-Silva theorizes as “linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies” of color-blindness that “allow [one] to articulate ... frames and story lines” of his or her racism (53). Using these rhetorical tools, Kevin weaves “pieces of fabric,” such as Carol’s friendship with a black woman and her marriage with an old racist into a story that would justify Carol’s racial hostility against Dana (Bonilla-Silva 53). This places the interracial couple within an historical era where racist culture is concealed behind “the normative climate [that has] changed from the Jim Crow

to the post-civil rights era" (Bonilla-Silva 53), one where new-style racism deploys slippery, subtle language.

Reading *Kindred* in the context of 1970s culture suggests that Butler's portrayal of the post-Civil Rights era does not "[mask its] cultural and political implications" (Foster 143). On the contrary, it purposefully elicits an ideological shift in the twentieth century in which the dominant racist culture has changed its appearance and perpetuated itself through double-speak and vagueness. However, the historical resonance of *Kindred* cannot be explained solely through the novel's representation of color-blindness in the 1970s, because it employs a non-linear continuum of time and space that conventional historiography cannot fully highlight. *Kindred* works in tandem with the slave narrative tradition while simultaneously challenging its authenticity as a speculative fiction. The following section analyzes how Butler employs the historical potential of science fiction and its post-realist aesthetic practices.

Neo-slave Narratives and Science Fiction: Form and Historicity in

Kindred

Time travel to the antebellum South allows a moment in which Dana realizes the social and cultural conditions framing her racial and sexual experiences, defamiliarizing common perceptions of race and ongoing effects of contemporary racism, in which a false belief in racial progress haunts minorities. Such a setting relocates the underlying relationship of interracial coupling in the 1970s within racialized heterosexual relationships of the antebellum South. This narrative thread re-colorizes the color-blind racial tensions of mid-twentieth century multi-

cultural United States where racial anxieties have been omnipresent since the Civil Rights Movement.

The overlap of two distant time periods does not take place as a mere psychic phenomenon. This trans-time/space travel relocates Dana into the historical past, and it constitutes her physical reality. When Dana feels “an avalanche of pain, red impossible agony” (261) from the amputation of her left arm by some mysterious agency on her way back from the last time travel episode, Dana’s 1970s body interacts with the past. The unexplained mechanism that transfers Dana back to the antebellum South and the bodily marks that this travel leaves destabilize her present life, making her feel that she loses “much of the comfort and security [she] has not valued until it was gone” (9). Further, when Dana is transported to the past for the second time, she realizes that “Rufus heard Kevin and [her] across time and space” (31). The slavery of the past defamiliarizes Dana’s present life, and a history of racial struggle intrudes into her private space at home. Butler validates the novel’s historicity by providing a physical reality to Dana’s time travel. The institutional violence of slavery inflicted on Dana makes her body “a site of historical interpretation” (Rushdy 1993, 138), but does not mean that Dana goes through antebellum slavery and its aftermath in the same way as Sethe in *Beloved* (1987) and Odessa in *Dessa Rose* (1986). Within the context of neo-slave fictions, how does Dana’s racial experience differ from these African American women protagonists? How does Dana’s subjectivity as an African American female heroine, whose experience takes place outside canonical realism, open up a new horizon of understanding for US racial history?

Kindred is one of few major works that revises the concepts of time and memory as transmutable and flexible in regard color-blind ideology of the twentieth-century United States. This revision is consonant with aesthetic references in a century that has challenged traditional epistemologies, especially in regard to the interaction between subjects, world, and history. When Dana returns from her fourth time travel, she feels "as though she [is] losing [her] place in [her] own time," and the past becomes "a stark, powerful reality that the gentle conveniences and luxuries of [her] house, of *now*, could not touch" (191, emphasis in original). Dana's destabilized sense of the real re-examines common assumptions of historical experience. *Kindred* uses memory as a repository for experience, i.e. the "obscure alter ego" of "recorded history" (Ellison 124), but Dana's memory refuses to serve as mere alternative form of historical record. It manifests instead in the performance of the present along with its material and physical marks on Dana's body.

Reading *Kindred* in the conventional genre frame of science fiction is compelling, particularly given the novel's reliance on basic assumptions of late twentieth-century postmodern literary culture. That continuously poses skeptical challenges towards on the logocentrism of homogenous Western culture. *Kindred* participates in such a science fiction extrapolation, where the "dimension of plausible impossibility" brings "the purely rhetorical chronotope of utopian fiction to its own" through "the meticulous construction of an intermediary fictional world" (Paschalidis 46). Furthermore, critics have found interpretive ways to understand the futurism of science fiction as dialectical within the Lukacsian notion of historical realism. The marginality of science fiction, due to its focus on

unfulfilled desire towards the future, is not central to the genre, because—as Freedman points out—“the future is crucial to science fiction not as a specific chronological register, but as a locus of radical *alterity* to the mundane status quo, which is thus estranged and historicized as the concrete past of potential future” (55, emphasis in original). Such an unborn yet ontologically present future-alterity establishes what one may call utopian realism, a speculative mediation on radical differences that might otherwise not be observed in conventional frames. In this generic basis, future becomes a narrative convention offering “distortions of the present” (Csicsery-Ronay 71), an interpolation to the agreed-upon empirical world of realism. This revalidation of future-history confronts reality, converting the empirically-verifiable world into an unfulfilled yet immanent future.

Understanding science fiction as dialectical to historical realism does not provide sufficient explanation of *Kindred*’s engagement in African American political agendas, just as the Lukacsian notion of realism does not elucidate the historical experience of racial minorities as fully as it does class struggle. This is further demonstrated when one considers that *Kindred* inherits from the tradition of antebellum slave narratives and reworks its basic assumptions through its chronological setting, which corresponds to a modern era during which “race occupied the center stage of American politics in a manner unprecedented since the Civil War era...[and] the very *meaning* of race was politically contested” (Omi and Winant 2, emphasis in original).

Transplanting basic assumptions of the antebellum experience and thereby contesting the meaning of race in the post-Civil War United States, Butler

participates in the struggle of neo-slave narrative writers who attempt to “assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (Rushdy 1999, 1). Such an attempt is geared towards salvaging African American experience from its literary appropriation by white writers, such as in Daniel Panger’s *Ol’ Prophet Nat* (1967) and William Styron’s *Confession of Nat Turner* (1968). The emergence of the Black Power movement and the New Left provides a historical background for the social and political atmosphere towards which *Kindred* gestures: the legacy of slavery and the color-blind reinvention of racism in the twentieth-century United States. Utopic visions of a post-Jim Crow “raceless society” gave rise to the “self-determination” by the black community (Omi and Winant 98).

Kindred counteracts literary conventions along two different aesthetic lines. It not only depicts the recurrence of racialized experience between the 1970s US and the antebellum South, but also examines how racial discourse can politicize contemporary racial politics by imagining a material juncture in history. In other words, the politics of *Kindred*, which reconsiders white historiography and its legacy in post-Jim Crow culture, are largely indebted to the science fiction genre. In creating a non-linear historical model, Butler calls into question traditional notions of history and subjectivity and defies historical foundationalism “embedded within the ‘realistic’ representation of slavery in traditional history and historical fiction” (Spaulding 2). Such aesthetic negotiation and political positioning place the historical complexities of African American experience at an intersection where the unconventional literary representation of slave experience informs a new understanding of US racism.

In order to understand how Butler builds her concepts of race, racism, and the history of slavery, critical attention should be given to how Butler uses the science fiction genre to imbue a race-specific historicity into the text. In this respect, it is surprising that even though scholarly interest has focused on *Kindred's* post-realistic form of science fiction, few critics have addressed the extent to which Butler appropriates the genre to both incorporate and counteract the slave narrative tradition. For example, Spaulding asserts that postmodern slave narrative writers "share many of the key preoccupations of postmodern aesthetics and politics" in order to "engage in the dismantling of Enlightenment conceptions of history and identity and the totalizing grand narrative Western cultural superiority" (3). Levecq points out that *Kindred* shows "a constructivist and a realist agenda simultaneously" (527), through which "a fantastic premise" and "a realistic, even documentary streak" become compatible (529). In spite of acute insights into the possibility of historical interpretation of a post-realistic narrative, neither critic can explain how the perceptual distortion of reality without any scientific or observable evidence brings realistic validity to *Kindred* as an African American historical novel. This critical lacuna begs the question: what literary traits of *Kindred* as a science fiction undergird its racialized historicity? Where does Butler's racial variation of time travel theme come from?

Twentieth-century African American writers have experimented with the form and representation of racial experience. *Kindred's* engagement in formal experiments is consonant with two major variations of modern African American literature: Richard Wright's urban social realism and Ralph Ellison's revisited black existentialism. Technically revising African American narrative forms, *Kindred*

reframes Wright's urban variation of nineteenth-century protest tropes and Ellison's revised notion of empirical experience, both of whose basic themes to a large extent comported with the sensibilities of nineteenth-century anti-racist/slavery protest rhetoric.

Kindred echoes the formal experiments of these writers in strategic manners. The novel inherits *Native Son's* racial variation of Lukacs's realism, which centers on the "aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change" to capture the "immanent (social) reality" (Lukacs 162) in a racial context. Butler simultaneously keeps a distance from Wright's strict realism, gesturing instead towards Ellison's mythic epic realism that attempted to overcome the limitations of an "immediacy of empirical reality" (Lukacs 162). Such aesthetic inheritances establish political and speculative registers in which *Kindred* makes its profoundly chronopolitical gesture in the language of classic science fiction tropes. The black presence in this distorted time continuum operates within a non-linear historical model, one that Ellison conceptualized in *Invisible Man* as "the spiral of history" like a "boomerang" (6). Trans-realistic representation of black protest informs the novel's complex engagements with African American literary history from the nineteenth century onward.

While Wright's *Bigger* revitalizes Frederick Douglass' fugitive narrative in urban Chicago, and Ellison's anonymous protagonist claims a nationalistic American vision from Ralph Waldo Emerson, Dana's trans-historical journey in *Kindred* descends from David Walker's powerful antislavery manifesto in *Appeal*. Walker wrote his *Appeal* to salvage the "truth" and "the strictest rules of morality" (5) from the widespread Christian belief that African American inferiority was

God's will in an attempt to awaken his people who were "blinded by the God of [the Western] world" (6). The blindness that Walker denounced as a principle cause of degradation in *Appeal* finds echo in Butler's representation of colorblind culture in *Kindred*, recapturing Walker's emphasis on the necessity of African American educational enlightenment in order to achieve liberation. Walker uses the term enlightenment in an ambivalent manner. For him, the "ignorance and consequent degradation" of his race was caused by "enlightened parts of the world" who "[had] plunged [African Americans] into wretchedness" (21). However, Walker also calls upon his race "to cast [their] eyes upon the wretchedness of [their] brethren ... [and] *enlighten [them]*" (30, emphasis in original). This notion of education and enlightenment as repressive yet simultaneously resistant gets revived in *Kindred*, where written history is represented as an unreliable source of memory. While Dana's literacy becomes a source of exploitation by Rufus (Flagel, Steinberg, Yaszek), literacy also serves for her survival and transgression in the nineteenth century.

With this bow with its literary ancestors, *Kindred* extends the classic time travel trope to the extent that the trope takes ontological questions about time, temporality, and cognition into Afro-diasporic history. Such an attempt to colorize time travel is not surprising, since time travel narratives have served as a "narratological laboratory," a philosophical space in which "temporality, history, and subjectivity" are examined in a "narrative machine" (Wittenberg 2). Time travel's "mechanism for revising the arrangements of stories and histories" (Wittenberg 1) brings to light essential questions of existence *per se* by inserting temporal disjunctions. *Kindred's* time travel does not simply conform to the tenets

of the Wellsian model, in which trans-time travel demonstrates the “power of technological rationality to take control over the part of nature we can least control” (Csicsery-Ronay 87). Instead, the novel’s time travel trope engages in the loop-paradox, also known as the grandfather paradox, in which the past threatens the present conditions of existence. Butler introduces this paradox when Dana understands the reason behind her time travel.

After all, what would have happened to me, to my mother’s family, if I hadn’t saved him?

...

But somehow, it didn’t make enough sense to give me any comfort. It didn’t make enough sense for me to test it by ignoring him if I found him in trouble again—not that I could have ignored any child in trouble. But this child needed special care. If I was to live, if others were to live, he must live. I didn’t dare test the *paradox*. (29, emphasis added)

Dana’s time travel is not only to save Rufus but to preserve her own existence. This is a central paradox of *Kindred*. As Flagel asserts, “she changes history in order to preserve it” (221). Dana’s is caught in this inevitability, where “free will and determinism” are “asserted simultaneously” (Rose 109). This incompatible presence conceives another reality that rebuilds the past, present, and future outside a chronological order, enabling us to assume that time-space in *Kindred* splits in dyadic realities. In the original reality, Rufus’s security is crucial to Dana’s birth. In the other reality that Dana’s time travel creates, Dana’s racial awakening alters the time-space continuum. Therefore, the time paradox in *Kindred* not only expresses a crisis of Dana existence, but serves as an epistemological device that

opens a world in which Dana's racial awakening reconstructs the reality on which she stands. Such a new continuum of time-space shares "one ultimate purpose" of classic time travel narratives, that is, to "find a way to prevent our own deaths" by "exterminat[ing] the radical otherness of history and other culture" (Csicsery-Ronay 88). Since it is Dana's racial identity that brings her into the paradox, and this paradox can be solved by eradicating racial otherness in her lineage, her time travel alters the meaning of otherness. This is how *Kindred* colorizes time-travel's basic premise, which aims to reconstruct time as "an architecture that can be redesigned, a plasma that can be reshaped, or a machine that can be manipulated by human intension" (Csicsery-Ronay 87). By doing so, the novel transplants the purposes of time-travel narrative into a racial context. If we interpret the novel's time travel in this way, it is important to examine how such a re-creation of this narrative device can be made possible through science fiction and how it can be used in a political context.

Delany's "subjunctivity" (10) suggests that there is, in the fictional space articulated under the unwritten rules of science fiction, a certain missing link. That link carries out a crucial role in elaborating the genre's inherent logics. Referring to "the tension on the thread of meaning that runs between (to borrow Saussure's term for 'word') sound-image and sound-image" (31), the term highlights the discrepancy between sound-images, or signifiers that locate science fiction outside the realm of the naturalistic fiction. In his explanation of the concept, Delany suggests three different types of subjunctivity in literature; "could have happened," "could not have happened," and "have not happened" or "will not happen," which respectively corresponds to naturalistic fiction, fantasy,

and science fiction. At the level of science fiction subjunctivity, in which an author describes the events that “*have not happened*” or “*will not happen*” (32, emphasis in original), readers must correct their own systems of understanding “in accord with what we know of the physically explainable universe” (33). This science fictional subjunctivity connects the cognitive missing link in the novel’s narrative—the unknown agency that leads Dana and Kevin to the past in *Kindred*— and uses it for political purpose by linking the scientific and rational blindness of the plot to the reader’s lack of knowledge of African American history. Such blindness gives rise to a moment within which readers are able to revise their knowledge of the historical continuity from the antebellum South to its actual performance in the present world. This knowledge otherwise might remain undisclosed under the myth of racial equality and its ideological appropriation by white supremacist paradigms.

In regards to this missing link and its interpretive possibility, Darko Suvin uses the term “novum,” referring to “a strange newness” (1972, 373), to explain the inner coherence through which estranged knowledge as an underlying structure of reality “has grown into the *formal framework* of the genre...within a still predominantly ‘realistic’ context” (375, emphasis in original). Suvin’s concept of ‘novum’ marks a radical shift in science fiction studies. This is why Parrinder calls Suvin the “Galileo or Columbus of SF studies” (9). Focusing on “knowledge as enlightenment in general, rather than on science in particular” (Milner 260), Suvin’s novum sheds light on the fundamental rule of science fiction, in which the genre posits “fictional hypothesis” with scientific rigor to construct “the textual world ... based on post-Baconian view” (Uhlenbruch 162). Moylan posits that

novum refers to a “utopian hope which helps to pull the dystopian struggle forward” (62).

Novum does not simply refer to a fictional world arbitrarily invented by an author. Instead, it is the space “postulated on and validated by the post-Cartesian and post-Baconian scientific *method*” (1979, 65, emphasis in original), which “cannot be empirically tested either in the laboratory or by observation in nature” but, nevertheless, “*can* be methodically developed against the background of a body of already existing cognitions, or at the very least as a ‘mental experiment’ following accepted scientific, that is, cognitive logic” (66, emphasis in original). The reality of the world transfigured by the novum, therefore, should have a certain coherence that historical and social practice could provide in order to construct “new semantic meaning that crystallizes the novum in human consciousness” (80). Suvin further discusses the historical potential of this new semantic structure and its radical visions by using Hegelian dialectics, where “the thesis would be naturalistic fiction” that is empirically provable and “the antithesis would be supernatural genres” that lack such empirical reality, which leads to the conclusion that science fiction is the synthetic conflation of these two genres (80-81).

While the Suvinian model discovers a potential source of historicity from the novelty of science fiction, the term ‘novum’ had much more political content when Ernst Bloch first coined the term in a heavily materialistic context. Bloch contends that Novum, intentionally capitalized, drives humanity out of its *status quo* towards the not yet manifest. For Bloch, the eventual purpose of humanity is to reach “*concrete utopia*” that “*stands on the horizon of every reality*” (Bloch 223,

emphasis in original). Non-empirical impulses towards “Not-Yet-Being” (205) are not naïve optimism, but part of a historical process where “repressed elements of the new, humanized society, that is, of the concrete ideal, are set free” (199). Therefore, the utopian impulse is not what people create, but lies inherent in the historical process as “*objective-real correlates*” (205, emphasis in original). What is considered an absence is in fact “unbecome total goal-content itself,” which leads to “*Ultimum*” of humanity in “the progressive newnesses of history” (202, emphasis in original). Future-oriented rationality inherent in utopian desire gives rise to moments in which mundane reality becomes dramatically transformed into a potential future to fulfill political-historical utopian impulses. Bloch believes in the political potential of what has usually been accepted as irrational or unscientific, and its ethical possibilities in the development of history and humanity.⁴⁴

Neither Bloch and Suvin simply literalize the novelty of unrealistic imagination as an absence of reality. On the contrary, they imbue sheer reality into this absence by demonstrating that the historical and political potentials of the imagination come into being only when this absence of reality is interpreted as historical necessity. Bloch and Suvin shed light on the inherent historicity and politics of non-empirical experience. Dana’s trans-time/space relocation describes the transfiguring process of speculative historicization, in which non-empirical imagination is constructed within a material reality so as to alter the basic premises of a mono-lineal model of history. Dana’s racial and sexual identities in her modern life get transformed as transgressive, destabilizing antebellum white masculine norms. However, the transgression of social boundaries takes place

most drastically when Dana's intellectual ability proceeds to become an unintegrated absence of history.

Dana reverses the basic relationship between Euro-American citizens and African American slaves based on the knowledge-making practices of Western logocentric rationality. Dana's literacy and historical/scientific knowledge not only provide her with a means of negotiation for her survival and liberation, but also suggest the complicated cultural and political contexts surrounding the classic Enlightenment belief in the improvement of human faculties by way of knowledge acquisition. Dana's medical knowledge positions her as an observing subject, reducing whites to objects of her observation. When Rufus is running a fever, Dana cures him with the aspirin that she brought from her home in California. She understands what causes Rufus's fever and that mosquitos can carry the disease, which even "doctors of the day [don't] know" (203). By the time the doctor arrives to treat Rufus, his fever is already gone.

The doctor asked his questions. Was I sure Rufus had had a fever? How did I know? Had he been delirious? Did I know what delirious meant? Smart nigger, wasn't I?

I hated the man. He was short and slight, black-haired and black-eyed, pompous, condescending, and almost as ignorant medically as I was. (137)

Rufus's reliance on Dana's medical authority leads to the inversion of their racialized relationship. This gains particular significance in the context of antebellum culture, where phenotypic racial differences were considered an intrinsic determinant of physiological inferiority. Such ideas were visible in the medical taxonomy of Benjamin Rush, dean of the University of Pennsylvania

Medical School, and Samuel Cartwright, a famous Louisiana physician. Benjamin Rush supported racial stereotyping by arguing that African Americans suffered from “an affliction called *Negritude*, which was thought to be a mild form of leprosy” (Jackson 4, italicized in original). Samuel Cartwright, “whose work represented the cutting edge of medical research on black bodies,” cited “physiological differences” between races “to prove physical and mental suitability of blacks for enslavement” (Woolfork 30). He coined the terms *Drapetomanias*—“the disease causing negroes to run away” (Cartwright 331)—and *Dysaesthesia Aethiopica*—a “hebetude of the mind and obtuse sensibility of the body” (Cartwright 333).

The doctor’s questions epitomize an edifice of pseudo-scientific racism, where medical knowledge played a significant role in the formation of racist sociobiology. Dana’s transgressive subjectivity, on the other hand, demystifies the cultural design in which “African Americans have been scripted as diseased, enfeebled, infantile, or hyper-violent by the American medical community” (Long 472). In its transhistorically-formulated subjectivity, through which Dana enters a state of enlightened self, *Kindred* reformulates David Walker’s emphasis on African American self-enhancement by means of education. In doing so, Butler practices post-humanistic politics that reformulate Enlightenment rationality and the post-realistic politics of science fiction in order to envision an alternative future /present. This speculative space enables us “to imagine there’s a possibility to exist outside of the current system” and “to shift our thinking away from the state keeping us safe” (Imarisha).

Butler's trans-historical politics of race in *Kindred* oppose a hegemonic belief in assumed internal servitude. On such a basis *Kindred* finds its way into new notions of history and the historical experience of African Americans. Butler does not provide any explanation about the agency and the mechanism that operate time travel, so what gives historical reality to the novel is not evidence or scientifically provable explanation. In this time and place the agency of a racialized protagonist crystalizes into the reality of white supremacist culture of the post-Jim Crow United States. An imaginary but coherent historical insight on race and slavery informs the substructure of *Kindred* as comprehensible and acceptable reality, through which the novel takes part in actual historical processes.

The seemingly exclusive logic for the inner coherence of *Kindred* depends on the historical reality that racism has never disappeared but "changed over time, taking on different forms and serving different social purpose in each time period" since slavery (Lipsitz 4). The internal logic that connects the United States of the 1970s to antebellum Jacksonian slavery discloses the racist legacy of American democracy and the dominant racist culture that operates on the same basis as pre-CRM racial discrimination where "power, property, and the politics of race ...continue to contain unacknowledged and unacceptable allegiances to white supremacy" (Lipsitz vviii). In the same fashion, it is not merely Dana's psychological awakening to her racial identity that time travel to the past brings to her life. Instead, time travel crafts a new discursive field to discover the racist democracy constructed in the nation-building process and to contest color-blind US post-CRM culture. Time travel is one of the oldest tropes of the science fiction

genre, but when used to highlight African American history and its aesthetic imagination it attains political power along with interpretive potential.

Race, Enlightenment, and American Democracy

Kindred characterizes mid-twentieth century racist culture in the United States by overlapping Dana's present life with the antebellum South in a speculative way. This spatio-temporal overlapping does not occur without specific historical references in regard to race. Butler specifies the time of the contemporary scenes along with an allusion to the Lebanon evacuation during Gerald R. Ford's presidency.⁴⁵ Nineteen seventy-six is the last year of Ford's presidency, after which Jimmy Carter succeeded. Carter has rarely been considered a segregationist, but rhetorical changes in his public speeches show interesting shifts in his political attitudes to race and racism. He gained approval from desegregationists when he announced in his 1971 inaugural speech as governor of Georgia that:

I say to you quite frankly, that the time for racial discrimination is over. No poor, rural, weak, or black person should ever have to bear the additional burden of being deprived of the opportunity of an education, a job, or simple justice.

However, when running for the presidency in 1976 he changed his tune and defended ethnic enclaves, saying:

I am not going to use the Federal Government's authority deliberately to circumvent the natural inclination of people to live in ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods....I think it is good to maintain the

homogeneity of neighborhoods if they've been established that way....I have nothing against a community that's made up of people who are Polish or Czechoslovakian or French-Canadian, or black, who are trying to maintain the ethnic purity of their neighborhood. This is a natural inclination on the part of people. (Lydon 1)

Those speeches not only reveal his ambivalent racial attitudes, but epitomize the cultural atmosphere in which institutional segregation was transferred into the putatively neutral, private realm. For him, the ethnic enclave does not result from housing discrimination. It is instead "the natural inclination of people" to maintain "ethnic purity." Moreover, even though he cites several ethnic groups such as "Polish," "Czechoslovakian," "French-Canadian," or "black," he never mentions the white community that had the greatest benefit from institutional segregation. By reducing the ethnic enclave to the result of personal choice by ethnic minorities Carter discredited antiracist legislation of the Civil Rights era, such as the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Carter's presidency arguably demarcates the transitional period that led up to the neo-liberal/conservative politics in the following decades, such as the War on Drugs during the Reagan administration in 1980s and legislative opposition to affirmative action and civil rights enforcement of the Bush Sr. administration in the 1990s. Alexander considers this era to be the inception of "the New Jim Crow" system (2), the new racial order that has tried to enforce the economic and political interests of the dominant racial group without any explicit racist agenda.⁴⁶

While the 1970s in *Kindred* alludes to the outset of new racial system, the antebellum scenes—which range from the 1810s to the 1830s—correspond to a

time when the political meaning of race also went through significant changes.

The chronological setting for the antebellum scenes and their historical references in *Kindred* is a purposeful narrative strategy, as when Dana makes an analogy between Keven and Andrew Jackson, saying Kevin “look[s] a little like a heroic portrait ... of Andrew Jackson” (240) after returning from her travel to 1829, the year Andrew Jackson began his presidency. The 1830s occupy a significant historical landmark in American political system as Jackson was opening up an experiment in mass democracy. The Jacksonian era radically reshaped the political system of United States. It was a time when “the relationship between whiteness and republican citizenship was cemented” (Olson 40) and race was institutionalized “as the most important mode of differentiation between a newly configured national body politic and its own (racialized) others” (Sale 4). As Shklar points out, American citizenship began referring to more than simply being a citizen by this time. Instead, “it confers dignity and standing upon members of the polity over and against noncitizens” (9). Because during the Jacksonian era the quintessential group of noncitizens were slaves *de facto*, “citizenship as standing [linked] democracy to race” (Olson 44). Frederickson asserts that this system of democracy was based on an “ideological marriage between egalitarian democracy and biological racism,” which “pandered at once to the democratic sensibilities and the racial prejudices of the ‘plain folk’ and was thus well suited to the maintenance of inter-class solidarity between planters and non-slaveholders within the South” (154-55). It is this “slavery as an economic system” (Lockley 164) that underlay white unity. The contradictory ideal of Jacksonian democracy germinated the political doctrine of *Herrenvolk* republicanism, the regime that is

“democratic for the master race but tyrannical for subordinate group” (Berghe 18). In this dualistic system, western equalitarianism was “tightly interwoven with bureaucratic will and police violence, and with a state of siege in the colonies” under its ideological design (Losurdo 375).

Butler describes this linkage between race, citizenship, and democracy during the 1830s. Dana tells Rufus that:

You are reading history, Rufe. Turn a few pages and you’ll find a white man named J.D.B. DeBow claiming that slavery is good because, among other things, it gives poor whites someone to look down on. That’s history. It happened whether it offends you or not. Quite a bit of it offends me, but there’s nothing I can do about it. (140)

Dana’s critique is consonant with one of the critical race theory’s major arguments that “the social stability of American democracy” is closely linked to the racial hierarchy ensured by the “*cross-class alliance* between the capitalist class and a section of the working class” (Olson 16, emphasis in original). Dana mentions J.D.B. DeBow, publisher of *De Bow’s Review*, a major Southern journal from New Orleans. DeBow believed in slavery’s advantage in maintaining the class division social structure by making “common cause with” working class, non-slave holding white males and enabling them to “look down upon those who are beneath [them] at an infinite remove,” while “the poor white laborer at the North [was] at the bottom of the social ladder” (74). When Butler overlaps images of two leading white citizens in *Kindred*—the slaveholder Rufus and the liberal Kevin—she creates an invisible analogy between two distant racist cultures. References to this historical recurrence of white male regime occurs in

Dana's observation: "I heard [Kevin] cursing. He had a slight accent, I realized. Nothing really noticeable, but he did sound a little like Rufus and Tom Weylin. Just a little" (190). Dana and Kevin perform a master/slave relationship in order to avoid raising Rufus's suspicion. This role-playing elucidates, as Crossley notes, "parallels between Rufus Weylin and Kevin Franklin: their facial expressions, their language, even after a time their accents merge in Dana's mind so that at times she mistakes one for other" (in Butler 271).⁴⁷ The doubling of Kevin and Rufus, particularly the proximity of their language, indicates the compelling recurrence of racialized social control and its cultural framework that "have been justified by new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results" (Alexander 21). In this light, it is not surprising that Butler specifies the two historical points in *Kindred*, the Jacksonian era and Carter's post-racial United States, both of which mark significant ideological shifts in regard to race, democracy, and the perpetuation of masculine whiteness as a political norm.

Conclusion

The speculative re-mix of the post-Jim Crow era and the Jacksonian United States by way of time travel in *Kindred* highlights moments in US history where contradictory ideals of American democracy have reproduced a white supremacist agenda. By identifying the post-CRM United States with the Jacksonian era, Butler recolors and repoliticizes mid-twentieth century and supposedly post-racial America where new meanings of race were invented with the political purpose of protecting and maintaining white supremacist polities.

Kindred's interpretation of post-Jim Crow culture insists racial difference still determines the material conditions of racial minorities' lives. In this sense, Butler's historical consciousness reveals itself starkly when Dana loses her arm on the way back to her house. This physical handicap illustrates not only how travel to the antebellum past leaves Dana with psychological damage, but retains its physical manifestation in the present culture, whose racist nature depends on the racial and sexual marginalization of black female bodies. In the cyclical structure that starts "with her narrator in a disoriented, post-traumatic state of disfigurement, Butler dislodges both her and the reader from the secure, familiar, and protected space of 'home'" (Flagel 227), translocating the private location to the broader context of 1970s racist culture.

Through the physical manifestation of the legacy of slavery in the post-Jim Crow United States, Butler creates what Ramon Saldivar calls "historical fantasy ... a new 'imaginary' for thinking about the nature of a just society and the role of race in its construction" (574). *Kindred's* post-Cartesian epistemology provides a new framework for understanding historical meanings of race and racism in the US, deconstructing the common perception of time and space as a stable and unchanging ground of reality. The trans-historical equation of antebellum South and post-CRM United States rejects naïve liberalism on the racialized condition of ethnic minorities. As Salvaggio suggests, "Dana's *new* perspective reminds her that simply by virtue of his color and sex, Kevin is automatically aligned with that oppressive society" (33-34, emphasis added). Dana's realization that she is involved in the historical moment where whiteness as a political power "is everywhere in the US culture" but is "very hard to see" (Lipsitz 2). The trans-

historical experience of interracial protagonists offers Butler and her readers an interpretive framework within which anxieties circling around post-CRM culture in the United States can be understood.

Chapter 5: Race, City, and Representations of a Post-racial World: Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Since black writers began adapting post-realist tropes of science fiction, the genre has become one of the most significant artistic devices to explore African American experience in modern industrial world. The genre's imaginative power serves for critiques of antebellum United States regarding race, and the white masculinity that maintains racial supremacy. In particular, modern black science fictions pay substantial attention to neoliberal politics in the post-Jim Crow era and the ways that shifting political strategies of dominant U.S. culture shape the social standings of ethnic minorities.⁴⁸ Science fiction's usefulness in representing black racial experience is due to the fact that African diaspora has always inhabited a "sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements" (Dery 180). This explains how science fiction futurism offers viable devices to African American artists. Through analysis of African American science fiction we observe how technological shifts reshape race dynamics.

This chapter explores the shifting politico-social milieu of urban technoculture in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Those novels speculatively illustrate racial climates in an urban city in the mid-twentieth century where racial inequality is invisible in supposedly non-racial market dynamics and the decline of welfare socialism.⁴⁹ Even though Whitehead and Hopkinson do not specify their novels' historical eras, their stories occur where conflicts between authority and minority groups constitute an unrecoverable wound in history. The Detroit Riots of 1967, considered "the

greatest tragedy of all the long succession of Negro ghetto outbursts" (Fine 1), underlies racial experiences in *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Both novels use the riots to illustrate moments of a purportedly post-racial era, one in which racial discrimination prevails by means of practices such as urban ghettoization, gentrification, and colorblind racism. Whitehead and Hopkinson map the modes in which Afro-diasporic experience in modern culture are captured in the genre fiction tropes of detective fiction and zombie fantasy. Both writers demonstrate how modern metropolises have served as central sites of racial discrimination in the contemporary era. In a plot set in a near future, Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* depicts an elevator crash and the pursuit of a behind-the-scenes wirepuller. Unlike conventional detective fiction tropes, in which a mystery serves to prove a victory of western scientific rationalism over irrationality, *The Intuitionist* distorts this ideological function of the genre. It draws readers' attention to an invisible world in which race disappears amid the post-civil rights colorblindness. Inheriting Toni Morrison's critique of the underlying presence of African Americans in canonical American writers' works, Whitehead represents the colorblind atmosphere of the modern United States through a ghost-in-the-machine theme, a concept with which writers explore limitations of human cognition and the possibilities of unrecognized-yet-existent reality.

Hopkinson sets *Brown Girl in the Ring's* main narrative in a post-apocalyptic urban metropolis in Canada left abandoned since ruined by ethnic riots. The novel contextualizes these riots within postwar global economic restructuring and political changes that led to massive deflation and social rearrangements. This historical shift towards the post-Fordist world in which factory-centered

production was transformed and the class hierarchy was reformulated alongside color lines, underlies *Brown Girl in the Ring's* plot premise of widespread "crime, gang violence, vandalism, and poverty" (Reid 297). Taking white suburbia and ghettoized city cores as its social landscape, *Brown Girl in the Ring* dramatizes an organ-trafficking story in a Caribbean Canadian community. It employs conventions of spirit-possession and zombie narratives to highlight the way in which slums in modern metropolises are systematically turned into racially segregated spaces. Hopkinson uses motifs of cannibalism whose images entwine closely with Western imagination and provide justification for "oppression, extermination, and cultural cannibalism (otherwise known as imperialism)" in the Caribbean islands since the age of colonial expansion (Kilgour 148). Using magical-realist tropes of spirit possession and zombification, Hopkinson explores interlocking significations of cultural cannibalism and consumer capitalism in modern techno-culture, criticizing an Anglo-Canadian biopolitical regime that exploits Caribbean immigrants.

The Intuitionist and *Brown Girl in the Ring* illustrate how systematic spatialization of space and geographical gentrification create class-race hierarchies in urban areas. By setting a modern city as a default background to explore race dynamics in the post-Jim Crow era, this chapter concludes that *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* align twentieth-century race history with a cultural climate in which industrial transformation, techno-scientific progress, and geographical modernization characterize a supposedly post-racial world.

Ghost in the Machine and the Haunted City: Racialized Map of Technology in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*

In a course on intuitionism at the Institute for Vertical Transport, a prestigious training school of elevator technology in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*, professor McKean introduces the topic of the "Dilemma of the Phantom Passenger" (100), a concept that calls into question the existential status of an elevator and its relationship to a passenger. It asks what will happen to the elevator if a passenger presses a button and suddenly changes his or her mind, taking a stairway instead; therefore, the elevator is moving while it does not hold any passenger or freight. Bernard, a student, answers:

The elevator does not exist when there is no freight, human or otherwise, then I think in this case the doors open and the elevator exists, but only for the loading time. Once the doors close, the elevator returns to *nonbeing* – 'the eternal quiescence' – until called into service again. (101, emphasis added)

While placing its reciprocity of existence within an "index of being" (100), Whitehead's concept of a phantom passenger speculates on the dialectical relation between two different levels of being. Lila Mae, the African American female protagonist, supports this idea, adding that "an elevator doesn't exist without its freight. ... the elevator and the passenger need each other" (102). Frederick Gorse, an enthusiastic empiricist student, feels "queasy with a diffuse disgust and the choppy waters of [the intuitionist idea]" (99). Gaining a similar hermeneutical consonance with the novel's catch phrase—"There is another world beyond this one" (63)—the classroom conversation on the phantom passenger

evokes the problem of the recognition of an invisible being and a discrepancy between existence and perception. When Bernard mentions an “elevator’s *will*,” which he believes would create the machine’s “vertical imperative” (101, emphasis added), the scene alludes to the philosophical tradition in which an unexpected manifestation of a non-material being has been explored in speculation about the materiality of the human mind.

This scene is a preliminary to understanding the novel’s treatment of technological progress, post-racial dynamics, and utopian impulse. The phantom image echoes throughout *The Intuitionist* while Lila Mae tries to find the behind-the-scenes wirepuller of Number Eleven, a crashed elevator in The Fanny Briggs Memorial Building she is in charge of inspecting. Lila Mae believes someone staged the accident to win the Elevator Guild chair election, but it turns out that “no one ... sabotaged Number Eleven.” It was “total freefall ... beyond calculation” (228). The technological glitch and phenomenal eccentricities loom around the accident like a ghost, making Lila Mae unable to recognize reality. Only when Lila Mae realizes what happened to Number Eleven is in fact one of the “many impossible events” of history (228), does the elevator’s mind materialize:

The elevator pretended to be what it was not. Number Eleven passed for longevous. Passed for heathy so well that Arbo Elevator Co.’s quality control could not see its duplicity, so well that the building contractors could not see for the routine ease of its assembly coeval doom. So well that Lila Mae Watson of the Department of Elevator Inspectors, who is never wrong did not see it. Did it know? After all of Fulton’s anthropomorphism: did the machine know itself. Possessed the usual spectrum of elevator emotion,

yes, but did it have articulate *self-awareness*. (229, emphasis added)

Whitehead describes Number Eleven as self-aware and conscious whose autonomous thought-mechanism constructs itself as self-salience. This personification of a machine points to an ambivalent sensibility toward techno-scientific progress, one that appears as messianic machine-worship and technophobic anxiety. This fundamental *aporia* of mapping a mind's place in a material body in the construct of humanity causes ambivalence in regards to human-machine relations, fueling intense debates in such fields as computer engineering, evolutionary psychology, ethology, molecular biology, and architecture. While *The Intuitionist* depicts the technological glitch of industrialized modern America which causes many unexpected outcomes commonly regarded as resulting from uncertainties of being, Whitehead also imbues the novel's ghost narrative with strong racial implications. This racialization of machine minds is conspicuous when it turns out that James Fulton, a founder of intuitionism who once was an empiricist mechanic, "passed for white" (236) when he was alive just as Number Eleven "passed for longevous ... [and] healthy" (229). The Elevator Guild believes Fulton left a "black box" assumed to contain a blueprint for a "perfect elevator ... that will deliver [them] from the cities [they] suffer" (61). Written in "code and hieroglyphics" (254), Fulton's black box haunts the conspiracy of the elevator accident throughout the novel. At the end of the novel, Lila Mae realizes that the black box's technical design, assumed to illustrate a technology for the "second elevation" to the "sky, unreckoned tower" (61), in fact addresses social inequity and racial criticism by Fulton in a coded language. When Fulton wrote *Theoretical Elevator* vol.1

introducing the intuitionist approach, his idea was to mock the “entire way of life” for empiricists (240). Feeling desperate about a cultural atmosphere where the “white world [would] not let a colored man rise” (240), Fulton poured “his venom into the pages of a book” (240). However, the joke of intuitionism became reality when Fulton’s African American sister visited him. He encountered his “other self,” his black self, that he had repressed “for decades” to survive the white world (237). His sister’s unexpected visit made him see his created identity differently, a “doctrine of transcendence that [had been] as much as a lie as his life,” enabling him to “switch from the novel but diffuse generalities of Volume One to the concrete Intuitionist methodology of Volume Two” (241). This fundamental shift of perspective explains why he wrote “Lila Mae Watson is the one” (211) in the margin of his notes. Because she is the only colored student at the Institute, she is the only one who can take over his project after his death.

The Intuitionist’s ghost narrative, as well as Fulton’s cryptic theory itself, have a strong racial resonance. Intuitionism is a “communication with what is not-you” (241) in “another world” (63). It is this epistemological contemplation of invisibility and being through which the mystery of Number Eleven and the coded scripts of the dead Fulton play on the issue of black invisibility, racial passing, and African American ontology in the colorblind culture of 1960s. It gains aesthetico-political resonance with such canonical African American novels as James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of Ex-Colored Man*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, whose African American protagonists experience the disappearance of the racial self under the dominant white gaze. Whitehead not only deals with African American invisibility in Lila Mae’s searching

for dead Fulton's legacy, but the novel also explores black presence as expressed in techno-scientific progress and technophobic anxiety.

The phantom passenger theme places the novel's passing narrative in a discursive tradition that explores black presence as a primordial American fear. It echoes what Toni Morrison calls "the ghost in the machine, ... active but unsummoned [black] presences that can distort the workings of the machine and can also *make it work*" (1988, 138, italicized in original). Morrison uses the term "ghost" to refer to an underlying mechanism, or an impulse, which "drives the machine" (1988, 145) called American literature. In the works of such canonical authors as Mark Twain, Herman Melville, and William Faulkner, according to Morrison, what has been accepted by critics as traditional American literature in fact has been built on such a "presence-that-is-assumed-not-to-exist" (1988, 145). Morrison's conceptualization of the "Africanist presence" (1992, 6), a fabricated African persona reflexive of "an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious" (1992, 17), enables us to read Whitehead's rhetorical trope of phantoms within this discursive tradition where a "coded language and purposeful restriction" construct the white, middle-class, male "sense of Americanness" (Morrison 1992, 6). *The Intuitionist* is Whitehead's response to Morrison's concept of race as a present ghost, transplanting its basic idea into the post-racial United States.

Gilbert Ryle coined the term "Ghost in the Machine" (5). He invented this concept to contest dogmatic Cartesian mind and body dualism where Descartes naturalized human mind commonly called soul, a separate non-material substance. Descartes's egocentric philosophy brought into doubt a material world

experienced through sensory perceptions. His subjective phenomenalism paved the way towards a philosophical trend referred to as 'idealism,' one that finds the essence of reality solely in a mentally-constructed consciousness, ascribing priority to mind over body. Rejecting any mind-independent substance, only a mechanism of mind can bring reality into existence. Famously theorized in George Berkley's Subjective Idealism, this epistemological method argues that "those things they immediately perceive are the real things" and "the things immediately perceived are ideas which exist only in the mind" (94).

Ryle stigmatizes a nonmaterial but present essence of existential humanity in the idealist tradition, arguing instead that a physical human body operates on the principle of causality "like any other parcel of matter," and a mind likewise is located in "another field of causes and effects" (18). For Ryle, the ghost means nothing but a perceptual misconception caused by what he thought of as a cognitive "category-mistake" (16). This mistake, he believes, falsely shifts mind-processes out from the boundary of the physical body.

No occult precursors of overt acts are required to preserve for their agent his title to plaudits or strictures for performing them, nor would they be effective preservatives if they did exist.

Men are not machines, not even ghost-ridden machines. They are men—a tautology which is sometimes worth remembering. ...

In conclusion, it is perhaps worth while giving a warning against a very popular fallacy. The hearsay knowledge that everything in Nature is subject to mechanical laws often tempts people to say that Nature is either one big

machine, or else a conglomeration of machines. But in fact there are very few machines in Nature. (Ryle 67-68)

In his famous behaviorist manifesto *Concept of Mind*, Ryle attempts to eliminate the metaphysical conception of mind from body-mind formulation and to "rectify the logical geography of the knowledge" (Iix).⁵⁰ Ryle's scientific materialism, in a convenient simplification, annuls the intellectual collision between ghost and machine, i.e., existence and embodiment, which was compatible with the Cartesian formulation of *cogito*. Ryle understands humanity as an exquisite mechanization of atomic materials without any agency or teleological purpose; if an entity is not material, it does not exist.

Unlike Ryle's materialistic reductionism, however, Morrison's conceptualization of ghosts lies in the tradition where a ghost has served an absent cause of American anxiety, one that "interrupt[s] the presentness of the present" and uncovers "untold stor[ies] ... beneath the surface of received history" (Weinstock 5). Understanding a ghost as an unrepresented presence not only refers to its role as a generic device whose literary representations are observable in the Poe-style gothic tradition, but it pertains to a sentiment represented as a "context-bound fear and desire" of main characters (Weinstock 6). The presence of ghosts enables us to understand the historical conditions where an official historiography encounters its ghostly hidden self, a fundamental fear that poses counter-memories against themselves.

Inheriting the aesthetic tradition in which a ghost serves as an "ensemble of cultural imaginations, affective experiences, animated objects, marginal voices, narrative densities, and eccentric traces of power's presence" (Gordon 25),

Morrison relocates Ryle's ghost in "the act of defending the Eurocentric Western posture in literature as not only 'universal' but also 'race-free'" (1988, 138). *The Intuitionist* merges this conceptual tradition of ghosts within the passing narrative of the post-civil rights, techno-cultural era. In doing so, Whitehead explores racism and anxiety towards machine culture in an allegorical construction of invisibility. What underlies this absent presence of ghosts in *The Intuitionist*, and simultaneously characterizes the overall novel, is the looming figuration of the 1976 Detroit Riots.

Although Whitehead obscures the historical time of the novel, he offers textual evidence that the novel is located in a mid-twentieth century northern city where institutional racism has ended but racist sentiments haunt daily life. Lila Mae mentions "last summer's riots," which took place in a "metropolis" with "magnificent elevated trains, five daily newspapers, two baseball stadiums," and that "[fell] into medieval disorder" during the riot (23). In the novel, the Great Migration, as Berube points out, "seems to be a recent thing, and racial integration has only just begun to get under way" (169). Elam asserts that the novel is "set in a vaguely post-Civil Rights era metropolis with distinctly pre-Civil Rights era racist sensibilities" (762). Lila Mae receives a professional-level education, unlike her father Marvin Watson who "studied at the colored college downstate" (160) but was unable to be an elevator inspector because the Department of Elevator did not accept "colored gentlemen" (161). Marvin feels proud of his daughter's educational achievement, but at the Institute for Vertical Transport, a "converted janitor's closet above the newly renovated gymnasium"

was the only space allowed to Lila Mae. The school “did not have living space for colored students” (43).

The admission of colored students to the Institute for Vertical Transport was staggered to prevent overlap and any possible fulminations or insurrections that might arise from that overlap. The previous tenant of the janitor’s closet had had a sweet tooth. Every cleaning produced yet another crumpled wrapper of Bogart’s Chewing Gum. Occasionally professors called Lila Mae by his name, even though it would have been difficult to say there was any resemblance. (44)

The reported racist sentiment in this passage reminds us of the contradictory racial reformation embodied in the Civil Rights Movement. The Movement’s outcomes, including the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* school desegregation decision, paved a way towards national integration. But as Warren highlights, “the most obvious expressions of segregation and discrimination [gave] way to more covert but equally pernicious manifestations of racism” (5). Critical race theorists attempt to highlight the shift towards neoliberal and conservative politics, and criticize market reductionism that contributes to racial inequalities. This transformation occurs in what Saldívar calls the “postrace era,” an era steeped with “post-civil rights racial apathy, color-blind racism—racism without racists, or new racialized ethnicities” where racism persists as an “undiminished fact of contemporary American life” while white supremacy manifests as an “unacknowledged ideology of our times” (2). Alexander defines this post-civil rights U.S. culture as “the New Jim Crow” (2). Her phrase refers to the new race-based caste system through which dominant white society promoted its economic

and political interests without an explicit racist agenda. Whitehead points to this historical transformation in the social and cultural instability Lila Mae experiences as a professional worker and a city resident:

[Whites] can turn rabid at any second; this is the true result of gathering integration: *the replacement of sure violence with deferred sure violence*.

Her position is precarious in the office, she understands that, and in O'Connor's as well; she's a lost tourist among heavy vowels, the crude maps of ancestral homelands, and the family crests of near-extirpated clans. Her position is precarious everywhere she goes in this city, for that matter, but she's trained dread to keep *invisible* in its ubiquity, like fire hydrants and gum trod into black sidewalk spackle. (23-4, emphasis added)

What defines her race is not an "attribute of personal identity," but "rather ... a complex set of personal and social actions, a structure of *doing*" (Saldívar 2, italicized in original). This is one of the distinctive features of post-Jim Crow society, where, as Markus and Moya highlight, race is "*actions* that people *do*," that can be translated to "social, historical, and philosophical *processes*...involving routine social interaction as well as institutional policies and practices of the society" (4-5, italicized in original). Whitehead uses the novel's major trope of ghosts and invisibility to depict such an atmosphere. What W. E. B. Du Bois calls "double consciousness," a sense of selfness recognized "through the eyes of others" and "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (8), still prevails yet in different terms. Capturing the particular moment of the political, social, and cultural constellation of black experience in post-integration America and the era's untrammelled belief in a

raceless world, phantom passengers, Fulton's passing, and the cryptic black box all gear *The Intuitionist* towards what Toni Morrison calls "knowing things behind things" (1987, 45).

The Intuitionist's variation on detective fiction is a rhetorical strategy to highlight such a behind-the-world space. The novel's detective fiction form distorts the ideological function of detecting meaning behind incomprehensible events, which has functioned as a device to reconfirm Western scientific rationalism in the genre's conventional formula. The genre is preoccupied with some fundamental rules. A mystery must look unmistakably irrational, but the parameters of its seemingly closed system should be reestablished by a protagonist detective, mostly a white male whose scientific knowledge and rational authority are assumed to have power to return the event's initial illogic to its original state of security. Such a "simple architectural paradigm" of detective fiction defines the genre's ideological essence. As visible in a Poe/Doyle-style locked-room mystery, "insoluble conundrums and ingenious solutions" (Sweeney 1) are structured in a way that shows a sleuth's masterful skills and proves that the mystery is nothing but a "logical, chronologically ordered sequence of causes and effects" (Sweeney 4). According to Moretti, rationalism's victory over irrationality, at which the genre's "greatest obsession" aims, reinforces the logocentric impulse towards "*perpetuating* the existing order" and a "*legitimate* state of affairs" (140, italicized in original).

Classic detective fiction constructs a class-, race-, gender-based urban space in "most distinctive narrative codes, conventions, and characterisations," which "have traditionally been structured around the consciousness of a white subject"

(Kennedy 2000, 132). Racializing this description, he depicts the novel's cityscape as divided through the "formative relations" between "the social structures and discursive formation of (racial) space" (Goldberg 205). Unlike white working class members in the Department of Elevator, "rank gloom of the garage" is "what the department allows the colored men—it is underground, there are no windows permitting sky, and the sick light is all the more enervating for it—but the mechanics have done their best to make it their own" (18). No one in the metropolitan city "notices them but they're there, near-invisible, and count for something" (18). Echoing Ellison's use of the anonymous protagonist and his underground space in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the novel uses the structural division of urban space to depict the "continuing alienation of the classes of people who [are] not the beneficiaries of social and economic gains" (Liggins 361).

Goldberg's analysis of geographical marginalization of ethnic minorities offers a useful interpretive frame regarding the spatial division of social structure. It is such "metaphorical and material manifestations of the power structures" which "regulate and constrain the formation of racial identity and knowledge" (Kennedy 1997, 45-46) in the novel's spatial design. According to him, "social relations are not expressed in a spatial vacuum," but in "differences within urban structure—whether economic, political, cultural, or geographic—are in many ways magnified by and multiply the social hierarchies" (185). Such "socio-spatial dialectics," he goes on to say, are constructed alongside the "rationalities of social space—its modes of definition, maintenance, distribution, experience, reproduction, and

transformation–[that] are at once fundamental influences upon the social relations of power” (185).

Citizens and strangers are controlled through the spatial confines of divided place. These geometries–the spatial categories through and in which the lived world is largely mapped, experienced, and disciplined–impose a set of interiorities and exteriorities. For modernity, inside has tended to connote subjectivity, the realm of deep feelings, of Truth; outside suggests physicality, human difference, strangeness. ... Boundaries around inner space may establish hegemony over that space, while they loosen in some ways but impose in others a disciplinary hegemony over the map outside the inner bounds. (Goldberg 186)

The Intuitionist challenges self-enclosed and self-reflexive space by disclosing the spatial arrangement of a city structured along invisible color lines and its underlying impulse to entrench the myth of an unmistakably-ordered world. These conventions are consonant with the basic empiricism of the novel, where Lila Mae thinks of “white people’s reality” as “built on what things appear to be” (239). Fulton’s intuitionism first appears as a cognitive shift from the empiricist mode of perception, but it is in fact not what empiricists believe it to be. Fulton laughs mockingly when he reads an elevator journal where Robert Manley, an empiricist critic from *Continental Elevator Review*, celebrates him as “the field’s greatest visionary since Otis, and hope’s last chance against modernity’s relentless death march” (238). Unlike Elisha Otis’s invention of the elevator in the late-nineteenth century, which drew the world up from “medieval five- and six-story construction” (61), Fulton’s “postrational” and “innate” theory

for the second elevation is not about the future the empiricists expect. In contrast to the empiricist belief that “now that Fulton’s black box is out there somewhere, the whole future of vertical transport is up for grabs” (71), Lila Mae believes the citizens are “not ready” for what they are “all doomed” by (254).

When Lila Mae realizes that Fulton’s black box does not contain a technical design of a perfect elevator but his racial commentary, the city in *The Intuitionist* attains a wholly different perceptual realm, one that is racialized. The narrative illuminates the extent to which modern industrial culture has been predicated on invisible color lines. By rendering such unacknowledged invisibilities as a strategic quality in the novel’s detective story, Whitehead opens a critical conversation between the ghost and the detective. He glosses the “social morphology of the imagined city” (Willett 3) with strong racial allegories. The novel’s utopian trope, which “point[s] toward a desalinated classless society,” creates a future space “without hierarchy, without relationships of domination and subordination” (Libretti 215).

Fulton’s intuitionism encourages the novel’s narrative as an illustration of the shifting racial conditions in post-Jim Crow U.S. culture, one Whitehead describes as a “vertical world” where “horizontal thinking ... is the race’s curse” (151). Just as Whitehead describes the will of the ghost as floating around Number Eleven’s fall, the secret of the now-dead Fulton—his African ancestry—hovers about the reality of the black box. This ghost is the “truth behind” what the empiricists “couldn’t see for the life of them” (239). It is nonexistent in the Cartesian reality, but it is alive in another perceptual realm, revealing, as Berlant asserts, the “secretly racialized map of twentieth-century utopian technologies,” and

“open[ing] up the present to a lived alternativity *in the present*” (853, italicized in original):

[Lila Mae] thinks, what passing for white does not account for: the person who knows your secret skin, the one you encounter at that unexpected time on that quite ordinary street. What Intuitionism does not account for: the catastrophic accident the elevator encounters at that unexpected moment on that quite ordinary ascent, the one who will reveal the device for what it truly is. The colored man passing for white and the innocent elevator must rely on luck, the convenience of empty streets and strangers who know nothing, dread the chance encounter with the one who knows who they are. (231)

Making an analogy between a secretly racialized world and the intangible mind of a machine, the novel places black experience within the context of postracial U.S. culture, in which the institutional practices of racism have been reformed into an invisible, underlying mechanism of colorblind racism. *The Intuitionist* captures such epistemological proximity between the rationalism’s anxiety over machines and postracial antagonism. As Saldívar notes, the elevator technology in the novel does not function as “the trope of a special mode of knowing,” but instead stands at “the locus of a peculiar spatial and temporal chronotope” (8).

The phantom passenger theme gains racial significance when the machine’s “emotion” and “self-awareness” (211) are imagined as another mode of perception in a world where “utopian thinking [is] embedded in the structure of modern urban technology” (Saldívar 8). The novel “invites us to entertain the

vitality of object and the consequence of that vitality" (Libretti 211) which exists outside the "steering light of reason" for empiricism (27). Whitehead writes a variation of the ghost in the machine metaphor, which Ryle and Morrison use to explain the interactive mechanism of mind and body and the ideological doubleness of American literary history in order to dramatize a racialized urban geography where "race fills the future space as yet another 'ghost' in the machine, haunting the paradigmatic ethos" (Guthrie 47). Placing the ghost figure in *The Intuitionist* in this epistemological lineage reconfigures the modern U.S. city as a site where African Americans reside in white imagination as exemplars of fear and anxiety.

White Suburbia, Black Underclass, and Zombie Capitalism in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

The main narrative of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* revolves around criminal syndicalism surrounding the heart transplant of Catherine Uttley, the Premier of Ontario. In the novel, Toronto is scientifically developed but the city's inner space is over-industrialized and devoid of central governmental protection. Although the government has a revolutionary "human transplant technology" called the "Porcine Organ Harvest Program" (2), Uttley is looking for a human donor. She wants to take advantage of her surgery for political purposes by showing to voters "people helping people, not ... preying on helpless creatures" (3). Because "polls are tipping in her favour since she started up [the] 'God's creatures' thing" (3), she believes her humanitarianism will assist her second-term election. Hopkinson builds the novel's supernatural spirit-possession

narrative on the medical technologies. The technology is established as a locus of race discourse when it turns out that Uttley's medical treatment is deeply connected to crime rings ruled by Rudy Sheldon, a Caribbean Canadian local gang lord in the over-industrialized inner-city Toronto called Burn. Since "almost no one in the world runs human volunteer donor programs any more," Douglass Baines, a procurement officer at the Angel of Mercy Hospital, believes that getting a human heart for Uttley "might bring [the hospital] good business" (3). He asks Rudy to find one secretly in Burn. Uttley's organ transplant ends up sacrificing Gros-Jeanne, a first-generation Caribbean Canadian immigrant in Toronto who cherishes Caribbean tradition. Her poverty epitomizes marginalized minority groups in the slums of the city core from which all resources have been withdrawn to suburban satellite cities.

Hopkinson places the medical technology of xenotransplantation alongside modern Canada's nation-building process where it is increasingly difficult to ascertain, caught up in the swirl of industrial and technological changes, what defines racial experience. Hopkinson contextualizes the Christian humanitarianism of mainstream Canada within the racial dynamics between the dominant Anglo-Canadian community and Caribbean immigrants in a supposedly post-racial era. *Brown Girl in the Ring* depicts how postwar techno-industrial culture has not only marginalized ethnic minorities, but also how the dominant culture maintains itself by exploiting those minorities.

Although Hopkinson explores race dynamics in Canada, the geographical background in *Brown Girl in the Ring* arguably has a close proximity to U.S. metropolises, those with massive black residential populations that have suffered

from radical economic decline in the decades following 1960s. As Hopkinson clarifies in an interview, *Brown Girl in the Ring's* Toronto is modeled on Detroit. She remembers that Detroit resembles a "ghost town," filled with pathholes since "government funding [was] pulled from absolutely everything" (2001). In Detroit, she says, "everything feels rundown. And it's because of exactly that same kind of process—support leaving the city core, and so jobs leave the city core, and then people with anything to lose move after it. What you have left are the people who have limited choices" (2001). This statement echoes *Brown Girl in the Ring's* description of Toronto:

When Toronto's economic base collapsed, investors, commerce, and government withdrew into the suburb cities, leaving the rotten core to decay. Those who stayed were the ones who couldn't or wouldn't leave. The street people. The poor people. The ones who didn't see the writing on the wall, or who were too stubborn to give up their homes. (4)

Hopkinson's description mirrors the restructuring of urban space precipitated by "white flights, disinvestment, and de-industrialization," which led to an "increasing concentration of poor black people" and kept them "more and more isolated from mainstream American society and economy" (Herman 3). The Caribbean immigrants in *Brown Girl in the Ring* represent the "vandalism and violence" of a collapsed city center which "keep[s] 'burb people out" (4), making the city look like a "doughnut hole" (10). In her interview, Hopkinson uses the words "hole in the doughnut syndrome" to express such a hollowing-out in Detroit where "everybody flee[s] to the suburbs as fast as they can" from a deteriorated city core (2001).

Hopkinson draws on such similarities between Toronto and Detroit in her depictions of the inner-city space in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The newspaper headlines that T-Jeanne clips indicate that major city-resources which once bore a central role in the construction of urban economy in the early twentieth century have withdrawn, resulting in a serious paralysis of administration. The federal government "cuts back transfer payment to province by 30%," and "force[s] Ontario provincial police to downsize" (11). The city hall "move[d] to suburbs" and the "7 largest employer[s] relocate[d]" in search of secure environments (11). The absence of a police force in Burn "sparked large-scale chaos" (4). This formation of a city-core ghetto gives rise to the riots, and its consequence has nullified any "repeated efforts to reclaim and rebuild the core" (4). When Ti-Jeanne was nine years old living in a "cramped, run-down apartment," she remembers that the city was "gradually collapsing economically as transfer payments from the province dwindled, taxes rose, and money, businesses, and jobs fled outward to the 'burbs" (47). Although she was too young to understand what was happening, "she could sense people's resentment and apprehension wherever she went" (47). Then the Riots began a week later. The lack of administrative authority and financial sources cause a "rapid transit cave-in," and civic protests against this situation result in "thousands riot," resulting in "thousands injured, dead" (11).

Brown Girl in the Ring's depiction of Toronto suggests Hopkinson's belief that the Ontario government "use[s] Detroit as a manual" (2001) for its race- and class-based urban planning. Such a site-specific historical context allows for reading the novel by way of American cities and the borderline metropolises of

Canada's construction of geographically divided class hierarchies. By extrapolating a Canadian city modeled on the American metropolis in which the inner-city is "painted as [a] bleak, degenerate space, as the anarchic margin to be avoided" and where the exurbs became a "locus of desire, the terminus of (upward) mobility" (Goldberg 188), *Brown Girl in the Ring* transforms Toronto into a geographical milieu where a post-capitalistic economy reproduces geo-political lines on trans-national scales.

The proximity between American and Canadian cities that Hopkinson constructs in the context of the slum formations of postwar pan-American capitalism makes it possible to read Ti-Jeanne's "Riots" (4) as an allusion of the 1967 Riots in Detroit, one of the most massive racial protests in twentieth-century United States. Since the government and its police force left the "rotten core to decay," Burn overflows with "street people" who "couldn't or wouldn't leave" their homes (4). Medical care is too expensive for low-income citizens, so "only the desperately ill call for help" when they are "near death" (8). To maintain the geographical division, the "police in [Toronto's] five satellite cities set up guard posts at their borders to keep Toronto out" (110). Such a description mirrors Detroit in 1967, in which the geographical privilege of middle-class white suburbia kept blacks "locked into a declining central city," "barred from decent jobs and housing," and forced to "raise their children on low wages" (Darden 5). Just as the Ontario government's "repeated efforts to reclaim and rebuild the core" (4) fail in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, "the entire city neighborhoods ... abandoned after the 'riots' ... have still not been rebuilt" in Detroit, "intensifying the abandonment and neglect of these cities by those who have fled to the

immediate suburbs and surrounding 'edge cities'" (Herman 3). Due to the "shift from manufacturing to technology and services" and a "tectonic shift of population ... to suburbs" (Herman 2), the 1967 Detroit riots established a "suburban ring of racism" that "prevent[ed] blacks from sharing the same suburban dream" as white population (Darden 5).

Hopkinson represents how white suburbia and the ethnic riots intersect to establish a geographical gentrification by race and class hierarchies, pointing to an era in which the white suburban flights reshaped cities as "racially divided inner-city residential neighborhoods," densely populated by "poorer whites" and the "racially marginalized" (Goldberg 188). The slum formation in *Brown Girl in the Ring* posits "growth of egregious, crime-spawning conditions" that prevail in "urban slums and rural backwaters across the nation" (Marable 7), and give rise to an emergence of 'black underclass.' The black underclass which Hopkinson represents in Rudy and his private posse does not simply refer to an economic status of urban black poor, but indicates, as Dubey asserts, a "black subset" of a racially-diverse population "seen to be actively responsible for its impoverished situation" (26). Since the financial stability of urban black communities largely rely on the dominant culture's economic structure, the racial minority is particularly susceptible to radical economic changes. As Harvey asserts, this historical stage marks a "troubled period of economic restructuring and social and political readjustment" (145). This restructuring is an outcome of the "general conditions of deflation," accelerated by the "technological change, automation, the search for new product lines and market niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labor control" (Harvey 145). Industrial globalization precipitates a

systematic transition from a manufacturing-centered economic system to post-industrial and post-national phases where production and accumulation become more flexible.

Burn represents an urban/suburban spatial order that economic restructuring establishes along color lines. Rudy's private slum militia, which mostly consists of Caribbean black youths, mirrors the structural decline of urban black labor in an era in which a "labor pool (made up largely of racial minorities) ... has been made obsolete" (Dubey 196) while clusters of "high-skilled technical jobs" replace traditional factory line workers. The deterioration in living conditions, increase of unemployment and poverty, high crime rate, drug trafficking, and lack of medical resources lie in such race-based class gentrification.

Rudy's crime ring which gains control over the abandoned slum speaks to one consequence of "endemic unemployment and chronic social immobility" (Massey et al. 5). Its existence, however, is attributed to the moral deficiency of "pathologi[cal] black urban culture" aberrant from a "normative model of U.S. mainstream culture" (Dubey 39). Hopkinson configures the political and cultural attitudes of white upper-class Canada towards Caribbean minorities through her depiction of the criminal syndicate at the Angel of Mercy Hospital. Baines asks Rudy to find a human donor secretly from among people in Burn who have "terminal injuries" (4), most caused by Rudy. Baines does not want this to look illegal. Since there are "no laws about human organ donation on the books any more" (4), Baines believes that if Rudy finds one, the situation can be disguised as a voluntary donation. When Tony, Ti-Jeanne's boyfriend, kills Gros-Jeanne under Rudy's threat, a "Vulture" medical team from the Angel of Mercy Hospital

takes custody of her dead body, saying it is a "life-giving donation" (153) of a "bio-material donor" (152).

Illegal traffic in human organs in Burn under the cloak of "voluntary human organ donation" (39) symbolizes how Anglo-Canadians consume Caribbeans. Metropolitan society is not only divided along color lines, but exploits the racialized inner-city by means of governmental legitimization. This consumption of a ghettoized inner-city is not only a metaphorical expression of economic and political exploitation but it also represents how Anglo-culture consumes Caribbean bodies literally. Reid reads Uttley's heart failure as a symbolic description of the "breakdown of centralised Canadian authority," and the physiological malfunctioning of "pumping blood around her body" as an illustration of the government's incapacity to "distribute funds effectively to its extremities" (301). Reid understands the novel's visceral images as Hopkinson's critique of a failure of Canadian multiculturalism. Uttley's surgery, where a new host accepts an alien organ, speaks to how diverse cultures become integrated. As the success of multiculturalism depends on an integration of migrants, "white blood cells from Uttley's bone marrow should migrate smoothly into the foreign organ, and vice versa" for a successful establishment of organ-symbiosis (167). This "chimerism" in which an existing system accepts a "foreign organ" and "coexist[s] peacefully" (167-68) explains how Hopkinson comprehends Canada's multicultural reformation. "Symbiosis" cannot be achieved naturally, but it is an outcome of the continuous "battle" between heterogeneous cultures (236).

Metaphoric representation of organ transplantation in a multicultural society recasts transplants as a practice of eating other bodies, a cannibalistic act that

consumes flesh of Others as a source of self-preservation that exposes vulnerability. This vulnerability indicates “a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body” (Kilgour 6). Since “the most basic form of incorporation is the physical act of eating,” Kilgour asserts “food is the most important symbol for other external substances that are absorbed” (6). If we accept such symbolic implications as inscribed in the act of eating external existences, then transplanting organs is a cannibalistic process of consuming another’s flesh in order to reduce vulnerability.

Brown Girl in the Ring describes such cannibalistic consumptions of Caribbean bodies as a criminal-government partnership. Not only does Baines secretly hire Rudy to find an available human heart, but governmental resources that Caribbean people cannot access because the “price for established medical care [is] so high” (8). Baines prepares necessary medical equipment such as “Ringer’s Lactate, laser pen ..., [and] portable CP bypass machine” for Rudy to prevent a donor from suffering necrosis (7). When Tony kills Gros-Jeanne, medical professionals from the Angel of Mercy Hospital take all the necessary steps to “fly the heart straight to Ottawa General” (152). All these medical resources and technologies mobilize to victimize Gros-Jeanne and to nurture Uttley, who has “never been physically strong” since “weakened by meningitis as a child” (37).

The consumption of Caribbean bodies proves ironic since Uttley needs a human donor to prove her “moral courage” (40). After the Epsilon virus appears, a disease that “jump[s] from pigs to humans through the antigenic porcine organ

farms" (39), public support for the farms falls. Uttley's secretariat wants to take advantage of this situation by returning their policy to "voluntary human organ donation" and convincing voters of "the safe, moral way to go: 'People Helping People'" (40). Waiting for a human donor, they believe, will appear to be Uttley's life-risking determination. Consequently, the humanitarian morality of "this 'God's creatures' thing" makes "polls ... tip in [Uttley's] favor" (2).

Bio-medical control, geographical spatialization, and high-technology with limited availability work together for this bio-cannibalistic consumption of Caribbean bodies. This mode of commodification of racial Otherness reminds us of what bell hooks terms "consumer cannibalism" (31) in which "the Other ... [is] eaten, consumed, and forgotten" within symbolic practices of cultural imperialism (39). According to hooks, capitalistic production sustains "racism, imperialism, and sexist domination" to "assert power and privilege" over the Other (36), not only by "displac[ing] the Other," but by "den[ying] the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization" (31). Political attitudes of mainstream Canada in *Brown Girl in the Ring* illustrate a practice of symbolic act of eating in which racial difference is a source of imperialistic pleasure where "members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (hooks 23). Western consumer culture is then a cannibalistic exercise for "excessive consumption and insatiable hunger, feeding off human bodies for profit" (Sheller 148).

Cannibalism not only represents the act of eating Other cultures as a symbolic process of cultural marginalization. The novel describes the heart transplant as an epitome of a modern biopolitical regime facilitated by advanced

medical technologies. This reading draws attention to a complex set of meanings surrounding political legitimization of bio-power and its regimental practices. As Kilgour asserts, cannibalism is configured as a site “where self and other, love and aggression meet, where the body becomes symbolic, and at the same time, the human is reduced to mere matter” (Kilgour in Guest viii). When a human body is mere flesh, its subjectivity is reduced from a normative and nonmaterial place to material realms. Agamben explains such a bare existence of human body as a pre-political status:

The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoe/bios*, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion. (8)

Agamben’s concept of bare life places a human body in a political process of inclusion and exclusion whose practices are regulated by sovereignty’s “biopolitical calling” that operates on “the repetition of the sovereign exception and the isolation of *corpus*” (123). In this formulation of biopolitical dynamics, a bare existence is an embodiment of political subjectivity through signification processes, and living matter is incorporated into a sovereign power that controls biological life. *Brown Girl in the Ring* complicates this political formation of bodies. Gros-Jeanne’s dead body and her excised heart retain their political significance both in biological and symbolic status. After the transplant, Uttley feels an invasion from outside in her dream:

But then the dream had changed. She had realized that she was being invaded in some way, taken over. The heart's rhythm felt wrong, not her own. It had leapt and battered against her chest as though it were determined to break out. ... she would no longer be herself. Unable to move, unable to save herself, she had felt her brain cells being given up one by one. (236-37)

This passage imbues the visceral bareness with political meaning, and revises an Agambenian notion of bare life in a way that discloses a contradictory conceptualization of biological bodies, political embodiment, and their consumption in Western culture. Such re-significations of biopolitical body and bare flesh enable a reading of the cannibalism as symbolic marginalization of heterogeneous cultures, biomedical exploitation of its bareness, and their concurrent operation in Canada's multicultural policy.

Such a politicization of Caribbean bodies is all the more intriguing given that the Caribbean islands have been a "liminal zone of encounter ... a site of human dismemberment and cooking" since Columbus's arrival to the New World (Sheller 143). From Western perspectives that center on enlightened human rationality, a Caribbean cannibal has long been a figure that evokes a fear in which a human body is consumed as food for others and thus dismantles the limits of humanity. Simultaneously, in this colonial context, cannibalism is closely associated with an "absolute alterity and used to enforce boundaries between a civilized 'us' and savage 'them,'" out of which Caribbean cultures are a "symbol of the permeability, or instability" of human-nonhuman boundaries (Guest 2). The colonial West's consumption of Caribbean culture occurs, as Sheller argues, through such a

"displacement from the narrative of Western modernity (decontextualization), followed by its recontextualization as an 'Other' to serve the purpose of Western fantasy" (144). In the context of assimilationism, the cultural dynamics between the eater and the eaten imply social practices through which a dominant culture establishes itself as a unified being and its peripheries as an object it can master. Githire explains:

Assimilation ... is a metaphor that is at once corporeal and cultural, involving conscious, purposeful, structured, and controlled interaction. It is also a *cannibalistic* process that feeds upon (and subordinates) other bodies/cultures for the territorial and cultural expansion of the dominant economic, cultural, and social forces. More important, assimilation collapses the boundaries between the consumed and the consumer, creating an intimacy that is at once transgressive and transformative. (10, emphasis added)

Exploring this interlocking signification of cannibalism and assimilationism within consumer capitalism sheds light on how *Brown Girl in the Ring* appropriates the magical-realist tropes of spirit possession and zombification, a supernatural control of human bodies that Rudy uses to control Burn. Rudy employs a mix of Haitian folk medicines to "lower [one's] emotional resistance, make [one] more suggestible," evoking "nerve and muscle paralyzant" (211). Combining the "paralysis and the suggestibility with the right kind of ... *indoctrination*" makes the "zombie go do anything [Rudy] tell it [*sic*]" (212, italicized in original). Hopkinson contextualizes Rudy's supernatural power within Canada's national politics. The Uttley administration is complicit in the murder of Gross-Jeanne within a realm

where “relations between colonising and colonised bodies and nations might be imagined” (Sheller 149). By exploring the colonial practices that the Anglo-Canadian regime has deployed on Caribbean immigrants in the magical-realistic hoodoo-crime story, Hopkinson establishes the post-apocalyptic city in *Brown Girl in the Ring* as a potential location for critiques of Canada’s and North America’s racist multicultural policies.

Conclusion

Whitehead and Hopkinson write the geographical spaces of their novels as sites for thinking about race, representing racial dynamics in ways that gloss a cityscape with strong racial implications. The anonymous city in *The Intuitionist* and Toronto in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, both modeled on Detroit, have multiple significances and resonances in African American literature. Inheriting the urban speculative realism of George Schuyler’s *Black No More* and Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, in which a modern city serves as a site of racial discrimination, *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* capture different modes of racial dynamics in a post-industrial world, using the Detroit Riots of 1967 as a historical watershed. Such a focus on a postwar urban place explores how racial experience changes as the market economy transforms into a global form. Whitehead captures this transformation in the colorblindness that Lila Mae experiences in *The Intuitionist*. Hopkinson uses an urban ghetto to illustrate the way an Anglo-American culture has locked racial minorities into chronic poverty.

By appropriating the genre characteristics of detective fiction and zombie narrative in racial contexts, *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* interpret

the cultural atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s differently. Yet they envision a similarly dystopian future space in which race is part of transnational global economy that reproduces class hierarchies along color lines. This colorized urban landscape reminds of what Lavender terms as an “ethnoscape,” a “socio-spatial environment” in which “landscapes of race and ethnicity [are] constituted by sf’s historical, social, scientific, and technological engagement with the present” (189). The science fiction ethnoscares that Whitehead and Hopkinson employ introduce significant topical variations of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* in which a geographical space shapes the protagonist’s radical exclusion and isolation. *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* are located within this tradition of urban realism.

The tropes of historical science fiction in *The Intuitionist* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* illustrate how Afrofuturist writers respond to a postwar capitalism caught up in radical industrial and technological changes. These gear with the “political drift to the right in the national politics” (Marable 32) and reproduce conventional hierarchies as another form of dominant technocracy. In *The Intuitionist*, a racial identity determines one’s career in the field of elevator technologies. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, an Anglo-centric regime in multicultural Canada uses medical technologies to sustain cannibalistic consumption of Caribbean immigrants through governmental legitimization. The ethno-topological designs of racially-divided geographies in these novels shed light on the shifting circumstances in which race dynamics are normalized into colorblind market principles.

Chapter 6: Alien Consciousness, Chicana/ofuturism, and Borderland

Identity in Mexican American Cyberpunk Literature

You have to realize this planet is not only inhabited by humans,

it's inhabited by aliens too.

–Sun Ra, “Fallen Angel”

Introduction

Discussing racial conditions in the twentieth-first century, Saldívar asserts that “the United States has entered not so much a postrace era, but something perhaps even more startling: a postwhite era” (2015, 156). Saldívar pinpoints Obama’s re-election in 2012 as a notable passage of this transformation in which smaller numbers of the white population voted for Obama, a result indicating that “white politicians [can] no longer afford to underestimate the voting power of the people of color in the United States” (2015, 156). Warren explains this shifting racio-political demography in similar terms, asserting that “people of color delivered the election, more accurately, people of color in combination of several constituencies.”⁵¹ The political geography of the United States is turning towards an era in which “the changing demography and topography of race” (Shu and Pease 2) are taking a more substantial part in national politics. In other words, “while the twentieth century was a time when the nation and the idea of national culture predominated, the twenty-first century is marked by crossnational linkages and transnational process” (Shu and Pease 2). Disintegration of traditional U.S. nationalism became far more complicated, yet simultaneously much more conspicuous, with the beginning of the Trump administration in 2017. The administration’s stance on anti-globalization, anti-immigration, and trade

protectionism visible in its U.S.–Mexico border wall policy is a symptomatic phenomenon, a crisis of white male power that has lost its once-dominant voice in U.S. political debate. This geopolitical reformation decentering middle-class white males reshapes some basic premises of American studies. American studies have entered a post-nationalistic phase, “reflecting the important influences of women’s studies, ethnic studies, and postmodern and postcolonial theories” (Rowe 167).⁵²

A post-national understanding of the current political milieu of the United States argues on contacts between heterogeneous cultures, but it is much different from the previous century’s discussion of assimilationism, multiculturalism, or integrationism. While traditional approaches focus on disclosing a monolithic nationalism established by universalizing forces and ruling assumptions, newer methods highlight post-national social dynamics that cannot be explained in the traditional categories of race, class, and gender. Nor are they reducible to conventional understandings of heteroculture. Pease explains:

Postnational forces understand every social category as the ongoing antagonism between internalized models and external forces. As such, they are productive of an internal divide (the contamination of the excluded/external), whereby the structures underwriting the stability of the national narrative can undergo transformation. (5)

Living in an alleged post-racial world does not mean that race cannot shape individual identity or influence the lives of ethnic minorities. Instead, as Saldívar asserts, it indicates that U.S. culture has entered a “new stage in the continuing historical drama of American debates on racial justice, racial politics, and what W.

E. B. Du Bois famously termed 'the color line'" (2015, 157). Understanding America as a monolithic entity and U.S. nationality as a geographically limited concept is insufficient in evaluating the current political and cultural map. In its claims to encompass not only cultures of the Western hemisphere but those of diverse ethnic origins, current American studies are shaping its disciplines and programs, trying to answer the question of what is crucial in the construction of a new America.

To suggest a theoretical frame through which shifting spectacles of race in the twentieth-first century U.S. can be understood, let us focus on futuristic experiments with multiple ethnic origins. This chapter analyzes science fiction works that examine the conditions of Chicana/o cultural identity captured in futuristic imagination, an aesthetic movement that Ramírez terms as "Chicanafuturism" (2004, 57). Since Chicana/ofuturism⁵³ borrows its "theories from Afrofuturism" for the genre's exploration of the "ways that new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture" (Ramírez 2008, 187), contextualizing Afrofuturism's aesthetico-political visions together with Chicana/o writers' futuristic ventures sheds light on the post-national exploration of American culture in terms of science, technology, and their influences on race dynamics. This provides fertile ground to pursue race-technology discussion in the United States.

Mid-twentieth century African American culture produced a concept of 'alien' when Sun Ra—an avant-garde jazz musician—and his band Arkestra, envisioned mythic Egypt and outer space in songs such as "Space is the Place" and "Ankh." They used electronic instruments, stage illumination, and exotic costumes to

create an uncanny mood that represented the cultural alienation of African Americans. The astral cosmology of Sun Ra and Arkestra has since predicated black fantasy and science fiction imagination. The concept of the alien is not only an important motif of African American literature, as in the works of Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler, but the theme has inspired other artistic practices in African American culture. In popular music, such musicians as George Clinton, DJ Spooky, Janelle Monáe, and OutKast work on the concept of the alien.

Their rhetorical similarities notwithstanding, Chicana/ofuturism is not merely an aesthetic descendent of Afrofuturism. Existing in a different historical context from Afrofuturism, the concept of the alien has a particular resonance with Chicana/o arts. Chicana/o scholars and artists constantly enact U.S.–Mexico border experience as akin to the ontological status of alien. For example, Anzaldúa's concept of "alien consciousness" (77)—a condition in which one undergoes "a struggle of flesh, a struggle of border, an inner war" in his or her identity construction (78)—configures the borderlands not only as a geographical space but as metaphore, in which becoming alien pertains to an ontological status. This alternative approach "reject[s] Enlightenment epistemology and ontology, as represented in great part by empiricism and the Cartesian subject" (Ramírez 189). In Anzaldúa's concept, being an alien means having "a consciousness of the Borderlands" (77) where diverse historical and cultural identities cohabit. This intersects race, gender, and sexuality in Chicana/o culture. While a homogenous white patriarchy underwrites modern nation-building in the United States, Anzaldúa's alien ontology derives its cultural experience from a state of "perplexity," "insecurity," "indecisiveness," and "psychic restlessness"

(78). In this cultural flexibility, an alien experience is a “version of reality” where the “coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” emerge (Anzaldúa 78).

Alien ontology provides an important nexus for science fiction and Chicana/ofuturism. Anzaldúa describes an alien consciousness as one that “encourage[s] fear and distrust of life” and accepts “a split between the body and the spirit” (37). It is a description that resonates within science fiction imagination. Although people of color serve “in the background of this historically ‘white’ genre,” whose “estranged landscapes and powerful technologies extrapolate and model new racial formations” (Lavender 19),⁵⁴ ethnic science fiction writers appropriate the concept of alien to represent experiences of marginalization in a future world imagined as “placeless, raceless, [and] bodiless ... enabled by technological progress” (Nelson 1). Octavia Butler understands humankind and alien as a metaphor of white supremacist culture and racial minorities. She writes that there is “every kind of alien, but ... only one kind of human—white” in mainstream science fiction production (17-18). In her novel *Dawn*, Butler imagines a black protagonist’s racial experience in a post-apocalyptic world where aliens control human survivors to repopulate the Earth. As Ramírez points out, “the future ... is generally imagined as white,” and “people of color have been erased from the future” (2008, 188). Similarly, in a Chicana/o context, understanding alien consciousness as a mode of existence helps us understand the strategic self-construction of a third-world identity Sandoval terms as “tactical subjectivity,” which de-centers an “oppressive authoritarianism” (2000, 58). Echoing Haraway’s cyborg feminism that transgresses mythic western

binaries, she argues, the “cyborg consciousness” of the “colonized peoples of the Americas” can serve as “the guides for survival and resistance under First World transnational cultural conditions” (2000, 375). Moraga expresses this cultural flexibility as “third world consciousness within the first world ... [of] capitalist patriarchy” (xix). She constructs third-world consciousness within and outside gender epistemology, calling for political solidarity between African American women, Native American women, Asian women, and Latinas. Citing what she calls “incredible odds” (xiv) against white-male homogeneity, Moraga challenges symbolic orders of imperialism, patriarchy, and homophobia commonly found in science fiction tropes of alienation and estrangement.

Adapting aliens and cyborgs into current race discourse reconfigures the U.S.–Mexico border as a site constituted by multiracial experiences. Since the alienation of Chicana/o culture makes it possible to imagine the culture similar to one captured in science fiction where humankind encounters another kind in alienating circumstances, science fiction tropes provide a tool to interrogate the boundaries of Mexican American culture and identity. Arguing that Chicana/ofuturism takes Afrofuturism’s aesthetic paradigms and devices to articulate “colonial and postcolonial histories of *indigenismo*, *mestizaje*, hegemony, and survival” (Ramírez 2008, 187), this chapter claims that Chicana/ofuturism’s ventures create the genre’s own aesthetic space in which Chicana/o artists capture, probe, and nurture their relationship with science and technology. Here, we investigate the genre’s origin within the tradition of magical realism which takes fantasy tropes to represent experience that Western realism

has not been able to capture. Then the chapter focuses on Chicana/o cyberpunk literature that emerges beginning in the 1990s.

Since the cyberpunk genre represents a dystopic world in which such technological progresses as cybernetics, robot engineering, and information technology make body/mind separation possible, the genre's tropes provide appropriate tools to depict a flexible Chicana/o identity caught in the history of the U.S.–Mexico border. In the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) especially, Chicana/o artists represent their experiences of the neoliberal and neocolonial economy in cyberpunk language. Not only are Chicana/o science fiction works by Ernest Hogan, Sesshu Foster, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita important texts in this emergent canon, but Guillermo Gómez-Peña's multimedia performances and Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* will also be drawn into the discussion of Chicana/ofuturism.

Afro-speculative Fiction and Magical Realism

George Schuyler's *Black No More* marks the beginning of black science fiction, but African American writers before that novel's publication had their own tradition of speculative tropes. Martin Delany's *Blake: or the Huts of America*, which takes allohistorical tropes as its narrative base, Charles Chesnutt's folkloristic hoodoo stories in *The Conjure Woman*, Sutton E. Griggs's separate American state in *Imperium in Imperio*, and Frances Harper's reimagined South during the Reconstruction era in *Iola Leroy* all build prototypical tropes of black futurism. During the Harlem Renaissance, Pauline Hopkins, Zora Neale Hurston, and other African American writers published speculative short fiction in journals

and magazines such as *Colored American Magazine*, *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *Messenger*. These writers' works do not fit the genre of science fiction, but share many rhetorical characteristics with futurism. Similarly, Chicana/o literature establishes its own speculative tradition within magical realism, a "form of narrative fiction writing whereby the narrative makes no distinction nor discriminates between events that defy the laws of nature (in physics or genetics, for example) and those that conform to the laws of nature" (Aldama 334). As Afrofuturism works do not conform to Lukacsian realism, magical realism takes aesthetic devices of fantasy that enable writers to draw "blueprints where the unnatural and natural mix seamlessly," with which to "achieve a particular effect on the reader" (Aldama 335).

When Flores first coined the term 'magical realism' in the Latin American context, it referred to an aesthetic "novelty" consisting of "the amalgamation of realism and fantasy" found in Latino(a) literature (189). While following Franz Roh's use of the term to define the artistic trend of post-expressionism in the early twentieth century, Flores locates the genre's roots in the "naturalistic notation of a fantastic universe" of Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and Edgar Allan Poe. Magical realism transplants this "detailed exactitude of depiction" (189) into a Latin context. As Schroeder points out, magical realism "permits the margins more than an entry into the main discourse," offering an "opportunity to reevaluate that central ideological constraints and to challenge the very features of the mainstream that allow for a margin in the first place" (151). Like Afrofuturism's relationship with black speculative fiction, Chicana/o writers have used fantasy tropes from magical realism to "fill in the gaps ... in ways we are not

accustomed to in our everyday engagement with reality” (Aldama 335). In this way, Afrofuturism and Chicana/ofuturism alike borrow tropes of speculative realism, but within their own historical context. Afrofuturism weaves speculative narratives to represent the African diaspora, calling on African folklore, hoodoo magic, and the fatalism of conjuring. On the other hand, magical realism “fuses the two opposing aspects of the oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form a new perspective” (Bowers 3) through which to depict politico-cultural marginalization in the borderlands. Each history determines the subgenre’s narrative context. As Faris asserts, “history is the weight that tethers the balloon of magic” (170). Latin American novels such as Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955), Carlos Fuentes’s *A Change of Skin* (1967), García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Tomás Rivera’s *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (1971), and Ron Arias’s *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975) share a rich tradition of speculative realism until cyberpunk emerges as an important trope in Chicana/o literary tradition in 1990s.

Chicanonautica Manifesto:⁵⁵ Cyberpunk Narratives in Chicana/o Culture

Alex Rivera’s 2008 film *Sleep Dealer* dramatizes a significant moment in U.S.–Mexico history. In the film, Rivera introduces the neologism *cybraceros*, which combines the word “cyberspace” with “*bracero*,” a Spanish word for a manual laborer. Set in a near-future dystopic Mexico, *Sleep Dealer* portrays the borderland experience of Mexican protagonist Memo who migrates to northern Mexico after his father is murdered by a Mexican regime that mistakes him for an

anti-neoliberal terrorist. As his family farm business fails due to U.S. economic expansion and water shortages in the American Southwest, Memo finds a job at Cybertek that operates “sleep factories.” This is a virtual labor system that uses a computer-implant technology called “nodes” to connect a *bracero*’s neural system to a construction robot in major metropolitan cities around the world.

The film portrays the historical moment in which “immigrant labor as a mobile commodity and the relationship of this commodity (and the bodies that perform it) to capital accumulation” (Decena 131) are incorporated into the transnational capitalism that exploits “wealth resources from indigenous and immigrant communities with little compensation in turn” (Rivera 2014a, 302). In a broader sense, *Sleep Dealer* inherits a narrative lineage that concerns the bio-technological control of immigrants, such as Michael Winterbottom’s *Code 46*, Neil Blomkamp’s *District 9*, and Gareth Edwards’s *Monsters*. *Sleep Dealer* speculates on a bio-political regime in site-specific narratives within U.S.–Mexico political history. Simultaneously, *Sleep Dealer* challenges white-masculine borderland narratives that center on a “heroic mission of the Texas Rangers, border guards, DEA agents, or other police personnel” (Fojas 4-5) by shifting the narrative focus from nationalistic paradigms to borderlands displacement and exploitation.

Sleep Dealer follows and participates in Chicana/o borderland narrative conventions which deal with a “site-specific political and historical condition: the annexation of northern Mexico, the subsequent and steady industrialization of the borderlands, and ... the creation of a vast *fronterizo* working class” (Rivera 2014a, 293). More specifically, concerning the economic exploitation that relies on the political “design and implementation of migration-control strategies” (Rosas 41),

Sleep Dealer constructs a borderland labor narrative within the context of NAFTA, which ties the United States, Canada, and Mexico to a neoliberal hegemony. *Sleep Dealer* adopts cyberpunk to show the new economic system based on “commodification and privatization of land,” “commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative, indigenous, forms of production and consumption,” and “neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources” (Harvey 74). *Sleep Dealer*’s major concerns—the colonial nature of borderlands labor and technocratic regimentation—show some of the goals and methods of contemporary Chicana/o artists. Since NAFTA, Chicana/o artists increasingly orient towards the utopian/dystopian tropes of cyberpunk to articulate concerns over how technology inhabits their borderland identity in ways that reproduce exploitative relations between the United States and Mexico.

In depicting how techno-science shapes Chicana/o experience in borderlands, *Sleep Dealer* represents bio-technologies—virtual labor, bio-drone, and digital memory—not only as serving a neoliberal capitalist regime, but also as bearing potential for political resistance and cultural reconstruction. The virtual labor system at Cybertek and its nodes technology enable U.S. corporations to outsource without importing laborers, separating labor from a physical body and thereby accelerating labor alienation. Bio-drone technology which operates on the same mechanism of neuron-machine interface serves the U.S. military, establishing automated surveillance as a basis of transnational economy. The commercialization of memory electronically storable and transferrable operates on market principles. However, these oppressive technologies become tools of resistance. Luiz, a woman Memo meets on the bus, sells her digitalized memories

to an online subscriber to pay her student loan. It is later revealed that Rudy, a U.S. drone pilot from a Mexican immigrant family, is the one who purchases Luiz's memories of Memo. From his first mission to kill Memo's father, Rudy feels guilt. His purchased memories allow him to realize that he, in fact, killed Memo's father, not a terrorist. After crossing the border and confessing what he did to Memo, Rudy decides to connect to his drone through nodes in sleep factories, with Memo's help, and destroy a dam that a multinational corporation monopolizes to control regional water supply. Such an appropriation of technologies by minorities illuminates how *Sleep Dealer* is a political response to an expanding neo-capitalistic U.S. hegemony. The film advocates countercultural survival and resistance in a techno-immersive world, using cyberpunk as its political device. Along with its speculation about borderlands history, the film reverberates with the political struggles of ethnic science fictions where survivalism and resistance are envisioned in a virtual milieu and future environment.

Lunar Braceros 2125-2148, by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, echoes *Sleep Dealer's* cyberpunk rendition of U.S.-Mexico bracero agreements and its colonial regime. Set in the twentieth-second century, the novel depicts a group of *cholo* laborers living in Fresno Reservation in Cali-Texas, a new nation-state established after "the end of the United States as it had been known till then" (11). It is governed by "transnational agri-business corporations" and "bio-techs" that control "anything and everything that [have] to do with technology transfer, informatics, and any kind of power generation, bio-fuel, nuclear or otherwise" (7). The "low skill contract workers," Moon Tecos (15), from the Reservation are sent to the moon to dispose of toxic wastes that pollute the earth.

Unlike the 1950s bracero program in which Mexican immigrants participate the labor pool in the lunar bracero program, called LunaSphere, consists of residents from an "internal colonial site" (14) where "wage-less workers work in exchange for shelter, meals and minimal medical services" (15). These Cali-Texas isolation sections keep the "homeless and the unemployed off the streets" (13). "Population management" is not so much different from "waste management," so the New Imperial Order, a new system of multinational dominance, finds a solution to the environmental and population crisis by "search[ing] for new deposit zones" (15) for the "surplus population" (14). Lunar braceros struggle for a better life, but they confront a brutal reality when they discover that their former braceros were unable to return to the earth but were executed. After realizing this, they make a plan to escape back to their home to "attain [a] freedom from exploitation on the reservations in Cali-Texas" like the "Indians in Chinganaza [did] ... centuries ago" (118).

Lunar Braceros 2125-2148 weaves issues of Chicana/o immigrant labor and global corporate hegemony into a moon colonization narrative and contextualizes the U.S.–Mexico border within modern technocracy. As Manzanias and Sanchez argue, the reservation is a "class- and ethnicity-based immobilization that actualizes colonial regimes in the new world order" (94). Moon-travel is neither a triumph of science nor a romantic adventure of humankind. Under the LunaSphere project, the moon is nothing but "one more spatial fix for global capital," serving to "stimulate capital investment in high tech production" (15).

Cyberpunk serves as the novel's frame through which to "write both within and against multinational capitalism and its ideological underpinnings" (Rivera

2012, 430). Since the Reservation is not only a population control mechanism but a part of the state's race-based bio-political regime, the progress of techno-science in the novel parallels a history of bio-disciplinary observations and practices. Ethnic minorities are treated as a "controlled laboratory labor force, like lab rats," so the Reservation functions as a "disciplinary society that [is] useful to the state" (14). This human-experiment lab resembles a "panopticon prison" from which the New Imperial Order "can scan the perimeter as well as every inch of the Reservation and see everything and everybody" (35). The moon mission is a "recapitulation of Earth history" where the "Lab director ha[s] a power to determine life and death" (59). By connecting this future labor history of ethnic minorities to the 1950s bracero program and reconstructing it in terms of biopolitics, the novel's social commentaries gain a political foothold.

The themes and forms of *Sleep Dealer* and *Lunar Braceros* 2125-2148 are important in understanding the essential premises of Chicana/o science fiction. Many Chicana/o writers have adapted the cyberpunk sub-genre because its posthuman body politics defies conventional notions of body and mind and well represent the borderland experience. Before the 1990s, the science fiction genre did not draw substantial attention from Chicana/o artists. As Lima writes, "there is no tradition of science fiction writing to speak of in Latino literary and cultural studies. There are no Octavia Butlers or Samuel Delanys, as in the African American tradition, no Laurence Yep or S. P. Somtow, as in the Asian American tradition, to engage in a sustained critique of the ideology of genre as it pertains to a future subject position yet to be imagined." Although Lima's argument is somewhat inaccurate in the sense that, as Maguire points out, it relies on false

assumptions that the science fiction genre should be built on a “certain limited parameter” of Western tradition, and should show an “imagining of the future,” it is not easy to dispute his basic idea that an “ideation of Latino futurity ... has not yet achieved an ideology of form in the present” (351) and failed to create a rich tradition. In spite of magical realism’s contribution to speculative Chicana/o art, which remains uncaptured in literary historiography, Chicana/o science fiction has not “develop[ed] ... for several decades,” perhaps because of Mexican literature’s “predilection for stark realism that followed upon the protracted violence and social upheaval of the Mexican revolution” (Bell and Molina-Gavilán 5).

Cyberpunk bridges a gap between magical realism and science fiction in the Chicana/o literary tradition. Because cyberpunk is “typically concern[ed] with the social, economic, and ecological impacts of transnational capitalism and emergent information technologies” (Rivera 2014b, 146), this generic choice is not merely fortuitous. It has a long historical context. Even before NAFTA, Mexicans in northern areas had been “strangers in their own land” since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Rivera 2014a, 292). Under that treaty, Mexico surrendered all claim to the southwestern region to the United States and California, and converted “all Mexican nationals in the conquered borderlands ... into an ethnic minority under the political control of the alien power” (Saldívar 1990, 17). The treaty re-created “Mexican American people ... *as a people*: Mexican by birth, language and culture; United States citizens by the might of arms” (Alvarez 924, italicized in original). Within the manifest destiny doctrine, a “cluster of idea[s] that relied on racism to justify a war of aggression against Mexico” (Gómez 18), Mexican Americans became “uniquely situated as ‘off-

white'" (Gómez 16). To borrow Anzaldúa's terms, this newly-invented realm was a "vague and undermined space created by residue of an unnatural boundary" (25). Since this cultural indeterminacy establishes Chicana/o identity as multi-layered, understanding Southwestern borderland identity is impossible without taking into consideration the "cultural, postcolonial, subaltern, and gender" conditions, which has made the region a rich site to explore "representation, aesthetic production, pan-ethnic poetics, vernacular aesthetics, and the cultural features of social formations" (Saldívar 1999, 218-19).

Cyberpunk's genre traits take future cyber-technologies into a historical continuum that includes the present, glossing Chicana/o literature with a dystopian trope in which regimented techno-science overarches an individual life. Since cyberpunk usually depicts a world in which "physical alteration" in a digital world, "such as cyborg prostheses or direct brain-computer interfaces," has transformed the "supposed 'essence' of humanity, ... minds and souls" (Foster 2005, xi), the cyberpunk sub-genre can be closely aligned with Mexican American culture after annexation, re-formation of "Mexican" as a racial group, and, in broader sense, U.S. expansionism. Foster examines the possibilities of reading cyberpunk as a vernacular language that pertains to race, raising questions about the "cultural implication of [the] 'techniques,' specifically the ways they define 'the nature of humanity, the nature of self,'" and interrogating the "dualistic habits of thought in western epistemology (2005, xii). Foster explains:

The cultural work of cyberpunk fiction can only be fully grasped and evaluated in relation to a longer history speculations about, for instance, evolutionary theory's challenge to the idea of 'the body' as a stable and

unchanging ground for human identity, or the origins of the figure of the cyborg in speculation about how humanity might survive an ecological collapse by adapting ourselves to extraterrestrial environments (rather than changing those environments to suit ourselves). (2005, ixxx)

Foster pays particular attention to cyberpunk body politics and its posthuman ontology which celebrates “‘fluidarity’ in general” and converts it “to more specific political context” (xxi). Rethinking cyberpunk and posthuman narratives as a vernacular language of race provides “new possibilities for cultural diversity outside the universalizing framework of the normative human form, which increase[s] possibilities for external control and manipulation of those same uses and possibilities” (Foster 2005, 244). In this racial variation of cyberpunk, posthuman tropes are a “model for dialectical relation” between “unbound pleasure” and “unceasing skepticism” (2005, 244). Foster’s reading of cyberpunk narratives as a particular form of racial contemplation colorizes the subgenre, echoing Sandoval’s argument that “cyborg consciousness can be understood as the technological embodiment of a particular form of oppositional consciousness,” which “must be developed out of a set of technologies that together compromise the methodology of the oppressed” (1995, 408). Posthuman body politics as a political gesture reject any categories of race, gender, sex, and class that establish a certain form of identity as a norm.

Such is the theoretical ground upon which Mexican American culture can be understood within the cyberpunk sub-genre as it responds to post-war information capitalism. This consciousness provides a political charge to Chicana/ofuturism, which “militate[s] against the ways in which neoliberal

economic policies made worse by NAFTA starve the indigenous to fatten the capitalist” (Rivera 293). Such generic utility in representing Chicana/o experience reminds of Saldívar’s argument regarding Chicana/o history and literary form and their dialectical relationship. He explains:

The dialectical form of narratives by Chicano men and women is an authentic way of grappling with a reality that seems always to transcend representation, a reality into which the subject of the narrative’s action seeks to enter, all the while learning the lesson of its own ideological closure, and of history’s resistance to the symbolic structures in which subjectivity itself is formed. For Chicano narrative, *history* is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subject of its discourse. History cannot be conceived as the mere “background” or “context” for this literature; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and context of the literature. (1990, 5, italicized in original)

Saldívar’s theorization of the “dialectics of difference” of Chicana/o culture—a “narrative strategy for demystifying the relations between minority cultures and the dominant culture”—defines the nature of the Chicana/o-Anglo relationship (1990, 5). This produces, he asserts, “for Chicanos a consistent and highly articulated set of oppositions to the dominant cultural system” (1990, 4). Anti-utopian tropes of cyberpunk offer useful tools to represent the reality in which Mexican working-class people become “long-suffering disposables of neoliberalism” (Hayden 271). Saldívar’s concept of the dialectics of difference invites the rethinking of otherness, which was largely synonymous with an inferiority for the past centuries, as an essential condition of Chicana/o identity.

This shift of subjectivity begs a question regarding the location of minority ontology and its constitutive forces. Such an understanding of where an object becomes a subject resonates with what Bogost calls an “alien phenomenology,” an “object-oriented ontology” that “puts *things* at the center of being” (6, italicized in original). An object-oriented ontology “contends that nothing has special status, but that everything exists equally,” and “ponder[s] their nature and relations with one another as much with ourselves” (6).⁵⁶ The anti-humanistic ethics of alien phenomenology can be read as another rhetorical strategy of multicultural subjectivity.

Loss of land, legal creation of “Mexican” as racial group, and the social use of racial categories to entrench white supremacy position Mexican Americans as aliens. Such political dynamics provide cyberpunk with a tool for representation in which history serves as an essential context. While Afrofuturist writers such as George Schuyler, Samuel Delaney, and Octavia Butler use themes of bio-engineering, alien abduction, space war, time travel, and vampire horror to represent trans-Atlantic diaspora and enslavement in a remote land, Chicana/o cyberpunk employs artificial intelligence, android, brain emulation (mind uploading), and computer hacking to describe cultural, legal, and geographical inbetweenness. Cyberpunk is a narrative embodiment for the conditions that characterize Mexican American borderlands life. This understanding resonates with the concept of Aztlán, a “legendary location” in Mexican culture which is “repurposed ... to help galvanize the Chicano activist movement” (Sohn 76). Finding a *mestizo* cultural identity in pre-Columbian Mexican civilization, Aztlán is charged with multiple political meanings. By serving as a language to explore

body-technology interaction and its emptiness, cyberpunk's posthumanism enables Chicana/o culture to be reconceived in a way in which an identity is understood as a socially-constructed "empty signifier" (Pérez-Torres 104). This emptiness of Chicana/o identity makes cyberpunk body politics a proper tool of its representation. These gain address in what Rivera calls "post-NAFTA borderlands dystopias," a set of Chicana/ofuturist works that are "chiefly concerned with the material realities of the U.S.–Mexican borderlands in the wake of NAFTA," employing the "narrative strategies of the dystopian science fiction subgenre cyberpunk to articulate these concerns" (Rivera 2014a, 292). NAFTA is a crucial historical context when thinking about the relation between the borderlands experience and cyberpunk tropes. So too are the 1990s.

The 1990s mark an important era in Chicana/o science fiction. Chicana/o speculative arts began taking a cyberpunk form during this decade. Marion C. Martinez, a New Mexican performer, used a computer circuit board to represent how science and technology intersect to shape the modern Chicana/o experience. Her circuit board artworks recreate *santo* images—one of the religious arts in Spanish and Latin areas—in electronic materials, using "Mixed Tech Media."⁵⁷ Martinez's techno-*santo* artworks are mostly made from computer components discarded at a dumping ground at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, one of the largest multidisciplinary science institutions in the world that runs a nuclear power and weapons research center. Using computer fragments obtained from an ash heap and traditional religion to reproduce and simultaneously transform Chicana/o art forms, the techno-religion hybrid challenges nostalgic and romantic visions of New Mexico. It conceives the state as a place steeped

with the remnants of modern technology. Further, as Ramírez highlights, due to the images of romantic borderlands produced by the tourism industry of New Mexico, the state's "putative temporal and physical distance from the hustle and bustle of the modern world ... gloss[es] over its demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental realities" (2004, 64). Martinez's techno-*santo* discloses the state's physical landscape by visualizing "images of New Mexico as a place of natural beauty" that have obscured its current function as a "repository for radioactive waste" (Ramírez 2004, 66). Such a re-creation of borderlands where Catholic tradition, technologies, and the leftovers of a post-NAFTA economy combine, is emblematic of Mexican American futurism, whose empty indeterminacy symbolizes "dynamism and malleability of cultural products and practices" (Ramírez 2008, 188).

While Martinez was envisioning modern Chicana/o culture in her techno-*santo* artworks, two "cyber-Aztec TV pirates," Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, interrupted U.S. household TV signals on Thanksgiving Day 1994, "transmitting bizarre views on American culture and identity 'direct from their underground vato-bunker'" (Gómez-Peña 112). In their "experiment in interactive television via satellite," they broadcast a "simulacrum of a pirate TV intervention to hundreds of cable television stations across the country," while "encourag[ing] perplexed viewers to call in and respond to the broadcast" (Gómez-Peña 112). During the signal intrusion, Gómez-Peña addresses the audience as "post-NAFTA America" (112), claiming to offer "direct access to the labyrinthic mind of a Mexican" (113) through a "miracle of techno-*rascuachismo*, a true example of post-CNN Chicano Art" (112). Gómez-Peña's "Chicano virtual reality machine"

called TECHNOPAL 2000, an "interactive TV program, never before shown in the western world" (112), incorporates multicultural Chicana/o experience into new communication technologies, redefining the borderland as a "conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the diasporic communities" (7). As Foster explains:

Gómez-Peña redefines the meaning of *indigenous* so that both migrant and native groups can be understood as occupying a 'conceptual' rather than a material space, and the main characteristic of conceptual space is that it is not defined by clear boundaries between insides and outsides; Gómez-Peña's Fourth World occupies 'portions of all the previous worlds.'" (2002, 46, italicized in original)

Gómez-Peña considers NAFTA an important historical marking point. Since the "largest artificial economic community on the planet," signed by Canada, the United States, and Mexico, avoided "the most basic social, labor, environmental, and cultural responsibilities that are actually the core of any relationship between the three countries," Gómez-Peña questions whether this relationship would make Mexico a "mega-maquiladora [assembly plant] or ... 'the largest Indian reservation of the United States,'" or if the country would "be treated as equal by its bigger partners" (7-8). He asks:

Will Mexico become a toxic and cultural waste dump for its northern partners? Given the exponential increase of American trash- and media-culture in Mexico, what will happen to our indigenous traditions, our social and cultural rituals, our language, and national psyche? Will Mexico's future generations become hyphenated Mexican-Americans, brown-skinned

gringos, or Canochis (upside-down Chicanos)? And what about our Anglo partners? Will they slowly become Chicanadians, Waspbacks, Gringotlanis, and Anglomalans? (8-9)

Gómez-Peña's *cholo*-cyberpunk performance claims that "a new era has begun" (9). Calling attention to a "new economic and cultural topography" that NAFTA designed, his questions urge his audience to find their "new place and role within [the] bizarre Federation of U.S. Republics" (9).

Gómez-Peña's cyberpunk performance provides a significant inspiration to the speculative tradition of Chicana/o literature. His cybernetic representation of Mexican American experience does not merely rely on "the current interest in cyberspace as a possible site of freedom from the body and its limitations-that is, cyberspace as a site for crossing the borders of personal experience" (Foster 2002, 63), but instead his "racialized scenarios in virtual reality implies that virtual reality offers no escape from real life" (Foster 2002, 62). He uses a hyper-visual and over-embodied performance of race to colorize cyberspace. Gómez-Peña's disruptive performance revises the parameters of the liberal posthuman belief that annuls a physical body as an empty space, "insert[ing] ethnic identity into virtual reality" and thereby "incorporating elements of Mexican kitsch that reveal a 'hybridization of Chicano and cyberpunk cultures'" (Maguire 357). This rhetorical strategy offers a "framework that resists any assertion that the posthuman does not need or can transcend organic bodies" (Gomoll 4).

As Martinez and Gómez-Peña prove, Chicana/o science fiction finds historical relevance in cyberpunk. It comes as no surprise that Ernest Hogan, considered the first Mexican American science fiction writer, calls Chicana/o ontology a

"science fiction state of being," which exist[s] between cultures, and ... creates new cultures: *rasquache* mash-ups" (Hogan 2015, 131). His experience as an ethnic minority makes him feel as "just another bastard son of Western Civilization, treated like an alien by his native land" (Palmer). His first novel, *Cortez on Jupiter* (1990), introduces Pablo Cortez, a Los Angeles street graffiti artist of the 2020s, who confronts the Sirens of Jovian, extraterrestrial aliens, and narrates this stream of consciousness experience in Spanglish, or Southern California Chicana/o slang. Since Cortez cares about nothing besides creating a masterpiece, whether in the LA streets or in outer space, he takes strange images of the Sirens of Jovian, designed to destroy humankind's mind, for his artistic purposes. Hogan's post-Anglo, polyglot tropes in *Cortez on Jupiter's* science fiction form point to how cultural indeterminacy and inbetweenness can be used strategically. This is clear when the protagonist says, "I really don't care what language they're from—I just use 'em when they fit (9). The fragmented hybrid language that Cortez uses gives a Chicana/o cultural context to the novel's alien-contact plot, while challenging the manifest destiny of space exploration.

Hogan's second novel, *High Aztech* (1992), depicts Xolotl Zapata, a poet and underground journalist, from the city Tenochtitlan in the near future. Since the "Armageddon" (22) war of 2045, the city has concentrated on "Aztec revival," a Mexican cultural movement "sponsored by High Aztech S.A." (97). Tenochtitlan is "the media and cultural capital of the One World" while "North America is in ruins" (97). In the city there are religious conflicts between "various Aztec factions," "non-Aztec tribal groups," and "a few Christian cells" (48). Scientific progress has developed an artificial viral medium called "faith viruses" (234). Zapata describes

these religious wars in an expository tone. He is also a carrier of the faith viruses of "Aztec purists" (57) and "Christian Fundamentalists" (189). His mindset describes a futuristic version of hybrid Chicana/o identity: "Christianity wasn't replacing my Aztec faith—it was combining with it" (199). The novel takes a "vernacular form of cultural production that includes both Chicana and Chicano practitioners," while attuning itself to "issues surrounding the effects of technology on Mexican Americans" and "exploring the ways in which Mexico (and indigenous America more generally) has historically functioned as a dumping ground for the North's technological waste and debris" (Rivera 2014b, 158).

Smoking Mirror Blues (2001), Hogan's third novel, places Aztec mythologies in contemporary Los Angeles, re-named. It tells the story of Beto Orozco, a Chicana/o computer hacker and virtual reality game designer. Using a bio-nanochip and AI technologies, he succeeds in bringing Tezcatlipoca, an Aztec trickster god, into the reality and digitizing it in a god-simulating program that his friend Xochitl invented for her research. However, when things go wrong in Beto's experiment, the resurrected god quickly escapes the program's control and downloads himself into Beto's body, running wild through the Hollywood street during the Dead Daze celebration. Smokey Espejop, as Tezcatlipoca nicknames himself, gets back to his original job as an ancient trickster god spreading chaos and ruling the universe. After he kills a gang leader and becomes a new boss, gang members help him join a band named Los Trickster and gain followers for his music, creating a new cultural phenomenon.

Hogan uses several cyberpunk conventions such as artificial intelligence, nano-technology, wrist phones, online information transfer through a space called

the mediasphere, robotic animals, sonic immobilizers, and biochemical tranquilizers. As those devices suggest, the cybernetic universe of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* shades the narrative of *Smoking Mirror Blues*. Hogan takes Gibson's ghost-in-the-machine theme and its posthuman body politics to represent Chicana/o consciousness in U.S. culture, blending cyberpunk tropes and Aztec trickster mythologies to "explode into the readers' mind and echo across reality" (Hogan 2012). While "cybertechnologies have been accused of distancing people from each other and from their ethnic, racial, and personal identity" (Maguire 356), Hogan uses such technologies as physical alteration, cyborg prostheses, and brain-computer interface to interrogate the ideation of "the body as a stable and unchanging ground for human identity" (Foster 2005, ix). In doing so, the novel examines how universalizing force and normative humanity can be re-envisioned through posthuman body politics.

Gómez-Peña's cybernetic performance, the borderland cyberpunk of Rivera, Sánchez and Pita, and Hogan's futuristic Aztec mythology blend Aztec and Chicana/o culture with the concepts of aliens, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and human-computer interface in their exploration of post-national U.S. culture. Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztek* (2005) extends the genre to include the tropes of counterfactual alternate history, which Phillip K. Dick famously employed in *The Man in the High Castle*. Foster rewrites the World War II allohistory in Dick's novel into the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire in the sixteenth century. *Atomik Aztek's* 1940s is based on a historical continuum where the Aztec empire defeated the Spanish in 1510s. In the novel's universe, the world is not singularly existent. In circular concepts of time, where "reality infinitely curves back upon itself" and

"all that has existed does exist and will always exist and so forth into infinity [sic]" (3), the protagonist Zenzontli lives in two different worlds. In his real life, he is a member of a military group called "Keeper of the House of Darkness of the Aztex" living with his warrior wife Xiuh in Anahuac, a Southern California area. In his "peripheral vision like burnt-out flares" (27) where he is addressed as Zenzón, he experiences a world where the "Aztec civilization was 'destroyed'" (1). In this universe, he is a Mexican immigrant worker in a meat-packing factory in "some 3rd-class city called Los Angeles" (70), where "riots, fires, earthquakes, epidemics, crack wars and the disaster of [their] everyday life [sic]" prevail (44). As Foster says in an interview, the novel "reconceives Los Angeles as the Aztec underworld and Land of Dead," in which "unquiet spirits victimized by History are presumed to speak" (2001, 2). Aztec warriors in the novel's alternate world claim "some other side of History" which remains unimagined in what Foster calls a "limbo of genocidal amnesia and official forgetting" (2001,2). In such an impulse towards a reconstruction of Chicana/o history, alternate reality is an epistemological frame through which one may find what has been absent in official historiography where time and history are linear.

Atomik Aztex's depiction of California, as Sohn highlights, "exhibits a larger racialized underclass that exposes the inequities produced by global capitalism," in which "Chicanos have currently become the most prominent laboring pool engaged in [the] physically dangerous occupation" (65). The California of *Atomik Aztex* where postwar global capitalism consumes minority laborers as disposable units is the result of the colonialization of the Southwest's indigenous population, the transnational influx of Asians, and the mass relocation of African Americans

during the Second Great Migration. The protagonist's crossing narrative shows the story deeply rooted in the immigration history between U.S. and Mexico, in which "the continuing quest for the least expensive marginalized workers eventuated in the US dependence on Mexican nationals migrating across the border" (Rosas 36). Zenzón narrates:

I crossed deserts to get here. I traversed the mountains of the Romorosa & the Coast Range, skirting secret borders of forgotten history & identity. I sacrificed the Past, relationship & dreams of community. I tore open blister & stubbed my toe on rocks. Empire ruins along the way. I survived long odds, bad luck & bad trips as one of a select few. I negotiated with coyotes, rubbed elbows with travelers from everywhere, hung out under the watchful eye of the Migra. (40)

Foster links Zenzón's slaughterhouse job to a broader social context, in which global capitalism gives rise to a formation of the Mexican American working class in American Southwest. He is aware that his life is an accidental outcome of history. He struggled to cross the border and get a job in the meat industry, but does not believe that he was "born working in a slaughterhouse" (40). Life forms on "every possibility in any given moment" and "multiple chances hidden inside every second" (41). This "potentiality of living moment ... [can] lead to Death or to Life" (41). His present life, in which he "slic[es] the heads off pigs with the circular saw" (41), is a result of such accidental intersections of multiple conditions outside his choice. Likewise, the U.S.-Mexico borderland history, where a "maroon Buick Riviera roll[s] over 4 times in the desert outside of Riverside" while "19 others vatos [are] asphyxiated in a boxcar locked in the Arizona sun"

(40), manifests in a certain set of probabilities. History as probability grounds an epistemology of the alternative universe in *Atomik Aztex*. The Chicana/o working class in California becomes an accidental manifestation of multiple chances that exist “throughout overlapping levels of reality and akross chronologies [*sic*]” (184).

Foster depicts a world founded on global capitalism, neocolonial practices, and neoliberal racism where a “potential sovereignty-signifying violence of the emerging international boundary-cum-frontier ... [is] typically embodied in law enforcement and those acting on its behalf” (Rosas 36), Zenzontli’s real world is structured under different principles. The “scientifikness” of the Aztek has made the empire “able to connect with the most teknocratikally advanced spiritual beings refracted in the multitudinous multivalent wheeling planes of the universe, both inside and outside of Time [*sic*]” (65). The Aztec empire understands reality to be within “tentative purview of alternative visions of the universe such as might fall under barbarian superstition,” and major universities run a “radikal department of Barbarian Studies where savage, exotik, paranormal world-views are revisited [*sic*]” (4). Like Zenzón in the other world knows that his present life comes out of latent multi-probabilities, in the universe of Aztec empire Zenzontli is also aware that he is “somewhere else ... [and] other worlds exist” (84). The nonlinear time and space continuum in *Atomik Aztex* reflects how Chicana/o activism imagines Aztlán—a mythic place that an ethno-historical Chicana/o view invented to reclaim forgotten memories of an ancestral Mexican past. Like the concept of Aztlán, Foster attempts to show that forgotten memories and unrealized possibilities can be part of history.

The multi-universalism in *Atomik Aztex* where “the world is some shifty joint where universes intersekt & spin away into new directions like car crashes on the Golden State Freeway [*sic*]” (200), serves for self-reflection by the protagonist. Foster designs the overlapping chronologies in the narrative not only to represent a potential history where reality expands in different directions but to criticize totalitarian impulses. Zenzontli in the Aztec world is proud of his life as an Aztec warrior. The mission in Stalingrad where he is sent to help their Russian allies defend Nazi Germany provides a chance to confirm the masculine supremacies of “the Aztex, the Mixteks, the Yanomamo, Warani, and other indigenous allies of the Mexika” (62). Later, he becomes critical of the masculine militarism of the “Council of Tlatoani of the Party of Aztek Socialism” who “determined [they] must Defend & protect [their] way of life thru War, [their] standard way of living (War), [their] freedom of religion (War) (1000 hearts per day minimum) [*sic*]” (117). Likewise, in his visionary life as a factory worker, he becomes aware of working-class consciousness, oppressive power structure at the workplace, and, more extensively, the consuming forces of global capitalism. By conforming to alternate history’s generic rules in which “history becomes a variety of paths that disperse into disjunct alternatives” rather than “a tightly bound cause-and-effect process linking a given present (all aspect of which supposedly constitute a single *total* world) with a single future world” (Csicsery-Ronay 94, italicized in original), *Atomik Aztex*’s ethno-speculative realism “amounts to a radical revaluation of the trajectory of the development of narrative form” (Saldívar 2015, 165).

Atomik Aztex’s alternate world exemplifies how Chicana/o art uses the cyberpunk sub-genre as a site-specific language of the American Southwest in

order to carve out a cultural experience in the aesthetic legacy of Aztlán. Deeply attuned to the viability of speculative imagination in creating a racialized historiography, the ethno-cyberpunk tropes of Chicana/o culture provide opportunities to contemplate the potential of science fiction as a vernacular language for minorities. Until the mid-twentieth century, African American culture's appropriation of science fiction tropes, such as George Schuyler's Afro-transhumanism in *Black No More*, Ishmael Reed's slave computer in *Flight to Canada*, Octavia Butler's trans-bellum time travel in *Kindred*, and Colson Whitehead's black-ghost in the machine in *The Intuitionist*, created a world in which slavery, racism, and African diaspora are addressed through science fiction. Chicana/o cyberpunk extends the validity of science fiction as a genre where race encounters history.

Conclusion

In 2017, Marvel Entertainment released *Logan*, an installment of the *X-Men* franchise. In the film, an aging superhero named Wolverine helps mutant children escaped from Alkali-Transigen—a biotechnology corporation where scientists create cloned mutant killers—to cross America to reach a shelter in the North Dakota–Canada border called Eden. The mutant children raised in the facility are mostly African and Mexican descendants. The film's representation of the American Southwest where the militant government has made the borderland a site of bio-technology experiments and objectification of ethnic bodies epitomizes a trend in American popular culture where science fiction and fantasy tropes are employed to capture borderland experience.

Logan's depiction of bio-medical control of ethnic minorities illuminates how political dynamics of borderlands have entered another phase. While colonial capitalism has shaped the American Southwest through the Manifest Destiny doctrine since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, current racial dynamics at the border reconstruct previous forms of economic exploitation through bio-political power. This historical subtext provides an important frame to understand the neoliberal and neocolonial experience of the U.S.–Mexico border. Within this political milieu that Martinez, Gómez-Peña, and Hogan conceive aesthetic tools to represent the post-NAFTA borderland experience through the language of cyberpunk. *Sleep Dealer's* bio-technological survivalism, *Lunar Braceros's* ethno-space exploration, and *Atomik Aztex's* alternate Aztec world employ cyberpunk to explore posthuman language and contest the universalization of a normative humanity.

Chicana/o art's attention to science fiction brings an alternative narrative, one outside a linear Cartesian epistemology, in which history, memory, and past come to construct a new Chicana/o vision of Aztlán. While Aztlán serves contemporary Mexican American activism by reinforcing the culture's historical legacy, multicultural science fiction provides a perspective in which history is understood as a coincidental manifestation of multiple possibilities. This revisionist historiography in Chicana/o culture opens a broad avenue of interpretation that still waits to be explored.

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Notes

Chapter 1

¹ Spillers explains the African diasporic experience as a symbolic mutilation of black bodies, whose “absence *from* a subject position ... provide[s] physical and biological expression of ‘otherness’ ... resonating through various centers of human and social meaning” (67, italicized in original). As the ethnicity is inherently inscribed “as a scene of negation” that confirms black body as “metonymic” (66) of racial arrangement, African American diasporic experience becomes a site of exotic otherness located outside the dominant signification process.

² This issue of publication practices of black speculative and fantasy fictions during the Harlem Renaissance era will be addressed more specifically in Chapter 2 on George Schuyler’s *Black No More*.

³ This transnational expansion of U.S. economy towards Asian-Pacific countries was associated with the post-Cold War militant expansionism. The “empire of military bases” in East Asian area, which the United States had used as a strategic site for military defense, became a “web of economic treaties” (Shu and Pease 11). For further elaboration, see Shu and Pease, 1-35.

⁴ As a notable example of such a counter-cultural appropriation of technologies, Penley and Ross mention the “anti-Western practice” of “cultural piracy” in developing Asian countries (x). According to them, the “*samizdat* technologies” in those countries have deterred “the efforts of the transnational monopoly producers and brokers to control profitably and politically the flow of news, scientific data, educational materials, and entertainment” (x). Such political use of new technologies by minority groups can serve an alternative to the hegemonic paradigm of modern Western techno-culture, reshaping the geopolitical dynamics of technology.

⁵ The trans-continental colonial utopianism in the early science fiction texts parallels anxieties over the advent of techno-culture, as observed in western culture’s technophilia. What Baard calls “bio-Luddites” suggests dystopic visions of such ‘anxietized’ groups or communities who have “apocalyptic [notions] about the convergence of genetics, computer science, nanotechnology, and bioengineering.” For further explanation, see Baard.

⁶ While I use the term “postrace” in a similar way to how critical race theorists contest an alleged colorblind cultural environment (see Alexander; Bonilla-Silva; Lipsitz; Olson), I also expand it to refer to a mode of perception in which traditional understanding of race can no longer explain the shifting race dynamics of the United States. While employing the central stance of critical race theory that understands the term postrace as the dominant culture’s strategy to conceal the colorblind climate, we should also examine the term’s interpretive potential to highlight the new mode of social formation of what Pease calls “postnational forces for social change,” which are “neither wholly intrinsic to the previously subjugated social categories of race, class, and gender nor reducible to a capability external to them” (5).

⁷ The technological amalgamation of racial subjectivity, whose historical origin Mullen finds in the “interracial collaborative textual production” of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, becomes reproducible along with the emergence of modern techno-culture, replacing the “interiority comprehensible to white readers” (148, 2012) with the modern commodities, especially those

produced by the media technologies of entertainment industry.

⁸ Azoulay emphasizes that the strategic essentialism, in its political use, does not "preclude alliances between different social groups," nor does a race here mean an "essence" shared in "bounded" or "fixed" communities. Instead, this essence serves as a "discursive invented space," which takes the "beingness of black as experiential sources which can be drawn on without apology" (102). She argues,

While we *should* delegitimize the use of race and culture as metonyms for one another, this need not invalidate a notion of race-based communities of meaning. Such a notion reflects the efficacy of *political strategies* rather than the biologization of ideology. Furthermore, contrary to the claims of both its staunch adversaries and blind advocates, constructive strategic essentialism does not negate the plurality of identities and their mutability. (Azoulay 102, italicized in original)

Madison similarly points out that the strategic essentialism, rather than perceiving a biological body as a "pure presocial and prediscursive space," offers a discursive tool with which to reject any "social, political, and cultural processes of classification and identification that constitute race or racialization" (85).

⁹ Richard Dawkins explains "meme," which abbreviates a Greek word "mimeme" referring to "imitated thing," as retaining a set of cultural information that "propagates themselves in the [semiotic] pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which ... can be called imitation" (192). According to him, "cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission," and "language ... evolve[s] by non-genetic means" (189).

Chapter 2

¹⁰ Subsequent quotations from *Black No More* will be marked in page numbers.

¹¹ Mencken was, as Williams argues, "rather contradictory" in his view of race relations. Williams writes;

On the one hand, [Mencken] felt that whites were superior to blacks as a whole but that they were subject to unfair treatment by lower-class whites, particularly in the South. On the other hand, he had a modest respect for African Americans who were articulate, intelligent, and shared his views. Schuyler proved to be in the latter category. Viewing Schuyler as a writer with potential, Mencken felt that he could shape him into an immaculate example of a "Negro writer." (70)

Ferguson similarly points out his ambivalent position regarding African American culture. According to him, Mencken criticized African American religious culture as "extraordinarily stupid, ignorant, barbaric and preposterous," calling it "downright simian" (165). Further, Ferguson goes on to say;

By telling blacks ... that they need to build a strong economic foundation among their own and that this would in turn provide the independent means necessary for future black artistic contributions, Mencken played a dangerous game. Although he regarded it as simply pragmatic for blacks to think of racism as a permanent feature of American society, he flirted with a kind of segregationist complacency in putting the issue the way he did. (166)

¹² Schuyler believed that the progress of the African American community was seriously hampered by the NAACP's "defensive psychology," which "stirr[ed] the group to hysterical complaints and yammering supplication" and "increase[d]

the hypersensitivity" that kept the race from social and cultural elevations (29, 1947b).

¹³ Hair style, especially around the Civil Rights Movement, had very specific implications regarding African American identity politics. For some black women, "in its natural states, [the] hair would be a badge, a symbol of [their] self-esteem and racial pride"; for others, bleached and straightened hair was one of the ways to "stand in the white man's emporium and challenge [its] value" (Rooks 7). From the late nineteenth century, the cosmetic industry stimulated African American women by symbolically connecting physical features to "class mobility" and "social acceptance by the dominant culture" (Rooks 26).

It is within this historical and cultural context in which Madam C. J. Walker, whom Madame Blandish personifies in *Black No More*, can be understood. Like Booker T. Washington's racial uplift ideology, she believed social and cultural assimilation could be a strategic option for African Americans to gain better social standings. At the National Negro Business League's convention in 1921, she said:

I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. I was promoted from there to the washtub. Then I was promoted to the cook kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground. My object in life is not simply to make money for myself or to spend it on myself. I love to use a part of what I make trying to help others. (Bundles 135)

¹⁴ Madame Blandish references such African American female entrepreneurs as Annie Malone and Sarah Breedlove, known as Madam C. J. Walker. For further biographical references, see Lasky.

¹⁵ Given that biotechnological advancement has contributed to the establishment of a hegemonic system of biopolitical governance in most technoscientifically advanced societies, Crookman's treatment and his sanitarium can be considered a cultural site that militates against using institutionalized biotechnology as a dominant system.

¹⁶ Castells's theory of modern network society as a technological innovation serves for the close ground to employment conditions, where one's autonomy as "self-programmable labor" falls into the category of "an active component of a network" economy (10), a new economic structure designed to support radical increase of productivity in the United States and other advanced countries.

¹⁷ Millar points out that the United States was the first country that attempted systematic genetic engineering, long before Germany initiated its segregationist politics based on eugenic biology. She is correct in arguing that *Black No More* represents the fascist tendencies inherent in the chromatic democracy of the U.S., whose systematic racist politics were "aestheticized" and "theatricalized" for the creation of "human uniformity" and "normative homogeneity" (90-91). Millar's analysis is particularly useful in understanding how U.S. techno-culture decolored itself by abstracting such a racist regime in the disguise of the fraternal universality. However, such an observation stops short of theorizing the extent to which race meshes with technology in the contradictory construction of American modernity of *Black No More*.

¹⁸ For the political and economic gains since the Great Migration, see Marable 21-46; Barker, Jones, and Tate 22 - 26.

¹⁹ For the same reason, most critics "between the 1950s and 1990s [tended] to associate *Black No More* with a politically retrogressive desire for assimilation

or whiteness" (Ferguson 218). For further explanation on the controversy of Schuyler's political attitude, see Ferguson, 1-29.

²⁰ For Schuyler's criticism on the failure of African American leaders in constructing a stable structure for the economy, see his "A Negro Looks Ahead," especially 215-216.

²¹ For further analysis on the satiric caricatures of black leaders, see Peplow.

²² Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson celebrated urban black Americans' economic uplift in a consumer society. What is absent in his celebratory declaration of black urbanity is the way the black modernity was structured upon the basis of cross-class solidarity, obscuring intra-racial specificities. This description of black modernity as a positive urbanization bears special resonance for the colored cityscape in *Black No More*. For further analysis, see Retman, 1450 – 51.

²³ Dubey explains that the "shift from manufacturing to service" led to a bipolarized employment structure, resulting in a dual form of city "characterized by a small proportion of well-paid, high-tech job, a large pool of low skilled and poorly paid service jobs, and an evisceration of the middle levels of skill and income" (35). According to him, this radical shift transformed a structure of an urban space, which was divided into new "core areas where most of the new high-skilled technical jobs [were] clustered," and "old core areas inhabited by a labor pool" largely made up of racial minorities who lacked "technical skills required for the new jobs" (196).

²⁴ Such a structural collapse of the African American community, following the disindustrialization of the U.S. economy, can be traced as far back as to when W. E. B. Dubois published *The Philadelphia Negro* at the turn of the century. See Dubey, especially the chapter, "The Postmodern Moment in Black Literary and Cultural Studies," 17-54.

²⁵ For further explanation on the black economy in the Fordist era, see Bates, 39-68.

²⁶ During the Harlem Renaissance era, Ferguson asserts, literary sentimentalism and melodramatic tropes mostly outlined the "ideological forces" of race protest rhetoric and the "cultural assumptions" behind the New Negro modernity (57). For further analysis of how black nationalism shaped the cultural atmosphere in Harlem in the 1920s, see Ferguson, 30-62.

Chapter 3

²⁷ Subsequent quotations from *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Flight to Canada* will be marked in page numbers.

²⁸ Reed names the virus after ragtime's proliferation in the early twentieth century, which James Weldon Johnson describes in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. Johnson writes that the earliest ragtime songs "jes' grew" like "Topsy" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (xi).

²⁹ Taking a skeptical view, Strombeck highlights a black masculine desire inherent in Reed's description of conspiracy theory in the novel. According to him, the novel's secret society conspiracy theory shows a "specifically masculine nostalgia" (300), as the novel's male-centered plot itself "reflects and reinforces masculine desire, a desire consistent with the historical origin of" the secret

society theory (303), limiting the novel's deconstructing forces. Hardack criticizes Reed as an "eclectic reappropriator" whose literary practice in *Mumbo Jumbo* is "wholly Western" (121).

³⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* expressed it as "peculiar tricks ..., means of acquiring and diffusing intelligence quite as mysterious in accuracy and rapidity" (4). What is interesting here is the newspaper issue's description of it taking place in prison. What the prison's architecture is to a prison keeper's eye becomes a communication channel to African American convicts.

³¹ Grapevine telegraph broadly refers to a source of "rumor, mainly of a political or military nature" around Civil War era (Sperber 30). For an etymological study of "grapevine telegraph," see Sperber.

³² Vampton caricatures Carl Van Vechten, who was an American writer and photographer. He maintained close relations with artists in Harlem. Full of a passion for blackness, he understood the complexity of race relation and supported black movements in Harlem. Simultaneously, he is considered the most controversial among white people involved with the Harlem Renaissance. His notoriety is particularly due to his 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven*, one that Bernard calls Vechten's "declaration of his right to write about black Harlem life just as he pleased" (8). In the novel, Vechten attempts to "celebrate Harlem and its thriving, fascinating culture" (Bernard 25), but the novel's provocative title and stereotypical descriptions of Harlem nightlife brought him under severe criticism. The controversies *Nigger Heaven* caused "frequently overshadowed everything else Van Vechten achieved" (White 4). Reed's characterization of Vampton as a member of the Knights Templar lies in a skeptical evaluation of Vechten's career and its involvement in Harlem.

³³ Papa Legba is a Haitian loa known to facilitate "communication, speech, and understanding." Existing at a "spiritual crossroad" between divinity and humanity, he is believed to speak all human languages, and mediates in all communications between human and god. For further reference, see Hans-Peter Oswald.

³⁴ For analysis of the Flying African legends, see McDaniel, Storey, Thorsteinson, and Walters.

Chapter 4

³⁵ The science fiction genre has been built through certain racist framings based on political and economic hierarchies, even though many mainstream white science fiction writers have tried to erase white/non-white binarism. "Race, more particularly 'blackness,' is," Lavender notes, "always in the background of this historically 'white' genre," whose "estranged landscapes and powerful technologies extrapolate and model new racial formations" (19). Exploring how race functions in "what is commonly assumed to be a deracinated popular genre" (19), he sheds critical light on underlying racial frames that structure novels of major white SF writers such as Phillip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin, whose appropriations of the genre characteristics of science fiction have served attempts to locate themselves in the post-racial realm. For more insightful analysis on metaphoric variations of race issue and underlying racist framings in major science fictions, see Lavender, 21-53.

³⁶ For further discussions on the paradigmatic shift of postwar U.S. racial politics, see Omi and Winant, especially 159-244.

³⁷ For further discussion of the realistic legitimacy of *Kindred*, also see Steinberg and Vint.

³⁸ Lipsitz suggests that since the Civil Right Act of 1964 both US liberals and conservatives have prevented the carrying out of a racial debate "in explicit racial terms" under the guise of post-capitalist market economy. As a consequence of such ideological de-racialization of the US economic structure, disadvantages imposed upon racial minorities have been attributed to their "innate deficiencies" rather than to "systematic disenfranchisement and discrimination" (24). Lipsitz argues this is mainly due to the fact that civil rights laws "have been structured to be ineffective and largely unenforceable" (25).

³⁹ Critics have interpreted the allusion to the year 1976, the bicentennial of American independence, in a variety of ways. Kubitschek asserts that the allusion implies Butler's belief that "the country itself must re-examine its history in order to have any hope of resolving contemporary racial conflict" (28). According to Hua, the allusion shows that Dana's independence from the southern patriarchy occurs with "Dana's own complicity in rendering Alice a victim for the purpose of (re)producing 'history'" (398), so it leads to an irony of "the novel's masculinist sentimental strain" which undergirds "the patriarchal convention of national membership" (406). Vint argues that 1976 alludes to "the nation's constitution [which] encoded blacks as three-fifths of a full person" (259).

⁴⁰ This title comes from Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists*.

⁴¹ Subsequent quotations from *Kindred* will be marked in page numbers.

⁴² Systematic Jim Crow racism voyeuristically consumed black female sexuality, as notably evidenced during the Rhinelander trial in 1924. During this trial, African American female sexuality was represented as "diabolical" in its interracial relationship (Sollors 167) in "pornographic picture books" that later became best sellers in the gutter market (Sollors 163). When Leonard Rhinelander, a young, wealthy New York socialite, sued her wife Alice Rhinelander, a biracial woman from a working-class family, to annul their marriage due to her biracial ancestry, Isaac Mills—Rhinelander's attorney—introduced the interracial relationship as a "diabolical" seduction by an African American woman over a 21-year-old young white man who had not known of his wife's African American ancestry, to justify Rhinelander's accusation against his wife (Sollors 167).

⁴³ Bonilla-Silva insists that many white Americans employ styles of racist ideology along with several rhetorical tools to "talk nasty about minorities without sounding racist" (53) and to preserve "its mythological nonracialism" (70). The semantic moves that white Americans usually buy include tropes of making excuses ("I am not a racist, but), de-racialization of race ("It's economics, not race"), imputing racism to racial minorities ("Blacks are the really prejudiced ones"), and ambiguous answers ("yes and no"). For further explanation of color-blind rhetorical tropes, see Bonilla-Silva, especially the chapter "The Style of Color Blindness," 53-74.

⁴⁴ Csicsery-Ronay points out that Bloch fuses traditional Marxian dialectics with a "religious eschatology" (47). For more specific explanation, see Csicsery-Ronay, 47-75.

⁴⁵ When Dana comes back from the past without Kevin she hears news on "the war on Lebanon" and the President's ordering of "evacuation of nonofficial Americans" (196).

⁴⁶ Butler never knew what would be happening in the 1980s and 1990s by the time *Kindred* was published in 1979, but one may argue that this demonstrates the realistic accuracy of Butler's observation of the color-blind racist culture of the post-civil rights era.

⁴⁷ Green points out that the doubling of Kevin and Rufus proves Butler's rejection of the biological notion of race. Those two white males show that racist "personality and behavior are constructed within a social frame" in which "white man happen to hold the power in his society and...has been taught from a young age that he *can* beat, rape and kill" (182, emphasis in original).

Chapter 5

⁴⁸ For further discussions on the paradigmatic shift of postwar U.S. racial politics, see Omi and Winant, especially 159-244.

⁴⁹ Lipsitz suggests it has been one of the central concerns of contemporary race discourse to explore how U.S. liberals and conservatives have maintained racial discrimination in colorblind ways since the Civil Rights Movement without carrying out a racial debate "in explicit racial terms." Such de-racialization of the U.S. economic structure serves as an ideological device with which to attribute racial inequalities to "innate deficiencies" rather than to "systematic disenfranchisement and discrimination" (24).

⁵⁰ Ironically, Ryle's coinage and discussion of the term contributed to the advance of theoretical concepts adopted by recent research in cognitive psychology, computer science, digital computation theory, and artificial intelligence, whose major purpose is to make automatic machines that "manage themselves, taking self-directed action when deemed appropriate and making choices about what needs to be done and how exactly to do it" (Russel et al. 177). Arthur Koestler disputes Ryle's notion of ghosts, arguing "evolution has been compared to a labyrinth of blind alleys, and there is nothing very strange or improbable in the assumption that man's native equipment, though superior to that of any other living species, nevertheless contains some built-in error or deficiency which predisposes him towards self-destruction" (xi), and the "great innovators in the history of science had always been aware of the transparency of phenomena towards a different order of reality, of the ubiquitous presence of the ghost in the machine" (220).

Chapter 6

⁵¹ See also Clark, "Changing Face of America Helps Assure Obama Victory."

⁵² Since the 1990s American Studies scholars have turned their critical attention towards the racial reformation of U.S. politico-cultural geography. For basic methodologies, see *National Identities and Post-Americanist Narratives*, *Futures of American Studies*, *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning Toward the Transpacific*, all edited by Donald Pease.

⁵³ Although Ramírez does not clarify the reason she uses the term "Chicana" instead of Chicano, this appears to be because she finds the category's conceptual root in the works of Marion C. Martinez, a Mexican feminist visual artist, who uses "technological waste" such as "discarded computer components" to represent Mexican experience (Ramírez 2004, 55). We will use here instead "Chicana/ofuturism" to refer to a broader space in which Mexican culture as a whole manifests in relation to the history of United States.

⁵⁴ For analysis of racist framings in major science fictions, see Lavender, 21-53.

⁵⁵ Hogan coined "Chicanonautica" to refer to space of experience that is "always going out of bounds, crossing border, trespassing new frontiers, going beyond conventional understanding of the barrio" (2015, 132).

⁵⁶ Although there are similarities between his concept of object-oriented ontology and contemporary posthuman approaches to an alien, Bogost makes a distinction based on their different levels of anthropocentrism. He explains:

Posthuman approaches still preserve humanity as a primary actor. Either our future survival motivates environmental concern, or natural creatures like kudzu and grizzly bears are meant to be elevated up to the same status as humanity. ... The object-oriented position holds that we do not have to wait for the rapturous disappearance of humanity to attend to plastic and lumber and steel. (7-8)

⁵⁷ For specific images, designs, and methodologies of Martinez's artworks, see her website. <<http://www.marionmartinez.com/home222.html>>