

# The Afterlife of Slavery and the Problem of Reproductive Freedom

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**Alys Eve Weinbaum**

In a 2009 article Dorothy Roberts examines the impact of what she labels “reprogenetic” technology on race, gender, and class formation and diagnoses the emergence of a “new reproductive dystopia.” She characterizes this new dystopia by a form of “stratified reproduction” that limits access to reproductive technologies to those who can pay and renders all women self-governing subjects who “willingly” submit to technological interventions into their reproductive bodies and processes that amount to population control. Roberts, one of the most outspoken legal scholars to examine the linkages between contemporary cultures and politics of reproduction and those of slavery, sharply contrasts this “new reproductive dystopia” with the “old reproductive dystopia” that had been her prior focus, especially in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (1997). In so doing, she distinguishes the new from the old, the latter of which, she argues, was subtended by and reinvigorated predictable racial hierarchies. By contrast, the new dystopia is marked by neoliberal forms of governance that render all women, regardless of race, self-disciplining and ultimately self-exploiting subjects. As Roberts elaborates, in the old dystopia “a reproductive caste system contrasted policies that penalize poor black women’s childbearing with the high-tech fertility industry that promotes childbearing by more affluent white women.”<sup>21</sup> As a consequence, the old dystopia produced an implicitly eugenic social order in which white women were granted resources that allowed them to reproduce white progeny, while black women’s reproduction was pathologized and devalued, and their access to childbearing and childrearing

resources denied. Whereas in the old dystopia black and white women were pitted against each other, in the new dystopia all women function as reproductive consumers and laborers, such that women of color and white women are often bound in common plight by the “neo-liberal trend toward privatization and punitive governance.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Roberts is not a literary scholar, she insightfully singles out Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Gena Corea’s *The Mother Machine* as two well-known works of the dystopian genre that in the early 1980s helped readers to comprehend contemporaneous reproductive cultures and politics. As Roberts observes, the former explored the exploitation of reproductive laborers through its portrait of the surrogate mothers of Gilead, while Corea’s nonfiction polemic warned of a near future in which women of color would provide reproductive services to white women able to pay for the use of wombs and fertile eggs, and for genetically engineered children. Roberts’s main point in mentioning these texts is not only that literature has provided a useful critique of reproductive cultures and politics but also that the new century lacks the elucidating cultural forms that accompanied the old reproductive dystopia of the previous one. For Roberts, at present, we are thus in need of a literature keyed specifically to our contemporary neoliberal and, it is implied, seemingly postracial reproductive landscape.<sup>3</sup>

In this article I treat fiction by Octavia Butler and suggest that a dystopian literature that deeply and critically engages contemporary reproductive cultures and politics already exists. Contrary to Roberts’s assertion that our supposedly new situation requires new cultural forms, I demonstrate that the power of Butler’s engagement with the dystopian genre lies in its refusal of clear-cut divisions between old and new dystopias, past and present. Rather than mapping historical ruptures, Butler exposes historical continuities between the racialized and eugenic regime of the old dystopia and the neoliberal and governmental world that Roberts regards as new. In so doing, she also reveals connections between our present and the long history of chattel slavery. Through contextualization of Butler’s fiction within a discussion of reproductive politics, it becomes possible to recognize in Butler’s work not only a prescient assessment of the reproductive landscape that was beginning to emerge as Butler wrote in the 1970s and 1980s, but also, and as importantly, a *proleptic critique* of what has now become a well-established cultural dominant in the new millennium. For Butler’s fiction addresses our time as much as its own, offering forward for future generations a *philosophy of history* that highlights historical continuities and insists on complexity and articulation among economic systems and ideologies, rather than on clean breaks and discrete epochs. In so doing, it offers a philosophy of history that articulates the long

history of racial capitalism, including chattel slavery, with contemporary biocapitalism under conditions of neoliberalism.<sup>4</sup>

Among other things, Butler's philosophy of history allows us to see the long-standing reliance of racial capitalism on biopower and on postracial neoliberalism. When we read across Butler's writings we see that slavery is inextricably linked to contemporary cultures and politics of reproduction even though slavery is not always present on the manifest level of texts, and despite the fact that the bodies that are exploited within texts are neither necessarily black nor female. And, when we read Butler's corpus proleptically, we also see the emergence of the same self-governing neoliberal subjects who will be associated with the "new reproductive dystopias" of neoliberalism and thus that those whom Butler portrays as "consenting" to their exploitation exist side by side with those who are forcibly enslaved and rendered disposable. We discover, in other words, that there are no postracial reproductive worlds or "free" subjects. Rather, past and future formations are organized by continuously recalibrated racialisms that shore up the racial and gendered ordering of reproduction even though it often appears that the formations in question are no longer structured around long-standing, and thus familiar, racial and gendered conventions.<sup>5</sup>

Reading Butler's fiction as a philosophy of history produces critical consciousness about how evolving forms of exploitation correspond to changes in the mode of reproduction. To develop this method of reading, I draw on Raymond Williams's ideas about "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" cultural processes. Though Williams does not consider racial or gendered power, his ideas robustly resonate with Butler's representation of historical continuity, overlap, and transformation. As Williams's conceptual trilogy suggests, literature not only allows for apprehension of the ideology of dominant economic systems and cultural processes, but it also gives us access to *residual* (formed in the past but still "active" in the present) and *emergent* ("alternative" and yet often inchoate) ideological and cultural processes that continuously exert pressure on, compete with, and in the process reshape dominant ones.<sup>6</sup> Taking up Williams's terminology, we can say that Butler's fiction renders visible the incorporation and reinterpretation of the residual processes of slavery within the dominant processes of racial capitalism and biocapitalism, while, at the same time, exposing to view an array of emergent cultural processes that are expressive of formations that are either alternative or truly oppositional to the eugenic and neoliberal reproductive orders that are culturally dominant.

In giving expression to more than one cultural process, Butler's fictions reveal contestation among the range of reproductive cultural processes that are currently under way. Indeed, her fictions render visible

the afterlife of slavery in the form of a cultural residue; the presence of opposition to eugenic and racial hierarchy in the form of emergent cultural processes; and, too, the manner in which such alternative cultural processes might ideally point the way toward a range of complex responses to neoliberalism and postracialism—that is, to the ideologies that secure the smooth functioning of racial capitalism and biocapitalism. By insisting on complex economic structuration, Butler’s fiction reveals multiple modes of production vying for cultural hegemony and suggests that this is so precisely because an active and ongoing contest for reproductive hegemony is always already under way. Appearing to recognize that “only the historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins,” Butler refuses to allow the enemy “to be victorious.” She refuses to pander to ahistoricism, myths of progressive departure, or accounts of handy defeat.<sup>7</sup> Instead she offers readers an array of representations, a philosophy of history, in view of which she invites us to examine the material complexity in which we have been and continue to be immersed and, ideally, to jump into the ideological fray.

### **Kinship as Killing: *Kindred***

For the most part, readers and scholars interested in Butler’s ideas about slavery have focused on her first major novel, *Kindred* (1979), a time-travel narrative in which Dana, a black woman from 1976, finds herself transported to the 1850s, to a plantation on which her ancestors, black and white, live. There Dana experiences slavery firsthand and feels herself compelled to engineer the birth of the enslaved woman whom she believes will later become her great grandmother. There is however a hitch: in order to ensure her existence Dana abets the predatory sexual desires of her great-great grandmother’s master, a man whom she believes to be her great-great grandfather. In genre terms, *Kindred* is variously read as historical fiction, as a neoslave narrative, and as black feminist theory. It has been cast as a commentary on the enduring violence and trauma of slavery in the lives and psyches of the descendants of those who were enslaved and on the nation as a whole; as a reflection on the ruse of achievement of “freedom” for contemporary black women; and as a meditation on the problem of writing the history of women in slavery from the vantage point of the enslaved.<sup>8</sup> In short, *Kindred’s* engagement with slavery and historiography has led critics to read it as Butler’s singular historical novel and thus as anomalous when contextualized among her other writings, which are, in turn, classified as belonging to speculative or science fictional genres.<sup>9</sup>

To separate *Kindred* off in this way is a mistake. In so doing, critics obscure linkages between this explicit meditation on slavery and emergent

ideas about slavery and neoslavery (as dystopia) that pervade Butler's other fictions set in the present and/or future. Indeed, to get at the historical and materialist complexity of Butler's work—to reveal its philosophy of history—we must read *across* time and texts, situating *Kindred* as touchstone and telos but not as exception (generic or otherwise). Only through intertextual focus can the racialized and gendered power dynamics of slavery at work in the present and future worlds that Butler creates come into view such that the reproductive self-governance that characterizes neoliberalism can be seen as an obstacle to achievement of “freedom” in the present, *and, too, in the past, in slavery*—that is, within a slave context in which neoliberalism would appear, at least at first, to be a wild anachronism. And thus this article reads *Kindred* with “Bloodchild” to bring into express juxtaposition a text about slavery written in the context of the birth of biocapitalism in the late 1970s and a text about surrogacy written during the ascent of neoliberalism in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, this article, then, underscores the historical continuities among slavery, racial capitalism, biocapitalism, and neoliberalism and demonstrates the multiple ways in which reproductive hegemony remains perpetually under siege and vulnerable to insurgency.

In *Kindred* slavery is captured for readers and the novel's protagonist through the experience of time travel, which shuttles the present into the past as it shuttles Dana through time. As Dana moves between 1976 and the 1850s, she reflects on what she has imagined slavery to be from the vantage point of her present, on how reality compares with her imagination, on how to represent her present to those in the past, and, reciprocally, on how to represent slavery for posterity. After all, like Butler, Dana is a writer whose literary production reflects and refracts life in fiction and meditates on questions of history, historiography, and the literary imagination. Whereas readers of *Kindred* are required to take as given Butler's representational ability, however, Dana's is thrown into question. Butler subtly portrays Dana as an unreliable narrator who appears blind to her complicity in the historical violence that she witnesses, and who thus possesses a blinkered view of her present, and a diminished capacity to accurately represent it. Dana fails to register that her present, and a moment of supposed “freedom,” nonetheless gains an increasingly sinister aspect as it becomes, over the course of the novel, continuous with, rather than distinct from, the slave past that she visits.

The dimensions of continuity between past and present that Dana comprehends with least acuity are biopolitical—the very conditions that Foucault associates with the ascent of neoliberalism in his 1978–1979 lectures.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, Dana fails to see that the struggle in which she is involved is not only over personal survival but also over sexual and reproductive power—over kinship, genealogy, and, ultimately, futurity.

As a consequence, what Dana crucially fails to understand (but which is revealed by a philosophy of history situating the birth of biopolitics in slavery) is the way in which sexual and reproductive insurgency and counterinsurgency function as the motor of history. Put differently, she fails to see that human reproduction, kinship, and genealogy are power's source and stake—and, therefore, its vulnerability.

On the manifest level of the plot, as in many time-travel narratives, Dana is convinced that her existence depends upon her ability to go back in time and engineer her birth (in this case via the birth of her ancestor). And thus, while Dana might have gone back to the 1850s to free her relatives from slavery (thus ensuring their reproductive sovereignty), she never considers this option. Instead, she acts as if the only way to achieve her end is to orchestrate her ancestor's sexual and reproductive lives, perpetuating their bondage, and ultimately shoring up the system of slavery. Because Dana does not question the process by which she reproduces kinship and genealogy, her present life in "freedom" becomes contingent on another woman's enslavement. And thus Dana's pursuit of kinship is killing in that it amounts to soul murder, to the subjection of another woman to living death and eventually, as we shall see, to actual death.

The above assessment of Dana's complicity is not part of the existing criticism on the novel, which usually casts Dana as a sympathetic victim of slavery. Moreover, most critics take Dana at her word, believing that her time travel is driven by an inevitable and thus unproblematic quest for personal survival. At least on the surface, such reading makes sense. When Rufus, the slave master who Dana believes to be her great-great grandfather, is in mortal danger, Dana is wrenched from her present and returned to the plantation on which Rufus resides. There she invariably leaps to Rufus's aid, saving his life and restoring his power over his slaves. On his plantation, moreover, Dana sustains serious injuries. And while her condition is not identical to that of other female slaves (Dana maintains a privileged relationship to Rufus) her visible blackness codes her as chattel, rendering her vulnerable to Rufus's whims, to the lash, to the threat of disposability, and, in the end, to sexual violation and loss of reproductive sovereignty.

Alternatively, when we read *Kindred* as a novel about kinship as killing, Dana is no longer simply a victim; she also becomes an accomplice in slavery whose acquiescence to the logic of time travel and that of the genealogical project it entails amounts to a choice made again and again. Indeed, Dana, like *Kindred's* critics, never considers that the catalyst for her to pull back in time might be exerted not by Rufus but by Alice, the woman whom Dana identifies as her black female progenitor. Moreover, Dana never considers that Alice's summons might be to join forces, to help



her resist (as opposed to enable) her sexual and reproductive bondage. Uncritically focused on achievement of Alice's eventual pregnancy and birth as the cause and reason for her pull through time, Dana is blind to numerous alternatives—to the possibility that her time travel might not only save life (for Rufus) and make life (for herself) but that it also might catalyze another woman's subjection and dehumanization, or, conversely, her liberation.

This contradiction reaches a crisis point in a disturbing passage in which Dana is compelled to pimp Alice to Rufus. Perhaps one of the main reasons that this passage (which, instructively, lies at the center of the novel) is minimized in criticism is because readers have prioritized analysis of the relationship between Dana and Rufus over that between Dana and Alice, narrowly conceiving of the novel's central conflict as that between master and slave.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the insight that is neglected when the master/slave relationship is centered is the fact that, despite their manifestly unequal positions within the nineteenth-century racial formation that is depicted, Rufus and Dana actually share an agenda: they want to keep Alice alive. And each takes for granted (even as each laments) the fact that Alice's subjection is both necessary and expedient. Put differently, when Dana and Rufus are viewed as adversarial their shared biopolitical project—control over Alice's sexuality and reproduction, and, too, control over kinship and genealogy—is overlooked. And of course, this is precisely where questions arise. How does the novel's meaning change when focus on power inequality is shifted from Rufus and Dana to Dana and Alice? How does this change shift focus from enslavement as victimization to complicity with enslavement as biopower? And how might it enable apprehension of slave women's insurgency against sexual and reproductive enslavement as meaningful in and for our present?

On the level of manifest content, Dana and Alice are paired throughout. They look uncannily alike. Each is born free, and, albeit in different ways, each is enslaved by Rufus. For his part, Rufus expressly links the two: Alice and Dana are two halves of the same woman he perversely quips; together they satisfy all his needs and desires. Alice functions as "lover" and mother, Dana as savior, intellectual companion, and confidant. And yet, Dana and Alice are just as inextricably connected by the power differential that exists between them as by their likeness and supposed kinship. We cannot forget that Alice is a reproductive laborer whose insurgency against the conditions of her labor is continuously being checked by Rufus's counterinsurgency. And although Dana exerts a degree of power over Rufus, she nonetheless shares his investment in Alice's sexual and reproductive subjection.

Dana's failure to recognize her quest for kinship as killing renders

her a prisoner of sorts, an unwitting victim of the biopolitical order she aids and abets. While Alice dreams of insurgency, Dana not only consents to performance of her role as “slave” but also to the logic of kinship and genealogy that places her at Rufus’s mercy and renders her complicit in the violence he perpetuates against Alice. Along with Rufus, Dana exerts sovereign power, rendering Alice’s body and life disposable in the process of pursuing her self-interest, her genealogical futurity. Apparently never considering the possibility of sacrifice of self or, for that matter, other potentially insurgent actions—those that would entail electing not to participate in creation of kinship and genealogical futurity—Dana ends up securing the institution of slavery and its afterlife.<sup>13</sup>

There are two scenes in the novel that reveal the complex power dynamic in which Alice and Dana are involved, and the toll, in human life, of Dana’s pursuit of her birth. In the first scene, Dana brings Alice back to life (and into bondage) after she has been severely beaten; in the second, she accedes to Rufus’s request that she persuade Alice to comply with his sexual demands. Together these scenes reveal Dana’s complicity with biopower, and, simultaneously, her self-subjection—or, in the language of the contemporary critique of neoliberalism, her self-governance and participation in another woman’s reproductive bondage. In short, these scenes reveal how Dana’s commitment to genealogical futurity becomes the mechanism of her subjection to biopower and, too, how slavery becomes both an uncanny resource for subjection to reproductive hegemony and a possible resource when imagining insurgency against it.

In the first of the two scenes, Rufus attempts to rape Alice and winds up in a life and death battle with Alice’s slave husband, Isaac. Dana arrives in the nick of time and dutifully rushes in to save Rufus. And though it initially appears that she also pursues Alice’s well-being (she bargains with Rufus to give Alice and Isaac time to run), Dana merely delays Isaac’s lynching and Alice’s near-death beating and subsequent enslavement for aiding a fugitive. It is through Dana’s actions that Rufus gets what he originally sought: Alice’s sexual and reproductive subjection. Moreover, it is Dana who, at Rufus’s request, heals Alice’s wounded body and renders her sexually serviceable. The dialogue that ensues when Alice regains consciousness and realizes her new condition makes apparent that even though Alice clearly states her preference for actual death over living death, Dana is inured to Alice’s insurgent reason.

**ALICE:** “If you’d had any sense, you would have let him [Rufus] die!”

**DANA:** “If I had, it wouldn’t have kept you and Isaac from being caught. . . . It might have gotten you both killed . . . ”

**ALICE:** “Doctor-Nigger . . . Think you know so much. Reading-nigger. *White-nigger!* Why didn’t you know enough to let me die?”<sup>14</sup>



Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dana is naively unprepared for her role as pimp. As she concedes, although “I had thought that [Rufus] would just rape her again—and again. . . . I didn’t realize that he was planning to involve me in that rape. He was, and he did.” When Rufus charges Dana with her task (“You talk to her [Alice]—talk some sense into her—or you’re going to watch while Jake Edwards [the driver] beats some sense into her!”), Dana is unable to imagine Alice’s insurgent position, and proceeds to rationalize her choice (“No, I couldn’t refuse to help the girl—help her avoid at least some of her pain”). Even as Dana notes that she “didn’t think much of herself” for “helping her [Alice] in this way,” she chooses to execute Rufus’s plan.<sup>15</sup> After all, it coincides neatly with her own genealogical project.

While numerous interpretations of Dana’s choice are possible (sympathetic ones situate Dana between a rock and hard place), it is useful to hone in on the idea of choice itself. Dana complies with power, she self-governs, precisely by refusing to reframe her choices as such and thus by consenting to characterization of alternatives as either nonexistent or irrational.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, she accepts the neoliberal rationality that Dorothy Roberts attributes to women in the supposedly “new reproductive dystopia.” And she “helps” Alice comply with power, even as Alice informs Dana of one of many alternatives—killing Rufus, cutting “his damn throat,” and thus putting an end to the struggle in which they are all involved.<sup>17</sup> When we understand that Dana chooses to be inured to Alice’s suggestion, we also recognize that Dana not only fails to act, but she also imposes her own contemporary, neoliberal rationality on her enslaved ancestor. By bringing her neoliberal rationality with her into the past (Alice’s present), Dana imposes on Alice a form of enslaved thinking about insurgency that is in fact antithetical to the mindset of the other woman.

Although Dana successfully abets Alice’s enslavement for a number of years (and, significantly, just long enough for Alice to give birth to Dana’s supposed ancestor), Alice eventually succeeds in taking her sexual and reproductive labor out of circulation through an act of suicide.<sup>18</sup> On her last journey back in time, Dana thus returns to find Alice’s corpse swinging from a beam. It is the pairing of the life that Alice makes and her death that should give readers pause. For it alerts us, once again, that this novel is not only a commentary on slavery but also, when read proleptically—as a philosophy of history—a commentary on the violence of neoliberalism, and especially on its squelching of insurgency through self-governance. Even though Dana repeatedly states that Rufus killed Alice by driving her to despair, it is Dana who persists in believing that her genealogy must be secured, Dana who accepts the idea of Alice’s disposability, and Dana who does not question her choices.

As critics concur, Dana’s return to 1976 with an arm so maimed that

it must be amputated is one of the novel's most intriguing symbols of the violent afterlife of slavery. Dana's injury (seemingly caused by Rufus's grip on her arm as she transports through time) is read as a sign of the long reach of past trauma and violence, its capacity to grab hold of the living and to wreak mental and physical havoc.<sup>19</sup> While this is a powerful reading, it can be deepened further still. From a proleptic vantage point Dana is maimed not only by slavery and its afterlife but also by her recursive ensnarement in neoliberalism. In the supposedly "free" postbellum world to which Dana returns, her quest for kinship and her resultant complicity in another woman's enslavement continue to go unquestioned. And thus it is precisely from within neoliberalism that Dana is blinded to the possibility that she is violently marked not only by slavery but also by self-government or, more aptly, self-enslavement.

### **Slavery, Surrogacy, and Neoliberalism: "Bloodchild"**

When read proleptically, *Kindred* reveals how Alice's story highlights forms of surrogate insurgency against sexual and reproductive exploitation that are otherwise rendered invisible in contemporary neoliberalism. The female ancestor whose birth Dana orchestrates is named after an Old Testament figure, Hagar. Hagar, a slave belonging to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, is often cited in contemporary scholarship on human reproduction as the world's first surrogate mother. Hagar bore a son, Ishmael, to Abraham when Sarah requested her to do so because Sarah initially believed herself barren. When Sarah subsequently gives birth to Isaac, Ishmael becomes an obstacle to her son's inheritance, and thus Sarah exiles Ishmael and Hagar into the wilderness. This move to dispose of the pair allows Isaac to assume the covenant; it also allows Ishmael and Hagar, with God's help, to make a way where there is no way. Eventually, Ishmael becomes a prophet and patriarch of Islam, and Hagar the mother to an important progenitor of the Arab people. Within Christian theology, implicitly narrated from Sarah's perspective, Hagar is cast as an unruly, insubordinate slave who leaves the faith. By contrast, from the vantage point of black feminist theology, which gained a footing in the late 1970s and 1980s—precisely the years during which Butler wrote—Hagar is cast as a woman of African descent, a black Egyptian, who endures the trials of slavery, poverty, racial ostracism, sexual exploitation, forced surrogacy, rape, domestic violence, homelessness, motherhood in bondage, and single parenthood and not only survives but demonstrates an insurgent spirit, a capacity to buck authority and craft an alternative relationship to God.<sup>20</sup>

Delores Williams is perhaps the most well-known proponent of the black feminist "Hagar-centered tradition." In her treatise, *Sisters in the Wil-*

*derness*, she reinterprets the portions of Genesis in which Hagar appears, “lifting up” Hagar by imagining what Hagar’s story meant to her, and by reclaiming Hagar’s protest against surrogacy as an “analogue” for black women’s experience across time. As Williams explains, through Hagar “black women’s history . . . [becomes visible] as reproduction history . . . as history that uses *labor* as a hermeneutic to interpret black women’s biological and social experience of reproducing and nurturing the species and *labor* as an interpretive tool for analyzing and assessing black women’s creative productions as well as their relation to power.”<sup>21</sup> Through the lens of Williams’s work, Alice’s naming of her daughter expresses a philosophy of history and, too, what Robin Kelley has called a “freedom dream.”<sup>22</sup> Through her choice of “Hagar” Alice signals her insurgent sensibility as well as her critique of Dana’s counterinsurgency. With “Hagar” Alice prophecies freedom for her child and simultaneously broadcasts her hope that it will be achieved through insurgency against imposition of the surrogate role, against imposition of another woman’s biopolitical, genealogical agenda on Hagar’s body, progeny, and life.

Williams’s rendering of Hagar as an insurgent surrogate is a major theological and historical innovation. It constitutes “a route to black women’s issues,” and to black women’s “social-role exploitation” across the antebellum and postbellum periods.<sup>23</sup> Hagar had no control over her body or labor, her sexual or reproductive processes. Similarly, slave women were stripped of such control. Forced to reproduce property, to serve as wet nurses, nurturers of children, and sexual partners for white men, slave women surrogated on multiple fronts. When the Civil War ended, black women’s installation, via domestic work, in white homes placed them into familiar roles. While in our contemporary period the “social role surrogacy” that is Williams’s focus can be separated from “biological surrogacy,” Williams is quick to point out that “today the growing surrogacy industry in North America and the escalating poverty among black people can pressure poor black women to become heavily involved in this industry at the level of reproduction,” effectively returning them to forms of biological surrogate labor performed during slavery.<sup>24</sup> Extending her analogical analysis to the etymological relationship between contemporary surrogacy and reproductive slavery, Williams poignantly concludes: “What black women know is that . . . the language associated with commercial surrogacy today is a throw-back to American slavery, when certain slave women were set apart to function as ‘breeder women.’ . . . The question for black women today is whether forced surrogacy can happen again in their history.”<sup>25</sup>

For Williams, Hagar’s story, and black women’s surrogacy more generally, constitutes an invaluable heuristic device that offers forward a philosophy of history of special relevance in contemporary biocapitalism.

In “Bloodchild,” the short story I treat in closing, Butler builds on this proleptic reading of enslaved sexuality and reproduction, further examining the linkages between slavery and surrogacy that are established in *Kindred* by turning gestational surrogacy into an uncanny and horrifying practice. In the dystopian future world depicted in “Bloodchild,” an alien species, the centipede-like Tlic, composes the master class whose breeding and routine use of human reproductive surrogates is essential to Tlic futurity. Tlic must lay larval eggs in warm-blooded bodies where they can grow until maturity, at which point they are forcibly removed from their hosts or, alternatively, left to kill them as they eat their way through vital organs and flesh. Not only have humans come to constitute the preferred surrogate labor force, they are forced by Tlic to reproduce themselves as such. In short, humans reproduce Tlic and themselves, for, as first Marx and then Althusser observed, all labor forces are compelled to do so in order to reproduce the relations of production that subtend the dominant organization of power.<sup>26</sup>

According to the protagonist, a boy named Gan, when humans first arrived on the Tlic planet, refugees from Earth, they were caged, drugged, and mated like the other animals that the Tlic husband. By contrast, during the period in which the story is set, a supposedly more “civilized” system for managing the human population has become the norm. Corralled on “Preserves,” human families are now cared for by individual Tlic by whom they are adopted in exchange for their surrogate services. In these interspecies reproductive units, female Tlic couple with humans (male and female), in whom they deposit larvae and from whom they harvest young. Within this system, euphemistically dubbed the “joining of families,”<sup>27</sup> affective attachments emerge, and the narrative that unfolds revolves around the complexities of Gan’s relationship with T’Gatoi, the Tlic dignitary who raises him from infancy to be her sexual partner and surrogate “mother” to her young.

Despite evident inequality, some readers view the Tlic/human relationship as symbiotic.<sup>28</sup> Humans have fled a postapocalyptic planet, no longer inhabitable, and their descendants have been integrated into an alien world in exchange for their reproductive labor. And, at least superficially, this reading appears to be backed by authorial statements about intent. In her “Afterword,” for instance, Butler observes that it “amazes [her] that some people have seen ‘Bloodchild’ as a story of slavery” and admonishes readers, “it isn’t.” Labeling it instead a “love story between two very different beings,” Butler would seem to further imply that the Tlic/human relationship involves mutuality.<sup>29</sup> And yet, such an interpretation (on the part of author and critics) must be read against the grain, as it participates in the biopolitical dynamics and neoliberal rationality that the short story itself exposes to view. Indeed, when authorial protestations are put to the

side, Tlic methods of reproduction indisputably emerge as subtended by residual cultural processes—reproductive surrogacy and thus slavery—by processes that have not only been effectively incorporated but made integral to the functioning of the system overall. And, precisely because surrogate reproduction saturates the Tlic world, “Bloodchild” must be read as a meditation on slavery and its afterlife, and, too, as yet another iteration of Butler’s philosophy of history.

If slavery’s residue is incorporated and made integral to the dominant culture formation represented in “Bloodchild,” it is important to explain how it gets distorted through processes of incorporation and integration. While biological surrogacy is part of the manifest narrative, slavery is more difficult to discern, unmoored as it has become from recognizable racial and gender conventions. Put plainly, in “Bloodchild” slavery and the bodies that labor to reproduce it have changed; they are no longer necessarily either black or female. Rather, all human beings regardless of race and sex are breeders. *Surrogacy is now the universal condition of human beings*; and, all human beings are valued in relation to their reproductive labor and, too, their disposability. As reproduction bursts out of the heterosexual matrix, moreover, reproductive heterosexuality is revealed as only one by-product of reproductive exploitation. In “Bloodchild” humans of all races, genders, sexes, and sexualities—that is, all reproductive laborers—comprise a class. From the vantage point of the Tlic, all humans are reproductive resources available for direct exploitation, investment, and speculative development.

To the extent that Butler consciously recognizes this, she notes in her “Afterword” that “Bloodchild” is a “male pregnancy story” and “a coming of age story” in which a boy’s maturity is signaled by his acquiescence to (or, perhaps more aptly, his interpellation into) Tlic ideology. Gan eventually self-governs, choosing as his lot reproductive surrogacy and thus disposability. In a world in which racial difference is transvalued as species difference, in which the species divide is the caesura separating those with a right to life from those who are disposable, reproductive surrogacy becomes a specifically human activity. As the differences among human beings are flattened and homogenized, all of humanity is feminized by virtue of the historical paleontology of its universal reproductive identity and function, just as, in turn, it is racialized by virtue of the long history of human surrogacy within chattel slavery. The upshot is that even though Tlic ideology prevents humans from recognizing themselves as racialized and feminized slaves, readers readily perceive the human surrogates’ real relationship to the imaginary conditions under which they labor (to tweak Althusser’s formulation).<sup>30</sup>

The feminization and racialization of human surrogates is especially apparent in a violent birth scene at the heart of the short story. Bram Lomas

(who is described as having “brown flesh”) has the misfortune of going into labor while away from his Tlic, the only living being biochemically conditioned to aid him in birthing the larvae with which she has impregnated him. Since Lomas is in the vicinity of Gan’s home and T’Gatoi is visiting Gan, the two midwife Lomas’s ill-timed birth. Though T’Gatoi can’t ameliorate Lomas’s pain, she removes larvae from inside Lomas to another animal, successfully saving his all-too-human flesh from being devoured by Tlic young. For his part, Gan assists an operation that he concedes is “torture.”<sup>31</sup> As Gan describes it:

Lomas’s entire body stiffened under T’Gatoi’s claw, though she merely rested it against him as she wound the rear section of her body around his legs. He might break my grip, but he would not break hers. He wept helplessly as she used his pants to tie his hands, then pushed his hands above his head so that I could kneel on the cloth between them and pin them in place. She rolled up his shirt and gave it to him to bite down on.

And she opened him.

His body convulsed with the first cut. He almost tore himself away from me. The sound he made . . . I had never heard such sounds come from anything human. T’Gatoi seemed to pay no attention as she lengthened and deepened the cut, now and then pausing to lick away blood. . . .

She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with his blood. . . . It had already eaten its own egg case but apparently had not yet begun to eat its host . . . T’Gatoi picked up the writhing grub carefully and looked at it, somehow ignoring the terrible groans of the man.

Abruptly, the man lost consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

In a passage that echoes scenes of torture described in nineteenth-century slave narratives, a human body is mastered and subjected and in the process feminized and racialized. As Lomas’s body becomes surrogate, moreover, it is forced to surrender human life (humanity?) for Tlic life (uttering “sounds that could not come from anything [any longer] human”), thus literally becoming the animalized, disposable fount of the master’s futurity. Lomas’s value resides in his flesh; like the slavers and planters of the Old South, Tlic are biocapitalists invested in propagation and use of bare life. As Gan observes, not only did it seem that he was abetting T’Gatoi’s “torture” of Lomas, he was helping her “consume” him.<sup>33</sup> As in slavery, in Tlic surrogacy the master consumes the slave/surrogate, who, in being consumed, reproduces the conditions of enslavement such that surrogacy becomes function and sign of gendered, racialized, and animalized disposability.

For Gan, Lomas’s birth constitutes a turning point, an awakening to the relations of (re)production and the exploitative conditions in which humans labor.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, however, this awakening does not cata-



lyze insurgency against surrogacy; rather it compels self-governance and interpellation into neoliberalism—into the same rationality that guided Dana’s actions in relation to Alice. When read proleptically, in other words, “Bloodchild,” like *Kindred*, reveals the biopolitical dimensions of racial capitalism and neoliberalism. After Lomas’s birth, Gan struggles to reconcile the violence he has facilitated with his professed love for T’Gatoi and his desire to birth her young. And it is thus only by quelling insight and awareness, or perhaps more aptly, emergent consciousness, that Gan is able to choose to become a surrogate.

As in *Kindred*, it is necessary in “Bloodchild” to unpack the idea of choice and scrutinize the protagonists’ sense of agency or lack thereof. Although Gan claims that he “had been told all [his] life that this [human surrogacy] was a good and necessary thing Tlic and Terran did together” and had until now believed this to be true, post-Lomas Gan confesses that he has come to recognize human surrogacy as “something else, something worse . . . [a reality he] wasn’t ready to see,” yet one he “couldn’t not see. . . .”<sup>35</sup> In other words, Gan admits he was previously blind to his reproductive reality, a result of his eager consumption of the narcotic “eggs” with which Tlic routinely drug humans (supposedly to extend their longevity, but more pragmatically to extend their [re]productivity) and, too, as a response to the feelings of familialism, the ideology of interspecies mutuality perpetuated by Tlic. And thus although Butler never indicates whether Gan recognizes in Lomas’s birth/torture the residue of reproductive slavery as practiced on his old planet, Earth, the internal conflict in which Gan becomes ensnared reveals his vexed apprehension of the choice before him: acceptance or rejection of his assigned role? Consent to or dissent from the hegemonic (Tlic) view of human surrogacy? Participation in the human community as currently constituted by Tlic hegemony, or transformation of the current meaning of “human being”?

At the story’s outset Gan mentions that Tlic power is enforced on the Preserve through imposition of prohibitions (reminiscent of the Black Codes) on possession of guns and vehicles. And yet, Gan also unwittingly indicates that insurgency is most effectively squelched not by a repressive state apparatus but rather by an ideological one: the thick affective ties that Tlic develop to bind humans into familial structures in which subjection is rescripted as love and kinship. And it is for this reason, above all others, that it makes sense when Butler discusses “Bloodchild” as a “love story,” as it is through the filters of love and kinship that Gan considers his options and through these same filters that Tlic produce them. Evincing the complexity of the affective world in which he lives, Gan observes, without remarking on the apparent contradiction: T’Gatoi “parceled us out to the desperate and sold us to the rich and powerful for their political support,” and, too, she considered us “an independent people.” Gan’s

reified mind does not cognate that “caged” humans are “necessities” and “status symbols” that are “owned” by Tlic despite Gan’s use of each of these terms when describing himself and/or fellow humans.<sup>36</sup>

If readers are uncertain whether Gan fully apprehends his unfreedom, post-Lomas he clearly begins to probe his desire for T’Gatoi and to question the manner in which it binds him to her. This is tricky, uncomfortable business. “Bloodchild” can and has been read as a sadomasochist tract; however, once the links between slavery and surrogacy are established, it also necessarily becomes a story about sadomasochism in slavery, a story about a slave who chooses love for his master over revolt, about a slave who nurtures his desire for unfreedom. In the neoliberal reproductive dystopia of “Bloodchild,” slavery and freedom are never distinct; rather, they exist on a continuum along which rationality is acceded to by self-governing subjects who appear to “freely” choose their subjection.<sup>37</sup>

Evidence of Gan’s eventual choice to accommodate the power dynamics that structure his relationship to T’Gatoi emerges most forcefully in two interconnected passages that paradoxically reveal the emergence of a new level of self-awareness, a sense of belonging within an oppressed group of fellow humans and, simultaneously, Gan’s deepened acquiescence to the biopolitical and neoliberal formation that effectively blocks his consideration of the alternatives potentially available to the oppressed group to which he feels he belongs. The first passage, in which Gan rejects the rebellious route taken by his older brother Qui, is presaged by Gan’s midwifing of Lomas’s birth, an act for which Qui berates him. Having long ago recognized that he might be called on to function as T’Gatoi’s surrogate if anything were to happen to Gan, Qui devotes himself to the twofold task of Gan’s preservation and “running” as far as he can from T’Gatoi within the confines of the Preserve. Replaying a power dynamic that recalls that between Dana and Alice, Qui “frees” himself by sacrificing his kin, in this case, by literally surrogating him. In the second passage, Gan explicitly rejects Qui’s individualism by choosing to surrogate, an act that saves Qui and Gan’s other siblings from this role. However, in demanding that T’Gatoi impregnate him, Gan undercuts the human solidarity thus expressed by rearticulating human reproductive servitude. Succumbing to neoliberal rationality, to the feeling that expression of familial love and sexual desire for T’Gatoi require him to surrogate, he at the same time obscures the fact of his subjection. And thus, perhaps predictably, in an epic confrontation that rescripts (as it recalls) others between slave and master, Gan points an illegally stashed rifle at T’Gatoi but neither kills her nor demands his own freedom or that of other humans. Instead, he requests that she acknowledge her dependence on him before proceeding to subject him further.

From one vantage point Gan’s choice to engage in a sexual encounter

with T’Gatoi that culminates in her impregnation of him and his becoming surrogate can be interpreted as an act of accommodation under duress. And yet, to interpret it thus is to misunderstand the neoliberalism explored here. Although Gan refuses further complicity in the subjection of fellow humans, he nonetheless chooses self-governance and experiences his subjection as the fulfillment of strongly felt love and desire. In lowering his gun, in other words, he removes both T’Gatoi and Tlic hegemony from his sights. The disturbing transcript of Gan and T’Gatoi’s postcoital pillow talk reveals this now entrenched dynamic fully. To Gan’s last attempt at expression of oppositional feelings—his insistence that humans should at the very least be shown by Tlic what they are in for—T’Gatoi responds by silencing him. Humans must be “protected from seeing,” she insists, as birth has always been and will remain “a private thing.” Installing reproductive heterosexuality within familial networks of privacy, affect, and tradition, T’Gatoi reasserts the Tlic worldview and her own [*sic*] paternalism: “I’ll take care of you,” she reassures Gan in the last haunting line of the story.<sup>38</sup>

Although Gan chooses to self-govern, it would be wrong to conclude that “Bloodchild” ends by suggesting the inevitability of accommodation to Tlic power or to neoliberalism more generally. The deformation of Gan’s consciousness, evinced in his most intimate moments with T’Gatoi, marks the site of an emergent process in which all human readers might potentially be involved. After all, the surrogate condition in “Bloodchild” is represented as the universal human condition, our condition. Sexual and reproductive slavery, it is suggested, is our story, black and white, male and female, queer and straight. For in “Bloodchild,” surrogacy is not represented as black women’s plight in the distant past but rather as an enduring condition that touches all of us, the entire species, insofar as we are all written by the history of chattel slavery, whether we acknowledge the presence of slavery’s afterlife in our biocapitalist present or not. Indeed, through the work of what Darko Suvin has called “estrangement and cognition,” “Bloodchild” offers forward to readers a genre-specific gift: the critical distance that allows us to cognate representations of our world, past and present, as estranged; or, put differently, the critical distance that allows us to lay hold of the residue of the afterlife of reproductive slavery and the manner in which it subtends the Tlic world and perhaps, too, our biocapitalist present, if not (yet) the future that lies in the balance.<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, it may be argued, from one perspective, that Butler offers readers precisely the type of dystopian fiction, keyed to neoliberalism, postracialism, and the new reprogenetics, for which Dorothy Roberts called in the article discussed at the outset of this one. As I hope to have demonstrated from another perspective, the one offered in preceding

pages, fictions such as *Kindred* and “Bloodchild” move us beyond our biocapitalist present, offering us a complex philosophy of history that shuttles us backward and forward in time—into a past in which we might learn from slave women’s insurgency, and into a future in which slavery lives on and accommodation to it might find critique. For when read proleptically, Butler reveals the residue of sexual and reproductive slavery in neoliberalism and, conversely, how and why enslaved women’s insurgency against sexual and reproductive slavery might yet constitute a critical political resource in our present biocapitalist, postracial, and neoliberal times. Put differently, Butler’s philosophy of history would appear to “seize hold of a memory,” in this case a memory (or residue) of reproductive slavery “as it flashes up at a moment of danger”<sup>40</sup>—for in a moment of danger like ours, in which reproductive “freedom” amounts to consent to self-government, we must reconsider the modalities (material, ideological, and affective) through which we collectively “choose” to reproduce humanity and human futurity, our own and that of others.

## Notes

1. Dorothy E. Roberts, “Race, Gender, and Genetic Technologies: A New Reproductive Dystopia,” *Signs* 34, no. 4 (2009): 783–84. Roberts borrows the term *stratified reproduction* from Rayna Rapp.

2. *Ibid.*, 784–85.

3. *Ibid.*, 791. Roberts recognizes that in her new dystopia “the biological definition of race is stronger than ever,” and yet she argues that in the supposedly postracial context of neoliberalism class divisions, rather than race divisions, structure the consumption of reprogenetics, effectively leaving “the masses” to “suffer most,” qtd. 799–800. Also see “Privatization and Punishment in the New Age of Reprogenetics,” *Emory Law Journal* 54, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 1343–60.

4. “The object of analysis is always the specificity of this ‘structure-superstructure’ complex—though as a historically concrete articulation.” See Stuart Hall, “Race Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in *Black British Cultural Studies*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46.

5. On the persistence of racist racial projects and formations in the context of biocapitalism and postracialism see Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Racial Aura: Walter Benjamin and the Work of Art in a Biotechnological Age,” *Literature and Medicine* 26, no. 1 (2007): 207–39.

6. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122–23. Whereas the residual is routinely incorporated into the dominant culture through processes of reinterpretation, dilution, projection, inclusion, and exclusion, emergent cultural processes reveal “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship.” Emergent processes come in two varieties: those that are elements of some new phase of the dominant culture and those that are “substantially alternative or oppositional to it” and thus connected directly, if unevenly, to new social classes.

7. Though beyond the scope of this article, these formulations are indebted

to Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), qtd. 255.

8. My reading takes its impetus from Saidiya Hartman’s meditations on the necessity of “critical fabulation” in the face of the paucity of the archive left behind by enslaved women whose literacy was prohibited. See Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *small axe* 26 (June 2008): 12. Among numerous critical works on *Kindred* that deal with history, trauma, genre, and slavery’s afterlife see Marisa Parham, “Saying ‘Yes’: Textual Trauma in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,” *Callaloo* 32, no. 4 (2009): 1315–331; Lisa Yaszek, “‘A Grim Fantasy’: Remaking American History in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,” *Signs* 28, no. 4 (2003): 1053–66; and Christine Leveq, “Power and Repetition: Philosophies of (Literary) History in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*,” *Contemporary Literature* 41, no. 3 (2000): 525–53.

9. Stephanie Turner argues that *Kindred* ought to be read as a “hybrid form,” as “historiographic metafiction,” in order to liberate it from the genre straitjacket. See Stephanie Turner, “‘What Actually Is’: The Insistence of Genre in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,” *FEMSPEC* 4, no. 2 (2004): 259–80.

10. Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon, 1979), and Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild,” in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), 3–32. I follow Melinda Cooper’s periodization of biocapitalism as emergent in the 1970s, dominant by the 1990s, and, throughout these decades, closely keyed to the rise of neoliberalism. See Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 3–50.

11. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

12. In this reading Rufus and Dana’s white husband, Kevin, are frequently paired and interracial relationships read as mired in slavery and as evidence of its afterlife. See, for example, Carlyle Van Thompson, “Moving Past the Present: Racialized Sexual Violence and Miscegenous Consumption in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,” in *Eating the Black Body* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 107–44.

13. On the myriad problems of uncritical embrace of forms of futurity and freedom moored in heterosexual reproductive sexuality, genealogy, and kinship, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–32; Gillian Harkins, *Everybody’s Family Romance: Reading Incest in Neoliberal America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); and Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

14. Butler, *Kindred*, 160.

15. *Ibid.*, 162–63.

16. On neoliberalism, choice, and agency, see Jane Elliott, “Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain,” *Social Text* 31, no. 2 (2013); Nikolas S. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Elliott’s ideas about how the subject’s inner drive for life and overpowering interest in self-preservation are shaped by neoliberalism is especially germane to my interpretation of Dana’s “choices.”

17. Butler, *Kindred*, 167.

18. On black feminism’s proleptic reclamation of slave women’s revolutionary acts of reproductive and sexual insurgency see Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Gendering the General Strike: W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* and Black Feminism’s ‘Propaganda of History,’” in “Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*: Past and Present,” ed. Thavolia Glymph, special issue, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013).



19. See, for example, Ashraf Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 107–8.

20. This reading is indebted to Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 4. Also see Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988), esp. chapter 1; and Wilma Ann Bailey, “Black and Jewish Women Consider Hagar,” *Encounter* 63, nos. 1–2 (2002): 37–44.

21. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 10.

22. Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).

23. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 60.

24. *Ibid.*, 62.

25. *Ibid.*, 82. Angela Davis makes a similar point in “Surrogates and Outcast Mothers: Racism and Reproductive Politics in the Nineties,” in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 210–21. On Davis’s account of slavery and surrogacy, see Weinbaum, “Gendering the General Strike.”

26. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127.

27. Butler, “Bloodchild,” 12.

28. See, for example, Stephanie A. Smith, “Octavia Butler: A Retrospective,” *Feminist Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 389.

29. Butler, “Bloodchild,” 30.

30. Ideology is “not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.” Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 165. Famously, Althusser also argues that “ideology has no history,” an ideological proposition about ideology that can account for the erasure of the memory of chattel slavery for the humans living among the Tlic.

31. Butler, “Bloodchild,” 15.

32. *Ibid.*, 15–16.

33. *Ibid.*, 16.

34. Elsewhere I theorize surrogacy as (re)productive labor. See Alys Eve Weinbaum, “Marx, Irigaray, and the Politics of Reproduction,” *Differences* 6, no. 1 (1994): 98–128.

35. Butler, “Bloodchild,” 16–17.

36. *Ibid.*, 5.

37. On this continuum, see Stephanie Smallwood, “Commodified Freedom,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (2004): 289–298.

38. Butler, “Bloodchild,” 29.

39. See Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3–15. Suvin develops the idea of estrangement and cognition to describe the critical work performed by science fiction that projects near and far futures. I extend his insights to speculative fiction that engages the historical past instead of an imagined future. Also, see Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

40. Inspiration is again taken from Walter Benjamin: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.