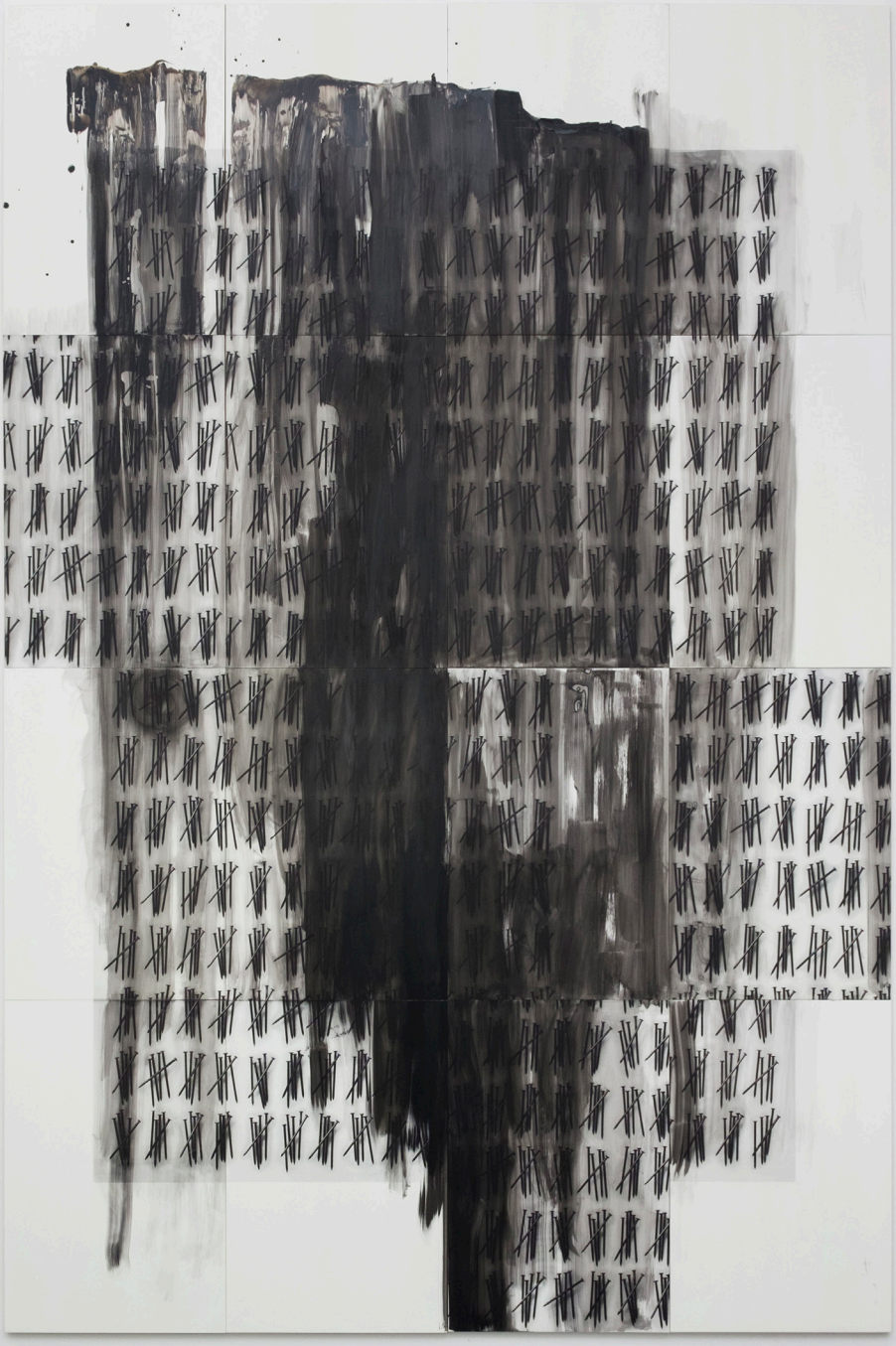
BLACK MADNESS :: MAD BLACKNESS



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:: CONVERSATION I

MAKING BLACK MADNESS

request :: *familiar pause*
innocence :: backpedal
Dear Scar Tissue,
I want my softness to be safe.

—KHADIJAH QUEEN,
"Black Peculiar :: Energy Complex,"
Black Peculiar

"As it stands, Disability Studies has a tenuous relationship with race and ethnicity: while the field readily acknowledges its debt to and inspiration by inquiries such as Black Studies, its efforts at addressing intersections between ability, race, and ethnicity are, at best, wanting," the late Christopher M. Bell intones.[1] His book chapter, "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal," widely considered the inaugural moment in Black disability studies, sardonically does not—in true Swiftian fashion—call for an overhaul of methodology, analysis, and representation.[2] Bell provokes scholars to seek and find the places where race and disability intersect, write about those spaces, and promote structural change to the field. He also urges affective shifts in the way scholars embrace each other and others within the field. Given the venue of his book chapter, *The Disability Studies Reader* (second edition), Bell's work speaks to a particular audience invested in disability studies already. In 2011, the introduction to his posthumously released edited collection, *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural*

Interventions, pans outward, staging "an intervention into the structuralist body politics underpinning African American studies and the whiteness at the heart of Disability Studies."[3] These two inaugural moments press for more granularity in the way of analysis that did little more than say race was like disability and vice versa. (Unfortunately, those "like race" analogies still crop up.) Instead, Bell advocates a set of projects that rereads figures—historical, literary, and cultural—who have been overlooked for their contributions to Black notions of disability or disabled notions of Blackness. Within the volume, scholars focused on specifically Black cultural locations of disability engaged with ableist attitudes, and foregrounded how Blackness alongside disability heralded radicality of a certain kind.

Seemingly in answer to Bell's work, scholars developed a reading strategy that clarifies how race and disability operate: mutual constitution. Specifically, mutual constitution impresses upon readers how these two discourses operate as interrelated and simultaneously present. This reading strategy performs several useful functions within the scholarship. In the interest of carving space to examine our critical conversations and open them up with the work of artists-theorists, I turn to several key moments in our use of mutual constitution to think through when it works and when it does not. This critical reading strategy becomes useful when understanding how disability has been used as a discursive tool. For example, racial and gendered groups have tended to justify their cases for civil rights in opposition to individuals with disabilities. The rhetorical invocation of disability here only functions to undergird the validity of another people groups' personhood (at the expense of the personhood of the disabled).[4] Disability, in this case, does not quite exist as a material reality but rather as a hauntological presence that helps create race and gender, sometimes as superlative. In thinking of race and disability as material, one must consider that contexts of oppression and war create disability, often with detrimental effects on those already disenfranchised by institutional racism.[5] In this case, disability shores up the physical evidence of institutionalized racism and systemic injustice, helping to define race as a matter of life and death.

In addition to highlighting the discursive and material effects of race and disability in tandem, such mutuality also serves an argumentative function. Since it is a critical reading practice, it also shapes how critics write about the two subjects. This project, in its interest in opening up the critical literature to itself, invests in discussing this as a writing and reading strategy for how it roadmaps intellectual possibility (and, as the metaphor goes, closes

off certain avenues). Within Ellen Samuels's monograph *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (2014), she pinpoints that "the mutual entangled and constitutive dynamic of disability, gender, and race in modern fantasies of identification determines the shape and trajectory of [her] book" and, in articulating her main argument, states that "if, at times, one of these embodied social identities comes to the foreground, such that parts of the book address disability or race or gender more centrally, the overarching argument remains structured around the inseparability of their meanings."[6] An incredibly useful proposition. Samuels's caveat guarantees that readers do not miss the way that all discussions heavily rely on each other. Historically speaking, the creating of disability, race, and gender occurs at the same time. The strands of what would become modern medicine worked to differentiate bodies from each other, specifically normal bodies from abnormal ones, where abnormal was constituted in gendered, raced, and abled terms. These fantasies of identification found their justification in what Samuels terms "biocertification,"[7] a process that further links the construction of abnormality (and with it the construction of Blackness and disability) to objective science, aspiring to some semblance of truth. What becomes clear is not just that one cannot read race without disability nor disability without race, but that their entanglement requires a robust critical armature that grapples with them both.

When I trace the use of mutual constitution, two critical reading practices emerge: first, recuperation projects that seek to historicize, and, second, retrieval projects that read against ableism to find agency. In this way, mutual constitution performs as scholarly shorthand for "It's complicated." Intussuscepted (that is, enfolded) in these readings are several challenges to the practices themselves: specifically, scholarship is stagnated between recuperation and resistance. What of the projects that are neither? Is there a space between these or next to them, narratologically speaking? How can we read the moments when race and disability have a wider range of relationships? In what follows, I read the spaces where the critical material breaks open the possibilities for new readings of Blackness and disability in tandem. Though much of this material analyzes Blackness and disability broadly, I find that the distillate reveals the critical material to itself, suggesting that madness, Black madness in particular, troubles the impulses of retrieval and radicality. First, Blackness and madness encounter the problem of existing on the same temporal plane, particularly when whiteness is a factor. The Black mad subject gets evacuated from history while the white able subject or white

disabled subject dictates the terms of history's narration. Second, Black mad subjects cannot always serve as the prompts for others' freedom from ableism. It is possible for Black individuals, institutions, and cultural spaces to be ableist. Moreover, when Black spaces function as examples of freedom for others, they do not exist on their own terms, a logical concern that lands us back in the terrain where whiteness instrumentalizes Blackness for its own ends. Later in this conversation, I turn to Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) and her archive for how she theorizes Blackness and madness.[8] Butler's texts and her archive offer alternative analytic strategies to the problems posed by mutual constitution in its current form.[9]

Recuperating, Historicizing

Mutual constitution attends to the fiction of fixity often ascribed to race and disability writ large. Reading race and disability in this way yokes the discourses to each other, since they typically cannot be pinned down elsewhere. When Ellen Samuels traces the way this mutual constitution functioned within the nineteenth century, she finds that the discourses that created and sustained ideas about race and ability were not only created at the same time but also reliant on each other for validity. These national fantasies were created by physicians who scrupulously searched the body for clues about its difference.[10] Both the physically or mentally abnormal body and the racially abnormal body were understood as close cousins, demonstrating in their difference the validity and supremacy of the white able body by contrast. Samuels writes, "At the core of the fantasy of identification lies the assumption that embodied social identities such as race, gender, and disability are fixed, legible, and categorizable. This assumption, by now deeply naturalized in our social and ontological structures, in fact required elaborate construction and ongoing policing through the nineteenth century and early twentieth."[11] The very mutability of these social categories makes necessary the fiction of their fixity and the necessity of their policing by parties for whom that mutability causes concern. Mutual constitution offers a conceptual corrective, given the discursive history, and allows for an analysis to take shape around that history and the cultural context of its object(s) of inquiry.

Ensuring that this corrective attends to history authorizes critics to acknowledge the plasticity of Blackness and madness in tandem. Consider that the United States census of 1840 was the first to provide statistics about mental illness. The faulty statistics counted a higher incidence of madness

among Blacks in the North at numbers that far exceeded the amount of Black people full stop. This pseudoscientific evidence not only arrogated madness to Blackness generally but also provided putative proof that Blacks were unfit for freedom, claiming that free Blacks were eleven times more likely to have mental illness than the enslaved or white populations.[12] The postbellum environment does not undergo a dramatic shift in this regard; the definitions of Blackness available hinge on definitions of sanity. Kim Nielsen's *A Disability History of the United States* (2012) traces the early conception of citizenship as tied not only to enslavement but to mental illness as well.[13] This connection and its mutability continue into the mid-twentieth century when wider public scrutiny of mental health institutions (and some scandal), advocacy from the family of president John F. Kennedy, and civil rights discourse made it possible to imagine integrating mentally ill and cognitively disabled people into public spaces.[14] This integration effort occurs simultaneous to that which occurred for Black people, linking the two populations in the public sphere. This history pertains mostly to those categorized as mentally ill or cognitively disabled. Though the definition of madness for this text is more expansive than that (given the healthy skepticism of psy-disciplines based on this history), sketching the relationships between the two discourses and social identities over time permits a closer look at how Blackness and madness rely on each other for concretization. Such an analysis also reveals how tenuous they are. This history makes clear that within the United States's cultural zeitgeist, there is no Blackness without madness, nor madness without Blackness. Yet, the discourses' fragility suggests that the two have been forced together out of political convenience and presumed abjection.

Notwithstanding the utility of mutual constitution as a historicizing tool, it cannot—as a methodology—fully account for how race and disability interact on a body or between bodies. To be mutually constituted implies a reciprocity of creation. I put pressure on reciprocity because mutual implies simultaneity while occupying the temporal plane. I put pressure on creation because constitution assumes that, where discourses or material conditions related to race and disability exist, they develop and are sustained completely and consistently. In other words, the phrase mutual constitution implies race and disability announce themselves at the same time and both exert pressure in constant fashion. Case in point: Michelle Jarman's work exposes this fold. In her hermeneutic reading of lynch mobs and eugenic discourse, she writes that the two discourses are "not equal or competing" but rather

"dynamic social and discursive processes that inform each other."[15] What her rhetorical sleight of hand allows is the possibility that one discourse will occupy more space than another or affect the material reality more than the other particularly within interracial encounter. Jarman pinpoints the hefty pull of eugenics discourse on the eventual castration of Benjy Compson (in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*). Because the action of the novel takes place during the early twentieth century, she links this eugenics discourse to the pervasive nature and likely rationales for lynch mob murders. Though her link to lynch mobs undergirds her argument by positioning the two discourses as reliant on each other, her readings reveal that they do not affect material reality equally. For instance, Jarman's opening gambit points to a tragic illustration of when both ableist and racist discourses collide in the real life beating of Billy Ray Johnson, a Black cognitively disabled man, and its aftermath. Here, the full force of racist eugenics comes to bear on the availability of justice for Johnson. There is a slippage in the way these two discourses occupy space: news outlets, civil rights organizations, and law enforcement could not conceptualize Johnson as both Black and cognitively disabled (I say more about this invisibility in the second discussion). He was either one or the other in their imagination. The material consequence—suspended sentences and probation for his assailants instead of jail time—exacerbates the violence already inflicted. What Jarman's example reveals is that race and disability do vie for narrative space and, in this instance, determine material consequence based on which narrative is told and which is believed. Billy Ray Johnson's story ghosts that of Faulkner's Benjy because it undermines how we read the interlocking ideas about Blackness and madness within *Sound and the Fury*.

Here lies the critical lacuna we have yet to address. The historicization approach to discussions about race and disability presumes a linear progression of time, an unfolding that takes place at a pace to which we have become accustomed delineated by demarcations of second, minute, hour, day, month, and year. However, as calendars themselves often lay bare, few cultures think of time in the same way. Which New Year do you celebrate? Is your calendar lunar or solar? Time does not progress in the same fashion for everyone. It becomes useful to think of history in terms of the fold. Here, I yoke Spillers's concept of the flesh with Deleuze's understanding of the fold (a point of connection between ideas where one begets the other) to Fred Moten's conceptualization of being, living, writing, meaning "in the break" (where history and narrative converge—invaginate or intussuscept,

to use his terms—as a requisite part of being intertwined). If we are to linger in the fold, in the break, then we must reckon with the way madness and Blackness force us to render history countermnemonically: attending to gaps, mistakes, deferrals, silences, glitches. It is in this break, cut, fold that the relationship between Blackness and madness becomes most clear. Here is the relationship between Blackness and disability writ large, a relationship sutured at times by its connections, but also turned in and turned out by missed connections, erasures, and gaps.[16]

Despite the fact that both disability and race as ideas emerged at the same moments in history, they do not necessarily occupy the same temporal plane when conjoined in quotidian interaction. In thinking of interracial encounter for instance, Sharon P. Holland reminds us of a "persistent problem in the Black/white encounter," specifically that we must question "what happens when someone who exists in time meets someone who only occupies space?"[17] As she delineates, Blackness appears as the antithesis of history, its excretion, whereas whiteness stands in for progression, being in time. Our sense of the two interacting in the same moment then is skewed by the fact that Blackness is not meant to be a part of history but rather its object. Black cultural production has consistently expanded upon this idea through its skepticism of linear progressive narratives that assume Western origins, choosing instead to position Africa (usually the continent, broadly conceptualized) as a futuristic space or elide Western notions of time and space.[18] Thinking through the Black mad subject, we must consider that this person is meant not only to occupy space but to be consistently removed from space in order to make room for the more recognizable subject: the white able body. It is this body that dictates the terms of history and narrative. In the case of Billy Ray Johnson, the criminal justice system determined that his assailants were allowed to move on with their lives regardless of the violence and damage done to his body. If we are to consider Bell's modest proposal, the Black mad subject is removed from time to make space for the white disabled body as well. In other words, the Black disabled subject exists only to shore up the value of others. So, when the Black/white encounter is divided along ability lines such that the disabled body is white and the able body is Black, what emerges is a dynamic of relationships that force Blackness and disability into the realm of unspeakability, troubling the idea that both are created and sustained at the same time.

Retrieval, Resistance

The second critical impulse, retrieval projects that read against ableism to find agency, attempts to locate spaces of resistance where race and disability meet. Here again, I turn to the critical conversations to read where the distillate reveals the material to itself. An analysis of resistance surfaces as part of projects undertaking Bell's "representational detective work" that "uncovers the misrepresentations of Black, disabled bodies and the missed opportunities to think about how those bodies transform(ed) systems and culture."[19] As such, it offers a way to think through the cultural and political contours of structural ableism as intersected with structural racism. So far, this scholarship concludes that Black disabled bodies loosen the grip of ableism by resisting cultural norms of both disabled and Black communities: scholars explore this dynamic within Blackness and madness from a wide variety of critical angles, including Black women and depression (Anna Mollow), melancholia and poverty (Éva Tettenborn, Anne Cheng, Paul Gilroy), cognitive disability and civil rights redress (Stacie McCormick), rehabilitation and Black queerness (Robert McRuer), and popular music (Nicole Fleetwood, La Marr Jurelle Bruce, Moya Bailey, Anna Hinton). Usefully, this body of scholarship opens up the critical space left closed when we aver that discourses of Blackness and madness compete. Each points out that the workings of structural racism and ableism do not complement each other. In fact, the cultural logics that mandate Blackness as abject can depose those that maintain disability as such.

This strategy is not the only or primary way to read challenges to racism and ableism. The problem exists (*pace* Hortense Spillers) at the level of grammar. These projects tend to have one vector: they "transform(ed) systems and culture."[20] Note that transform operates as transitive where Black, disabled bodies perform the work of transformation rather than undergo the process of transformation. Yet Black, disabled bodies will not always behave as agents that transform or those who are transformed in equal measure or, as noted above, with a degree of reciprocity. Allowing for more than one vector between Black, disabled bodies and the systems in which they operate clarifies the following: it is inaccurate that the only critical relationship between Blackness and disability (specifically, madness) is one of liberation from ableism. At times, Blackness exacerbates the presence of ableism, or cultural norms facilitate ableism.[21] In accounting for these moments, I trouble the corollary of the logic above: namely, that whiteness withal the

privilege embedded in it lacks the tools for its own liberation and must rely on Blackness to acquire its release. Here, Blackness becomes a reduced space where whiteness enacts its privilege by instrumentalizing Blackness. In this paradigm, Blackness for all its cultural complexity becomes another reactionary space that exists to indict whiteness, rather than a culture and system of thought all its own.[22] We must consider the spaces when mere exposure of oppression is not only not emancipatory but can also be detrimental, where demonstration and acknowledgement of one's various intersecting socially marginalized positions does not equal political agency. We must also consider what happens when Black cultural locations refuse whiteness as an interlocutor in favor of intraracial conversations. In short, when madness is "a Black thang" (with all that evokes in terms of exclusivity and ableist objectification).

I take up the question of intraracial context and conversation in the next discussion. For now, I turn to another foundational moment in the study of Blackness and disability to read in the breaks of the critical material. I continue the conversation about the critical impulse of mutual constitution that looks to retrieve agentive stories of Black disabled folks as instantiations of anti-ableist radicality. Rosemarie Garland Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) includes a chapter on physical disability in Ann Petry's *The Street*, Toni Morrison's oeuvre, and Audre Lorde's *Zami*. Though Thomson's discussion does not explicitly discuss mental disability, cognitive impairment, or crazy-as-insult, I find it instructive for this conversation. Madness shadows each of the texts under scrutiny since the characters deviate from intracultural norms by being Black women who seek class ascension despite the odds (Petry) and wider American cultural norms by participating in and identifying with communities labeled deviant (and crazy) by the DSM IV (Lorde). Of course, Morrison's characters are literally haunted by their actions and kinfolk, which always forces the question of whether Morrison's characters could be labeled crazy. It becomes useful to think about Morrison's, Petry's, and Lorde's work (especially as part of Garland Thomson's project) from the perspective of Octavia E. Butler: namely, that sanity is communally defined and anyone who deviates from agreed upon norms is treated as mad. The characters' desires for themselves (and the methods they use to achieve them) exceed the racialized and gendered boundaries drawn for them. Indeed, because they also have physical disabilities, their behavior trespasses the boundaries drawn based on ability as well. Madness cannot be cleaved from these conversations. Thomson's claims about the represen-

tation of physical disability as agentive and liberatory have implications for whether madness has similar representational possibilities.[23]

Thomson offers that the collective project of these Black women's writings provides an antidote to white racist depictions. These powerful bodies—extraordinary, in Thomson's lexicon—participate in a "collective project of cultural revision [that] challenges the African-American woman writer to produce a narrative of self that authenticates Black women's oppressive history yet offers a model for transcending that history's limitations."[24] Moreover, the primacy given to disabled women figures "reveals the shift in African-American literary representation from a modernist to a postmodernist mode, a change that parallels the ideological move of minority groups from assimilation to affirmation of cultural and ethnic differences."[25] While I partly agree that these representations "render oppression without reinscribing it,"[26] I hesitate to read in them the triumph that Thomson affirms. On the one hand, Thomson rightly points out that these characters do not completely represent physical deviance. On the other, they do not, as she says, "repudiate such cultural master narratives as normalcy, wholeness, and the feminine ideal."[27] I would attribute this aspect of their representation to the way that the social model of disability upon which Thomson relies does not fully account for the way madness shows up in these texts.[28] The social model privileges a particular kind of mental agility and cognitive processing to combat the stigma and material consequences that arise as a result of ableism. In turn, the model dismisses madness as a viable subject position, ensuring that those counted as such—either by communal consensus or psydisciplines—remain excluded from conversations about disability because they cannot logically engage. For the characters in Thomson's study, this has the pernicious effect of erasing some of the master cultural narratives they work against: those that acknowledge their physical disability and link it to mental disability as a way to further disenfranchise and disempower them.

Thomson's work reads these figures (based on their representation of physical disabilities) as liberatory for the larger narrative and theoretical spaces of ethnic modernism. I hazard that these characters' relationship to disability suggests an investment in internalized ableism, particularly vis-à-vis sexuality. For example, Thomson reads Ann Petry's Mrs. Hedges, a tall, dark-skinned Black woman with avoirdupois who works as a madam, as one who refuses victimization. Important for this conversation is the way Mrs. Hedges is not only physically disfigured by burns but also read as ex-

ceeding the gendered and racialized boundaries the text's Black community (voiced through the protagonist) circumscribes for her. Her madness is not biomedically defined, but it carries psychosocial repercussions given how she is treated. Thomson bases her reading of Mrs. Hedges as liberatory on Hedges's sexualized gaze on the main character and her profession as a madam. Yet, there is no room for Hedges to acquiesce to or enjoy the sexualized attention she receives from the rich white man who controls the street. The novel makes it clear that part of Hedges's rejection of the man's sexual advances is financial. She cannot be in bed with him literally and economically. However, what the novel leaves open is that Hedges's rejection of him is also about her own denigrated view of her sexuality.[29] She is still limned as monstrous, grotesque, even if Hedges as a figure shifts the understanding of monstrosity. Inasmuch as Hedges's physical disability allows her to move from one position in the economy to another more powerful one, she must rely on a chosen life of celibacy and a masculinized, monstrous appearance to secure and maintain her new economic position. Her celibacy also shores up her power by keeping the madness of her disfigured, disabled, interracial sexuality in check. That is, though the disability is no longer in the background of the text, the cultural baggage of internalized ableism appears in the foreground replete with eschewing sexual desire and limiting the association with traditional forms of femininity. Even if Petry's project does—according to Thomson—pave the way for Black authors to shift from assimilation to affirmation and provide a challenge to the static representations of disabled figures in modernist texts, Mrs. Hedges's refusal to engage in her own sexuality complicates a reading of this figure as liberatory vis-à-vis physical disability and the charges of madness that accompany her character.

Reading Mrs. Hedges as agentive certainly poses challenges given the internalized ableism within Petry's text, especially since the novel focuses on intraracial encounter. First, physical disability only liberates Mrs. Hedges from the intraracial economy of the street by providing an avenue for power. Yet, within intraracial encounter, she remains circumscribed by the discourses of madness because community members consider her mad for transgressing boundaries of race and gender. Second, the interracial encounter does not allow for her agency within the critical literature. Thomson claims that Petry's text, as well as the others, counters the limited representations of disability within modernist texts. Implicitly, the logic of such a critical move—regardless of its truism—mandates that Blackness become

the vehicle for (mostly white) others' liberation from ableism in their reading practice. In that way, it is the presence of Blackness that shores up white liberalism by not only providing a representation of Blackness but also a complex rendering of white-centered notions of disability.

Elsewhere, I have argued similarly—that we ought to attend to the way that Blackness and whiteness function in the interracial multiability encounter. In my article on television's *Monk*, I proposed that Blackness and madness cannot take up the same space within one interaction. I read the protagonist's unnamed obsessive-compulsive disorder as a disability that "misfits" with other (usually minor) characters' Blacknesses.[30] At times, one is used for comedic fodder or erased in favor of representing the other or eclipsed as a way to demonstrate white liberalism. My article describes the relationship between these two identities as mutually constituted, but it evinces some slippage when attempting to discern why the protagonist's disability erases the other characters' Blackness. Since Blackness and madness do not reside in the same body, the various drama-comedy scripts tergiversate about what difference among difference can mean, often mobilizing white liberalism to police disability and Blackness. Rereading my own work with an eye toward the breaks, I find that we not only lack a critical vocabulary for describing Blackness and madness simultaneously, but it is also assumed that one must take priority over the other. The end result is that in this interracial encounter—whether fictionalized, theorized, or criticized—either Blackness or madness must be erased. Important for this conversation is that the multiracial, multiability encounter shifts depending on the social position of the characters. Blackness cannot and should not be marshaled as the radical space for white liberalism to mount its critique of ableism or racism. When Blackness and madness exist in the same space, multiple ways of reading should become possible, some of which eschew the possibility of radicality and others that might usher it in.

The multiability interracial encounter also allows for Blackness and madness to be erased when improperly thought of as agentive. Because both discourses are often conceptualized as unspeakable or illegible, their presence can facilitate and consolidate the power that creates abject material conditions. Nirmala Erevelles makes this point most forcefully: "The analytic category of disability is useful in destabilizing static notions of identity, exploring intersectionality, and investigating embodiment, [yet] I argue that the effectiveness of much of feminist disability studies remains limited because of its overreliance on metaphor at the expense of materiality."[31] In

other words, Blackness and disability have the potential to destabilize the rhetoric of normalcy that holds them as abject, but they are curtailed in doing so when mislabeled as agentive. In Erevelles's exploration of the lived conditions of war, she argues that when disability (both physical and mental) intersects with Black and brown bodies in the developing world or in disenfranchised communities within the developed world, their confluence indicts unchecked multinational corporate greed because it reveals the politicized nature of impairment. With this in mind, there can be no ableist or racist narrative available that prioritizes individualized achievement (read: overcoming) or bemoans bad luck (read: pity) because the root cause implicates specific governments, companies, the people who run them, and those who are complicit in them. In addition, Erevelles resists ascribing agency to the disabled people of color she discusses, perhaps because, in this version of David and Goliath, Goliath is winning. More to the point, the material conditions for celebration and agency require material resources not available to everyone, and mere knowledge of one's situation cannot be proxy for freedom from it, nor does awareness equal agency.

Fledgling and in Search of *Asylum*

So, the critical task before us is not to dismiss mutual constitution but rather to develop a more robust analytic that does not remain stagnated between recuperation and resistance. We must consider how recuperative projects assume a simultaneity and reciprocity of creation not always present within linear history and interracial encounter. We must be wary of projects that locate resistance on Black mad bodies solely in service of white bodies (regardless of ability status), avoiding the seduction of ascribing agency at the cost of ignoring material reality. The critical literature foments its analysis based on characters or people's relationships to structures and institutions; yet, within each lurks the possibility of analyzing another set of relationships, the interpersonal. Without parsing structural violence and history from intimacy, Octavia E. Butler's consideration of kinship and intimate relationships offers a space to consider the quotidian and erotic praxis that undergirds the relationships and analytical possibilities of Blackness and madness. A move to the quotidian and the erotic prioritizes the import of "the discretionary acts and, yes, racist [and ableist] practices that each of us make in everyday decisions such as choosing someone to sit beside on the subway, selecting a mate or a sperm donor, or developing a list of subjects

for an academic study."[32] Not only should we rethink the "autonomy usually attached to erotic choices" but also how "racism [and ableism] orders some of the most intimate practices of everyday life."[33] Obviously, proximity and intimacy offer no curative function for racism and ableism and can, in point of fact, exacerbate the wounds they create. Yet, the contours of how we discuss intimacy reverberate beyond the individuals it includes, revealing a limited threshold for complex interpretation.[34] When we do not excuse the behavior of allies, friends, family, and sexual partners as representative of a culture, poor impact of good intention, or part of a learning curve, they offer another way to think through the constellation of relationships between Blackness and madness, circumventing the inclination toward limited readings of either resistance or recuperation.

Both frustrating and fascinating, Black speculative fiction writer and pioneer Octavia E. Butler renders intimate, personal relationships with an eye toward complexity and compromise.[35] Her characters' investment in each other does not necessarily equate to a divestment from the oppressive ideologies that buoy their power. Most important for this inquiry, Butler's work foregrounds the spaces of discomfort and erasure that accompany Black madness. As noted in the preface and introduction, I view Butler as a theorist working in the medium of fiction. I analyze her archive and her final published novel *Fledgling* (2005), interpreting the intimate relationships she depicts. Here, I invest in the "politics of the possible" regarding modes of interpretation that function as alternatives to mutual constitution.[36] Elsewhere I have discussed the enemy relationships in Butler's *Fledgling*, pinpointing that the protagonist's enemies "[mobilize] racist rhetoric subsequent to failed ableist rhetoric."[37] Their motives and their ideas are easily understood as a threat to the protagonist's life, a desire for her erasure, since their engagement with Blackness and disability relies on a denigration of both. This discomfort and erasure flows from the protagonist's lovers, friends, and family as well. Here, the discourses of madness and Blackness vie for importance, a competition of sorts in which neither can win, but where the decision to prioritize one over the other shifts the emotional and ideological terrain, particularly in the interracial, multiability encounter. Butler theorizes that Black madness creates a crisis of the self in which subjectivity and identity is destabilized and the conception of the future altered.

Butler conceptualized *Fledgling* as a coming-of-age and chase narrative that follows the structure of a crime procedural. In a letter to her editor she writes, "This one is essentially Shori's [the protagonist's] struggle to rebuild

her life in spite of her lost family and memory—and, of course, she can only rebuild if she finds those who are hunting her and her love ones and stop them. In *Law and Order* fashion, she does this first through physical action—looking for answers, finding them, getting surprised, fighting to stay alive. . . . Then there's the trial—a less physically active part of the story, but one just as involved in its own conflict and drama."[38] The first third of the novel follows Shori as she awakes with amnesia, learns that she is a vampire (called Ina) from her father, Iosif, and finds human companions, including Wright, Celia, and Brooke (called symbionts, abbreviated as syms) to survive. During this time, she learns that what separates her from other Ina is genetic experimentation with human blood that grants her melanin and the capacity to remain awake during the day. The middle third of the novel depicts her adjustment to her new symbionts, including three same-gender loving relationships with syms Theodora, Celia, and Brooke, and her alliance with the male Ina family to whom she was/is betrothed (the Gordons). The final third delineates the trial, or Council of Judgment, which determines truth and consequences for those Ina who attempted to murder her, and successfully murdered her family (Silk family, Dahlman family). Butler's notebooks and journals reveal that she conceptualized several sequels to *Fledgling*. She completed five chapters of a novel tentatively called *Asylum* or *Flight*. In it, she introduces a new symbiont, a newfound archive from Shori's mothers, and the drama of being kidnapped by unmated male members of the Silk family. In the journal entries months before her death, Butler rethinks the story line of kidnapping and considers the story of a seduction, where Shori must build a family of symbionts and Ina sisters.[39]

Within *Fledgling*, several intimate relationships—the Gordon family, Daniel Gordon, Shori's symbionts—clarify how Black madness disrupts the ideological field: their behavior clarifies that the reading strategy of mutual constitution elides the competition between Blackness and madness for narrative space, the impossibility of linear progressive understandings of history and time, and the fiction of Black mad resistance as always agentive. As a family, the Gordons remain in thrall to their able-bodied and race privilege, such that it governs their interpretations of Shori. They "deploy an evaluative gaze that assesses Shori's 'fitness' based on their own criteria—shaped as it is by abled embodiment. The Gordons constitute fitness based on criteria that demonstrate their ignorance about the systemic effect whiteness and ability have had on their lives."[40] Since they do not distinguish between her amnesia as impairment and Ina cultural and traditional customs

as fomenting disability, they exude a paternalism that becomes taxing for Shori to navigate. She must consistently remind them that her impairment has practical implications to which their cultural structures (such as the Council of Judgment or mating rituals) must adapt.[41] She reminds them, "My memory goes back a few weeks and no further," and the narration explicates her emotional response, "And because I was annoyed. I let my tone of voice say, *You should all realize this. I've explained it before.*"[42] Further, they neglect to think of her Blackness as more than just the genetic engineering experimentation that allows her to be awake during the day. They consider her melanin useful as part of her physiology but do not think through the implications of how it creates her outsider status. The Gordons rank her identities: her Blackness as more beneficial, her amnesia as more pitiable, her Blackness as less important, her amnesia as less desirable. Their logic views the two identities as competitive in their narration of events: only one category requires their attention at any given time. Their priorities reveal how one identity, disability, is a problem for them that they can articulate. Her other identity, Blackness, is a problem to be sure, but one about which they cannot answer a word.[43] Further, it stresses that their deliberate problematizing of one identity parses Blackness and madness for their own comfort. When Butler portrays Shori as frustrated in addition to misunderstood, she debunks the idea that all one must do is fuse the identities together. In other words, it is not necessarily a problem that the Gordons must strategize about Shori's disability (especially since doing so will help save her life), but rather that they seek to strategize without fully understanding the disability itself (and how it is shaped by Blackness) and without her input.

In this instance, Black madness cannot be agentive or radical or resistant all by itself. Shori's mere presence cannot bear the weight of reorienting the narrative all on its own, nor can her behavior automatically shift the ideologies that govern her circumstances or change the people who helped create and sustain them (which, by default, includes the Gordon family). Instead, Butler's work suggests that allies themselves must reconcile the competing tension between their own privileged positions and their desires for inclusivity. Though Shori can marshal her embodied knowledge to instruct others, she has limited success. The Gordons' gaze functions similarly to that of Shori's enemies. Their intimate interaction highlights that the difference between the two—that is, good intention—requires more labor on Shori's part (which by itself curtails agency). She cannot dismiss the Gordons because they are not antagonists; instead, she must reframe the conversation

to emphasize her position as potential daughter-in-law in need of assistance. When Shori reminds them, "So far [her] problem is ignorance, not dishonesty,"[44] she splices impairment from disability and suggests listening as an integral facet of engagement. Yet her interactions with the older Gordons remain taxing and frustrating because their good intentions do not match the impact of their behavior. Their remarks—she is "somewhat arrogant" or she must "seem more Ina than [the antagonists]," or she is "both very attractive and very frightening"[45]—belie their weddedness to ableism, even as they attempt to help her navigate institutionalized barriers. It is up to them to shift their thinking, and it is not clear that ever occurs by the end of *Fledgling*.

In Butler's drafts of *Fledgling*, she toys with the way Shori's Black madness structures her interactions with the Gordons and the text writ large. Each instantiation of the novel evinces Butler's commitment to depicting Blackness and madness as destabilizing forces, which heighten and problematize privilege because they shift the contours of the multiability, interracial encounter. The two discourses work together and, in that sense, remain coextensive, but they also function at cross-purposes. For instance, Shori speculates that the Gordons test her when they allow her to question the human agents responsible for the arson that killed her family. In Butler's drafts, she experiments with how to split the questioning between Shori and the Gordons, and, in the final version, Butler settles on Shori's silence. In the published version of *Fledgling*, Shori is only present to reassure the human agent and persuade him to tell the truth.[46] The effect of these changes—displacing the Gordons as the primary interrogators—suggests that the difference is not merely about the space given to the Gordons but rather how Blackness and madness operate. In one draft, Shori interrogates the human agent. Here, her Blackness functions as a discomfiting presence for the human, a reminder and remainder of her difference that forces him to reveal the identity of the Ina agents. Making her the interrogator does not disappear her madness, but it does emphasize a soundness of mind that does not appear to be consonant with her understanding of being Ina, undermining her general authority over her amnesiac experience. In another draft, the Gordons serve as the primary interrogators. Here, her Blackness performs a similar discomfiting function. Her amnesia bolsters her authority over her own experience, even as it forms the basis for her being surveyed by the Gordons. Her madness, invisibilized though it may be, structures the interaction since the Gordons' familiarity with other Ina allows them to ask leading questions of the human agent. By virtue of her amnesia, this

is not an interrogation skill she can use. As a result, her silence in the face of her amnesia lingers as an answer to the Gordons' skepticism about her, creating two interrogations. In these drafts, splitting the questions between Shori and the Gordons reorganizes how and why information about the attacks is given, clarifying that Shori's Blackness and madness work on the interaction differently than the Gordons' whiteness and presumed sanity. In the final version of *Fledgling*, since she is largely silent, Shori's Black madness functions as a sustained pressure for the interrogation, emphasizing the Gordons' privilege in relation to her. Whereas her Blackness shores up her utility during the questioning, her madness strips away her authority and autonomy because the Gordons take over the interrogation of the human agent and, without saying a word about her amnesia, create an interrogation of her. Though her race is recognized in both the draft and the final copy as a boon to helping them catch and coerce the human agents, the difference in interrogation technique allows for her madness to reveal the Gordons' relationship to privilege.

Recall that thinking about Blackness and madness as mutually constituted leads us toward reading the two identities as an avenue toward agency when they are located on the same body. I objected to this line of thought because it requires that Blackness operate as a stepping stone for imagining agency only available under certain material conditions and assumes that mere knowledge of one's condition suffices as emancipatory. Butler's novel and archive theorizes about this in contemplating the interplay of desire and madness. Butler writes several drafts of an interaction between Shori and Daniel Gordon where Daniel, lost in his own desire for Shori, invites her to bite him.[47] In each draft, the invitation remains unspoken at first, functioning only as a matter of scent. He allows her to crawl all over him while they smell each other. The olfactory plays a large part in Ina attraction to either possible symbionts or other Ina. So, Daniel's invitation to smell—especially since he has to keep himself from acting on sexual arousal caused by her scent—is dangerously coercive. It suggests sexual agency for Shori, but in fact it jeopardizes her life. Butler writes what appears in the final version: Daniel's admission that he had hoped Shori's memory was impaired enough to let her bite him. He says, "I half-hoped you would [bite], that maybe with your memory gone, you would simply give in to my scent, my nearness. If you had, well . . . If you had, no one could prevent our union. No one would even try."[48] What keeps her from such an action is her understanding that it might threaten her good standing at the Council of Judgment. In

these scenes, Daniel remains silent at first and, later, forthcoming about his desires/intentions. His invitation is a test, one Shori must pass to prove her Ina-ness to other council members, a perception of her identity dependent on both her race and her impairment. This is not merely about Daniel's desire but rather how his desire manifests as a form of ability that takes advantage of Shori's impairment and bears repercussions for the perception of her identity.

Operating along the axis of desire, Daniel's craving of Shori microaggresses her by circumscribing her within parameters that facilitate her erasure. Microaggressions as a series of environmental, verbal, and nonverbal slights often fall into the category of unintended discrimination and often occur in intimate and/or interpersonal spaces. At times, this discrimination also comes from an affective space of benevolence, where one intends to be nice but instead reveals one's own biases, ignorance, and desires. To read a microaggression, to understand it, is to analyze the break in the everyday since those moments prove revelatory about the microaggressor. Daniel intends to demonstrate desire and create intimacy, become Shori's Ina lover, and concretize what he views as the eventual mating between their families. However, Shori is not old enough in Ina society or physiologically mature enough to mate, and her impairment renders her ignorant of social customs regarding interaction between Ina males and females. In addition, Daniel has made a decision about his desire to mate with Shori, whereas Shori's ability to make such a decision must be—by virtue of her circumstances—delayed. Note the issue of time. Despite her enjoyment of Daniel's scent, Shori does not control the marketplace of desire, making murky the possibility of consent. Daniel's solicitation encourages her to break the rules and flirts with disaster given that they are on the cusp of a Council of Judgment meant to decide her fate.

It is crucial to note that within Butler's created worlds, biological imperatives are sacrosanct. In fact, she must remind both her editors that Daniel occupies a biologically subordinate role to Shori.[49] She writes to one editor, "I've done a little work on pages 143 through 144 as well as Chapter 21 to make it clear that Daniel is not dominant to Shori, that he is actually taking quite a risk when he offers himself to her, that chemically, the Ina are a matriarchy."[50] Despite his biologically subordinate role, Daniel's mental ability still affords him some power. In fact, it is Daniel's biological role that makes his coercion possible. He cannot compel Shori to bite him because of his masculinity. Instead, it is his intersected identity—as white,

male, and able—that creates the parameters for him to perform such a microaggression.

Shori lacks the knowledge regarding social custom, which indicates why her sexual agency is a fiction. Whereas her madness opens up the space for her to name her sexual desire, when combined with her Black femaleness and the itinerant narratives associated with it (i.e., Jezebel), Shori's racialized and gendered madness actually strips her of sexual agency. Desire for Black madness foregrounds the idea that Blackness and madness exist on the spatial plane and whiteness, the temporal one: in other words, Shori's Black disabled body must be marshaled to constitute Daniel as a desiring subject. His lust not only takes him over but also obfuscates Shori in the process. Despite the first-person narration, Shori becomes subordinated to Daniel's initial desire. This not only occurs in the initial encounter but also gets used as leverage against Shori in the Council of Judgment when her main antagonist attempts to mobilize Daniel's desire as evidence against Shori. Black madness becomes the excretion of time, forced to occupy space while (white) others' desires (even if driven mad by said desire) occupy time. In temporal terms, Daniel's desire represents progression away from his family and into a future family with Shori (regardless of its feasibility), and the antagonists' rhetoric actively marks Shori as a moment of regression. Either way, she does not occupy temporal space as a being in time but instead functions as an object of time or a wrench in the machine, disrupting the progression of Daniel's family and, according to her antagonists, the progression of the Ina species.[51]

One of the fundamental relationships within the world of *Fledgling*, Ina-symbiont, is not only crucial for survival but also dictates the terms under which Black madness can be celebratory. Ina-symbiont relationships are symbiotic: Ina need their symbionts for companionship (constant touch, reassurance, conversation, sex) and food (blood). Symbionts become addicted to the venom of their Ina and grow to be dependent financially, psychologically, and chemically. Though the *Fledgling* novel only describes humans as symbionts, Butler's notes clarify that Ina are symbionts as well.[52] Butler had a long-standing fascination with symbiosis, not solely for what it offered in terms of conflict for a novel but also because she understood all life to be intimately connected.[53] When the Ina-symbiont relationship is mutual (as opposed to controlled entirely by an Ina's command), their interpersonal dynamics reveal how ideology becomes manifest in intimate relationships. Shori struggles in her relationships with her symbionts because she is re-

learning how to be Ina, and they struggle with her because she does not seek to command or control their thoughts. Butler's depiction of their relationships refuses radical celebration of Shori's disability and also deliberately avoids positioning her as abject. Butler's text balances the refusal of degradation with others' attempt to interpellate her in those terms.

For example, Shori meets her primary symbiont (her first), Wright, a young white man, in the first third of the novel. He guesses that she is a vampire, pegs her as an amnesiac, and tells her that she is Black. Wright's reaction to Shori positions him as the first one to structure a relationship between Blackness and madness, between himself and Shori as a Black mad subject. He attempts to treat her as a wayward hitchhiking child and intends on taking her to the hospital until she bites him. After that, because of the intoxicating nature of her venom, they begin a sexual relationship. The fact that she looks eleven years old (and at this point readers have no idea that she is actually fifty-three) makes this an ostensibly pedophilic relationship. Pedophilia then becomes the primary way that Wright works through her Blackness and her madness. The intervening discourse for him is one of attraction and love, about which he is ashamed. Later, his resentment comes to the fore when Iosif (her father) explains to him that he may not have a choice as to whether he can leave her.[54] His attraction to her and his repulsion and resentment thereof compels him to become at times paternalistic caretaker. He teaches her about human rules, and helps structure the public face of her relationships with other symbionts (notably when he tells Shori and a Black symbiont Celia that they can pass as family). He struggles continuously with his subordinate relationship to Shori: he aggresses another (Black) male symbiont (Joel), complains to another (white) female symbiont (Brook), and resents his psychological addiction/need of Shori. In drafts of the sequel, another Ina tells Shori that Wright's behavior—trying to see how long he can stay away from Shori before he needs her venom—is his attempt to test her and is a period of adjustment that he must go through quickly. In another scene from that unpublished work, Wright quips, "What is it about you little bitty Black women? All you know how to do is give orders."[55] Ostensibly, his comment is about Celia, but it bears implications for Shori as well.

Butler crafts Wright as a character who cannot reconcile Shori's Black madness and his dependence. Their pedophilic sexual relationship becomes the avenue he uses to seek some degree of mastery and comfort. Yet, because her venom is seductive and their relationship mutualist, Wright's ef-

forts foreground that Shori's Black madness only exacerbates the destructive potential of Wright's desire to adhere to white patriarchy. Whereas their pedophilic relationship ostensibly allows Wright the space to negotiate his power, the depth of his dependence plus the height of her power along with the inclusion of other symbionts foreclose his ability to navigate either her Blackness as authoritative figure or help treat her amnesia as able-bodied/minded protector. When he first finds himself unable to cope, he responds with sexual violence. After meeting Iosif and his symbionts, Wright comes to terms with his loss of control and that given Ina custom, pedophilia is no longer the governing modality for understanding his interaction with Shori. He responds first with silent treatment, stonewalling, then with anger. Shori describes, "He rolled onto me, pushing my legs apart, pushing them out of his way, then thrust hard into me."[56] She responds with her bite, deeper than she intended, but matching his hard thrusts. Yet, if readers were to construe this as merely rough sex, their conversation troubles that interpretation. He asks whether he hurt her and she asks whether he wanted to. He responds in the affirmative.[57] The nature of consent isn't clear, but the violence intended is. Both her amnesia and her Blackness were navigable as illicit but not as consensual or acceptable. Wright has to possess Shori by force, subdue and control her somehow, if he is to consent to their relationship.

Consider the commonplace narratives about pedophilia as a sexualized madness (putting it mildly). To be clear, my reading here does not endorse these narratives but rather understands them as part of a cultural discourse that allows for madness to surface as an analytic. I keep with the definition of madness that maintains a tension between biomedical definitions (e.g., pedophilia as illness) and the psychosocial experience and usage (e.g., pedophilia as sexually deviant and criminal). Thinking of pedophilia in these terms acknowledges how Butler draws on these common discourses to theorize about how they are intertwined. This scene shifts the multiability interracial encounter in that the sexual violence between Wright and Shori dovetails with a familiar narrative about Black degradation and white madness: namely, that the latter is present only in the context of the former.[58] On the one hand, this narrative is dangerous because it dismisses the quotidian nature of racism and its structural quality. On the other, it forms the basis of a narrative facilitated by liberalism. By virtue of their incomprehensibility and socially unacceptable nature, morally reprehensible behaviors (lynching, hate crimes, sexualized violence, ableist violence, etc.) associated with oppressive ideology must be accompanied by madness. In these instances,

madness becomes shorthand for explaining away or excusing unethical or outlandish behavior. Wright's desire to subjugate Shori, to violate her, participates in this familiar narrative. He can only understand the madness of his pedophilia in the context of her abjection. Yet, her amnesia, her madness, disrupts the denouement of this narrative. She matches him with her bite, not knowing or understanding his need for violence, thereby thwarting the possibility of her degradation and allowing for her own pleasure. It is her amnesia that cuts across Wright's own perception of his sexualized and racialized madness.

In thinking of Butler as a theorist, we cannot lose sight of the fact that "the use of Black women's language and cultural experience in books *by* Black women *about* Black women results in a miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures."[59] That is, the intimacy of the novel, a pedagogical "monstrous intimacy" to use Christina Sharpe's language,[60] shifts as a result of privileging Black madness. Butler's aesthetic "[courts] the upheaval of traditional narratives by allowing disability to pervade the text," and, as a result, her work "unsettles ableist notions of form by highlighting with disability the contrapuntal relationship between the ableist world and the text."[61] *Fledgling*, within its structure, accounts for Shori's differences as a Black, female, amnesiac vampire. Specifically, the novel does not allow for the linear progressive understanding of time and narration but rather endorses the multiplicity courted by folds and gaps. In Butler's notes, this meditation takes the form of ellipses in the writing. In her drafts, Butler includes ellipses not as placeholders but as parts of the dialogue and narration. The gaps there do the work of creating silence and pausing within the narrative. In the final version some of these ellipses disappear. Others find their way into the dialogue as ways to indicate that people are thinking, usually pausing around the issue of difference, or affects of shame, concern, or embarrassment. The ellipses that remain in the narration allow Shori to express disbelief (e.g., that her antagonists consider themselves victims), concern (e.g., that the council would also judge her), or shame (e.g., that she was too rough when feeding from a symbiont). In addition, the spirit of the ellipses surfaces in the form of rhetorical questions. Shori asks herself multiple questions about how she will take care of her symbionts, how she will fight her enemies, how she will survive. The style sheet created for *Fledgling* indicated that there were several "suspension points," ellipses that ought not be changed to preserve the integrity of the novel.[62]

All of these ellipses do double duty as a way to demonstrate Shori's fatigue and confusion in the face of amnesia and to propel the action. They also aesthetically intervene in a genre (the vampire novel) that Butler critiqued for being long on explanation, short on plot.[63] The amnesia here uproots the general actionless plot that Butler worked against in her creation of *Fledgling* since she implored herself to inject explanation with action.[64] What aids her in this enterprise is the amnesia. Shori's disability, particularly because it reduces the ability to get inside her head, thwarts the interior availability typical of first-person narration and limits the explanations germane to vampire stories. It is worth noting that Butler experimented with making the entire novel a third-person narrative. In the beginning drafts of *Fledgling* she struggled to create a narrative voice in the third person that would adequately express Shori's confusion. The ellipses and rhetorical questions exploit and thwart the expectation that a first-person novel provides complete interiority and emotional availability. Since the novel mobilizes the ellipses to punctuate emotional reactions, it upends the idea that one requires grammatical or narrative cohesion to depict interiority.

Butler challenges the narrative cohesion expected of the genre of the novel as well. Her gaps and silences disrupt the wholeness we have come to expect of the genre. Certainly, the postmodern novel troubles that idea, marked as it is by fragmentation. However, the fragments of a postmodern novel can push toward coherence or resolution, whereas Butler's work tends toward remaining unresolved. Her characters' silences do more than demonstrate their hesitation around issues of difference, and the instability prompted by the presence of difference in a world hostile to it. Again, at the level of syntax, Butler disrupts the narrative. When Shori first meets the Gordons, they question her alongside Wright. When asked about the motive behind the attacks on Shori, Wright conjectures about Ina racists. Shori notes that "the younger ones listened, indifferent, but the older ones didn't much like what he was saying. It seemed to make them uncomfortable, embarrassed."[65] The following sentence appears after this statement: "Human racism meant nothing to the Ina because human races meant nothing to them."[66] In two drafts, this sentence appears within the narration as Shori's explanation for the Gordons' hesitancy.[67] In the final version, this statement is attributed to one of the fathers, but without quotation marks. Butler paid close attention to where quotation marks appeared as evidenced by the style sheet and her handwritten notes. Pulling the sentence out of the narration and attributing it to a specific Gordon removes the sentence from being a mat-

ter of Shori's interpretation. Leaving out the quotation marks also troubles the idea of whether that statement's sentiment should be attributed solely to one Gordon or to more. So, it is not filtered through Shori as part of the narration, but is also not solely in the mouth of one Gordon. The Gordons' discomfort with and denial of racism dovetails with the sentiments of Shori's antagonists, who connect her with a history of enslavement. The silence occasioned by the Gordons' liberalism cannot cover up oppressive ideology. It remains, invaginating the text. Butler's narrative demonstrates, through its fragmentation and silences, the effects of Blackness and madness in the text's aesthetic.

To be clear, Butler's aesthetic intervention does not exclusively exist in the ideological spaces of syntax and punctuation. One of the rules of science fiction is that the world the author creates must abide by its own internal logic. Within the world of *Fledgling*, part of the internal logic is the history of the Ina people. Though Butler does not break the rule insisting on an internal logic, she does not abide by the idea that the characters must be aware of the internal logic to which they abide. That is, the Gordons' liberalism and silence and the antagonists' hatred and genocide are two sides of the same narrative coin. They each participate in an act of historiographical revision, changing their past relationship to disability and Blackness by excising them. Unlike the critical impulse that permits representational detective work to recuperate Black disabled bodies and experiences, they cannot recuperate that which they do not think they have lost. They cannot treat as radical that which they considered so abject so as to not exist at all. Butler's text intervenes in the narrative logic that assumes the accepted stories about Ina origin and history are complete without the input of either the present or purported anomalies from the past. Ina construct the absence of Blackness and madness as a ballast of their identity ab ovo. The Gordons do not want to admit to the idea of Ina racists. They do not want to deal with the reality that Ina can be gravely mentally injured. (In point of fact, Shori's father, Iosif, is the only Ina who acknowledges that her head injury could be part of Ina experience.) Racism and ableism exert differing pressures on Ina history and ontology. Each destabilizes the Ina's notion of self, such that their only recourse is denial. To embrace the presence of racism in that moment would be to admit the possibility of dishonor and to more heavily court embarrassment and shame regarding Ina history or identity. To think about Ina injury, particularly amnesia, troubles the overarching paradigm they have developed for discussing their relationship to illness. Most often,

they think in terms of physical disabilities, usually temporary injury that can be rectified, such as broken bones or pierced flesh. Here, Shori's amnesia upsets their understanding of themselves as generally sound—in relation to humans superlative—in mind and body. The absence of a possibility for cure destabilizes an aspect of themselves they consider fundamental—memory as tied to their longevity and as a necessary tool for their survival. Since mutual constitution occasions the recuperation of Blackness and madness, they would be absorbed in their history or origin stories but not normalized based on abjection. According to these Ina, they were not present to be absorbed at all. This historiographical maneuver implies that madness and Blackness have and create separate historical trajectories which, when combined with a history that insists on whiteness and ability, is destructive to their sense of self.

By muddying history, Butler allows Black madness to shift one of the hallmarks of science fiction: the audacity to imagine the future. The attempted genocide and the rhetoric of erasure push toward creating a bare life for Shori. Agamben develops the concept of bare life to account for those who exist between *zoe* (mere life) and *bios* (good life) and whose existence is included as a part of the Western cultural landscape but occluded from visual representation or polite conversation. Moreover, those with bare lives lose their rights as citizens, and their existence is limned by their fungibility. Alexander Weheliye revises this concept to think through the Middle Passage instead of the Muselmann of the Holocaust, remarking that other bodies in the Western world are also susceptible to bare lives. In Weheliye's revision, the bare lives to which Black people become susceptible are made possible by their de facto and long-standing position of fungibility vis-à-vis the state.[68] In Shori's case, the possibility remains that bare life becomes affixed to her Black amnesiac body not simply by virtue of genocidal action but also because of the accepted idea that the Ina exist outside the confines of race and racialization discourses.

In thinking through Shori's Black madness as variation rather than aberration, the text opens the space for Shori to display certain kinds of agency, loosen the hold of a bare life. Yet because her allies have to advocate for her to be considered Ina, I am hesitant to ascribe to Shori's Black madness an agentive quality. That is, how far away from a bare life can she be if her existence must be consistently justified before their Council of Judgment, and even then not fully decided or accepted? Black madness remains a provocation. Even as it forms the locus for the invagination of their history and

the fold of their future, it both allows for agency and forecloses it. Black madness remains a wrinkle in the linear progression of history and time because of its opposition to their dominant ideology. As a result, it cannot have anything but a vexed agency, nor can it create itself outside the confines of a bare life. Moreover, Black madness, given its loss of time (amnesia) and aversion to time (changing the narrative) shifts the possibility of recuperation as a form of agency. Linked as it is to a bare life, affixed in history as such, it cannot fully recuperate its past nor rewrite the history to tell its story from its perspective.

Such a vexed position extends into the future. In terms of the narrative, Shori faces the dangers of the sexualized gaze and, possibly, antagonists deciding to avenge their families and harm Shori in the sequel. In Butler's notes, she implores herself to show children as part of the Ina community.[69] This nods to the characters' sense of a future even if that future is thwarted. Narratologically and aesthetically, the future poses a problem in the presence of Black madness. To be blunt, bare lives aren't afforded a future in the sense of progeny. As Alison Kafer describes, disability in the present portends "a future that bears too many traces of the ills of the present to be desirable. In this framework, a future with disability is a future no one wants, and the figure of the disabled person, especially the disabled fetus or child, becomes the symbol of this undesired future."[70] The future for Black mad subjects is a quagmire, and the struggle to represent it foregrounds the folds already present in the present and in the past. It is not merely that the future is unknowable or uncertain, but rather that it is unfathomable without the negotiation of ideological confines that create the past. The future tends to assume a possible solution—especially within a novel. Instead, this Black mad future assumes ideological conflict: the Black mad future is not fathomable because its present and its past are unclear.

Loosely, we have the contours and confines of Black madness. It is mutually constituted in historical terms but cannot be adequately delineated by projects that recuperate its presence or celebrate it as radical. The presence of Black madness allows for a partial unmaking of the logics that govern the linear progressive idea of time and space. Blackness and madness discomfort and confuse, particularly in intimate spaces where their cleaving is not possible. Though this subject position allows for agency, it also remains affixed to a bare life, holding in abeyance the critical possibilities of a freedom and a failure that is always on its way.

54 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing," 149.
55 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 211–16.
56 Puar, "Cyborg," 53.
57 In *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander G. Weheliye turns to the racial assemblage as a way to discuss the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, two Black women theorizing about Blackness and gender since "the idea of racializing assemblages . . . construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite humans, and non-humans." He sets up these ideas in contrast to bare life (Agamben) and biopolitics (Foucault), which in their original instantiations ignore race and racism and their profound impact on notions of humanity. In as much as I find Weheliye's formulation useful, the assemblage, since it does not deal with biology or culture stringently, cannot account for the interplay between Blackness and madness in the same way as intersectionality does.
58 Cooper's project makes very clear that Black women's intellectual commitments were not incidental or coincidental. They were part of an intellectual tradition that theorized out of their quotidian embodied experience as a bulwark against racist and sexist material conditions. See B. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability*.
59 See B. Cooper, "Love No Limit."
60 Rosi Braidotti's text *The Posthuman* usefully explicates the intellectual lineage of the cyborg, noting that it comes from a set of ideas that privilege privileged conceptions of the human.
61 Siebers, *Disability Theory*; Kafer, *Feminist. Queer. Crip*.
62 See Pickens, *New Body Politics*, 116–46.
63 Vargas and James, "Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization," 198.

CONVERSATION 1. MAKING BLACK MADNESS

1 Bell, "Introducing White Disability Studies," 278.
2 Though Christopher M. Bell's essay holds this distinction, and rightfully so, he was not the only person to discuss race and ethnicity. Others—Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Douglas Baynton, David Yuan, and G. Thomas Couser—had done so before him. His contention was, and I concur, that disability studies as a field had consistently participated in the erasure, silencing, or ignoring of the intersections between these categories. He was the first to suggest (by not suggesting) a set of methodologies, analytical strategies, and representational politics.
3 Bell, "Representational Detective Work," 3.
4 Douglas Baynton's work discusses this in detail. He examines historical narratives in which disability and race or disability and gender intersect at the moment of articulating a claim to civil rights. See Baynton, "Disability and the Justification."
5 Cynthia Wu and Jennifer James ("Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature") point this out in their introduction to *MELUS*'s special issue on race, ethnicity

and disability. Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference*, takes this topic up in her book-length study.

6 Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 16.

7 Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 9.

8 Octavia E. Butler bequeathed her archive to the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California. The extensive collection spans approximately eight thousand folders and over three hundred boxes. It includes manuscripts, correspondence, journals, commonplace books, and ephemera.

9 In other work, I read Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* for how she theorizes Blackness and madness. This work was completed before I visited her archive at the Huntington Library, so it misses some of her theorizing. Also, the shorter article was designed to think through where and how the text dovetails with critical literature. This reading investigates how Butler's work shifts the critical terrain. See Pickens, "You're Supposed to Be."

10 Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 11.

11 Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification*, 11.

12 Sander Gilman provides this historical context for his reading of the Black madman in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Gilman's reading, which appears verbatim in *Difference and Pathology* (137–40) and *On Blackness without Blacks* (6–8), grants some historical context to the discourses about Blackness and madness as they appear in the US public sphere.

13 Kim Nielsen's (*Disability History*) text works as an apt companion to those of Allison Carey and Nirmala Erevelles, who point out that the perception of mental illness is enough to warrant a conceptual and, at times, literal loss of citizenship rights. Nielsen's work establishes that link was made early in American history as a matter of defining citizenship.

14 Steven Noll and James Trent, Jr. (*Mental Retardation in America*, 1–19) clarify how the public discourse about mental illness undergoes slight shifts.

15 Jarman, "Dismembering the Lynch Mob," 91.

16 The phrase "turned out" has a slang meaning that refers to one's intensification of sexual desire in unexpected ways sometimes after having a (usually queer) sexual experience. Without carrying forward the homophobic connotations and logics, I do wish to harness the valences of the phrase that speak to various significant changes and shifts.

17 Holland, *Erotic Life of Racism*, 10.

18 Marlo David delineates how this functions in the category of neosoul music, particularly Erykah Badu's work, which draws heavily on these notions. Within this conversation, Mark Anthony Neal, Kodwo Eshun, Alondra Nelson, and Alexander Weheliye all trouble the idea that Blacks comfortably inhabit Western notions of time and progress. They each point out that Black cultural production muddies the understanding of Western time and space since it asserts the Black subject as a viable position. I discuss the import of this to humanist discourse in the third

conversation. See David, "Afrofuturism"' Neal, *Soul Babies*; Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun*; Nelson, "Introduction"; and Weheliye, "Feenin.'"

19 Bell, "Representational Detective Work," 3–4.

20 In another project, I discuss the way grammar determines responses to and about Black women's anger. This is another kind of madness, but the logic of dismissal tends to remain as part of the linguistic structures to which we have become accustomed in discussion. See Pickens, "The Verb Is No."

21 Michelle Jarman's work on Bebe Moore Campbell follows this logic. See Jarman, "Coming Up from Underground."

22 In another article (Pickens, "Modern Family"), I discuss Blackness as a "set of traditions, reading practices, and valuation systems operating alongside, intertwined with, but also independent from whiteness." My claims there sought to consider Blackness a paradigm from which to draw that does not operate in service of whiteness either to compare or castigate. Here I echo these claims.

23 Given the fact that disability studies (as a field) has tended to give primacy to physical disability, I am hesitant to collapse mental and physical disability. See Bérubé, *The Secret Life of Stories*; and Price, *Mad at School*. My aim here is to point out how much they are linked in this particular cultural context such that an analysis of one has repercussions for an analysis of the other. The two are decidedly not the same.

24 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 103.

25 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 106.

26 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 104.

27 Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 105.

28 The difficulties of the social model of disability, particularly as it relates to mental illness and psychosocial disabilities, constitutes a larger conversation in disability studies. Scholars have come to understand that thinking in terms of the social model delimits our discussion of mental disability (broadly speaking) because it does not address how disability studies as a field relies on sanist conceptions of mind. For a brief and adroit discussion of these concerns, see Price, "Her Pronouns Wax and Wane."

29 Mrs. Hedges's understanding of her own relationship with Junto is figured not just through her own imagination but also through those of other characters. At several points in the novel, Mrs. Hedges's nebulous feelings for Junto and his seemingly unrequited feelings for her rise to the surface as a point of interest or contention. See Petry, *Street*, 247, 251, 275, 417.

30 "Misfits" is from Thomson, "Misfits."

31 Erevelles, "Color of Violence," 119.

32 Holland, *Erotic Life of Racism*, 7.

33 Holland, *Erotic Life of Racism*, 7, 20.

34 Jared Sexton takes up this line of argument in *Amalgamation Schemes* when discussing the way interracial sex tends to be viewed in limited terms—either naïve or bawdy—neither of which allow for the possibility of the messiness of sexual

relationships and which can also abet anti-Blackness at the center of multiracial discourse.

35 Other scholars have written about this extensively, focusing on the difficult choices her characters have to make because of these intimate relationships. See Govan, "Connections"; and Hampton, *Changing Bodies*.

36 Timothy S. Lyle used this phrase during a public conversation with Janet Mock, to describe Mock's (and others') decision to publicly open up the space for others. His idea speaks to the desire to expand how we think through a concept in the public realm. See Mock, "#RedefiningRealness."

37 Pickens, "You're Supposed to Be," 39.

38 Octavia E. Butler to Warner Books, 2005, Box 216, Octavia E. Butler Papers. Conventionally, one might attribute a "sic" to some of Butler's writing because it does not conform to standard English. Rather than label her bodymind a mistake or call attention to her writing as such (that is, embed ableism in my citational praxis and scholarship), I prefer to render the writing as is and ask people to engage with her grammar, spelling, and writing as a part of her theorizing.

39 Octavia E. Butler, journal, 2005, Box 60, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

40 Pickens, "You're Supposed to Be," 40.

41 Ellen Samuels ("My Body, My Closet") calls this a "coming out discourse," usually demanded of people with invisible disabilities.

42 Butler, *Fledgling*, 194.

43 I riff on W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of being a problem here because its understanding of two-ness is evocative in the consideration of Black madness and mad Blackness, keeping in mind that Du Bois's notion relies on Anna Julia Cooper's work in *A Voice from the South*. I also find it useful to point out that the one being considered the problem, in this instance, is not the one required to be clear about their status. It is those who consider Shori a problem who must—for their own sake as well—be aware of how her Black madness functions as a disruption of their social and cultural institutions.

44 Butler, *Fledgling*, 196.

45 Butler, *Fledgling*, 152, 266, 194.

46 Octavia E. Butler, journal, 2004, Box 39, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

47 Octavia E. Butler, journal, 2004, Box 39, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

48 Butler, *Fledgling*, 219; ellipses present in text.

49 This appears in several manuscript, correspondence, and journal boxes in the Octavia E. Butler Papers. She writes it as part of her notes to herself (Boxes 37–43, Box 169–72, Boxes 186–87), marginalia on letters from her editors (Boxes 215, 256), drafts of letters to her editors (Boxes 186–87), and in final versions of letters to her editors (Boxes 215, 256).

50 Octavia E. Butler to Seven Stories Press, 2005, Box 215, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

51 In thinking about the way Butler theorizes Daniel and Shori as a couple, it becomes important to consider how Shori embraces coevality rather than the

legitimizing nature of couplehood. Certainly, there is no guarantee that mating with Daniel would allow her to be considered fully Ina by her antagonists, but becoming part of a couple would legitimize her standing in Ina social and cultural terms—even if it is viewed as gauche. The decision to embrace coevality allows Shori to do some self-determination even if it is circumscribed by temporal parameters. This brief reading is inspired by Michael Cobb's work, *Single*.

52 Octavia E. Butler, commonplace books, 2005, Box 187, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

53 This fascination appears as early as 1974, though it may have occurred earlier given that symbiosis makes it way into drafts of *Kindred*, which she began conceptualizing in 1960. See Octavia E. Butler, journal, 1974, Box 56, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

54 Susana Morris ("Black Girls") discusses Wright's attraction and revulsion as well.

55 Octavia E. Butler, draft of *Asylum*, 2005, Box 8, Folder 79, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

56 Butler, *Fledgling*, 85.

57 Butler, *Fledgling*, 85–86.

58 This dovetails somewhat with a narrative that prematurely sexualizes Black girls. It is noteworthy because of Shori's appearance, since that has implications for Wright and other humans' interpretations of her. However, I have opted not to explore this interpretation because Shori is not a Black girl in terms of culture and age and does not understand herself that way. At this point in the text, the narrative does not present her as such. She is fifty-three, and, though still young for an Ina, she is not a child.

59 B. Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," 164.

60 Monstrous intimacies are "defined as a set of known and unknown performances and inhabited horrors, desires and positions produced, reproduced, circulated, and transmitted, that are breathed in like air and often unacknowledged to be monstrous." See Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 3.

61 Pickens, "Octavia Butler," 174–75.

62 Octavia E. Butler to Seven Stories Press, 2005, Box 215, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

63 Octavia E. Butler, draft of *Fledgling*, 2005, Box 37, Folder 599, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

64 Octavia E. Butler, draft of *Fledgling*, 2005, Box 38, Folders 649–50, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

65 Butler, *Fledgling*, 148.

66 Butler, *Fledgling*, 148.

67 Octavia E. Butler, draft of *Fledgling*, 2005, Box 39, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

68 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

69 Octavia E. Butler, draft of *Fledgling*, 2005, Box 40, Folder 704, Octavia E. Butler Papers.

70 Kafer, *Feminist. Queer. Crip.*, 2–3.