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Phantom limbs beating time: Black temporality in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*

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ABSTRACT

As a neo-slave narrative that revolves around a traumatic experience of time travel, Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) not only revises the historiography of slavery, but challenges traditional assumptions regarding Blackness. While intersecting different timelines to address power dynamics within race relations in the U.S. through Dana's dysfunctional relationship with Rufus, the novel also interpellates its protagonist "as the point at which many collective identities intersect" (Wright 2015, 30). Dana's severed arm thus is not solely the tangible evidence of the hard reality of her time travels – and, metaphorically, of the legacy of slavery – but the ghostly embodiment of a peculiar relationship with temporality, which takes its toll on Black subjects and yet is re-defined by their "un/imaginable lives" (Sharpe 2016, 18). The missing limb stands precisely for what cannot be explained using white Western notions of time and causality, a trauma which, however, would not exist without white oppression.

Keywords

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*, Black Studies, trauma, phantom limb, temporality, neo-slave narratives

You can take my body
You can take my bones
You can take my blood
But not my soul
Rhiannon Giddens, *At the Purchaser's Option*

Introduction

Her left arm and a year of her life. This is what *Kindred*'s narrator and protagonist, the young Black writer Dana Franklin, claims to have lost at the very beginning of the novel. These two losses immediately link together trauma, both physical and psychological, and temporality, in ways that readers cannot fully grasp yet but which are already setting a spectral pace for what is to come – or has already happened – in Butler's text. *Kindred* intersects timelines to craft a neo-slave narrative that, at the time of its publication in 1979, was instrumental in triggering the revision of the traditional historiography of the racial question in the U.S., addressing some of the most unsettling consequences of slavery – rape, lynching, disability, dismembered families, and much more. Perhaps more importantly, and among the reasons that still make it a compelling reading today, the novel challenges and goes beyond essentialist assumptions regarding Blackness by interpellating Dana's subjectivity "as the point at which many collective

identities intersect" (Wright 2015, 30) – a Black, disabled, woman across time and space, painfully coming to terms with her mixed-race ancestry while dealing with the implications of her interracial marriage in the 1970s. Throughout the novel, Dana moves back and forth from the California of 1976 to antebellum Maryland due to a most peculiar connection she shares with Rufus Weylin, her slave-holding ancestor, which draws her back in time to the Weylin plantation whenever Rufus's life is in danger and brings her back to her own time whenever her own life is at stake. This unwanted bond implies that she is forced to experience firsthand the implications of something she knew only from a safe distance before, that is, the origins of her mixed-race identity, and reflects the racial history of the United States as "a nation of individuals bound by blood, unable to escape the history encoded in their bodies" (Long 2002, 463). Flung into the harsh reality of the 19th century, she struggles to keep both her body and mind whole in the plantation while she waits to witness the birth of her maternal great-grandmother Hagar, the event that would at least allow her to make sure that the future of her family – her own future – is somehow safe. She soon learns that weeks or months spent in the 1800s correspond to just minutes or days in the 1970s, a discordance in the flowing of time which adds further unease to an already discomforting experience of temporal dislocation (Parham 2009, 1322), which eventually ends just like the novel started, with Dana's severed arm.

Various scholars have explored the possible meaning(s) of Dana's disability in the novel, generally reading it as a metaphor for the overwhelming weight of history (Long 2002, 470; A. Mitchell 2001, 70), for "the hold of the past on the present" (Donadey 2008, 70), or for her own – and her family's – dismembered and/or disfigured identity (Donadey 2008, 68, 72; Flagel 2012, 232-233; Melzer 2006, 100; A. Mitchell 2001, 69-70). However, the specific ways in which her missing limb might concretely affect the unfolding of Dana's self in the present have not been really tackled and/or have been mentioned only indirectly (Donadey 2008, 72; Parham 2009, 1318-1321, 1325; Yaszek 2003, 1063). My essay examines how reading Dana's disability – and the events that caused it – by explicitly addressing the implications of the condition known as Phantom Limb Syndrome (PLS)[1] might be instrumental in shedding further light on Butler's narrative.

The studies on Phantom Limb Syndrome implied, among other discoveries, the need to acknowledge the self – meaning our mind and body together – as something radically different from how the Western mind had pictured it (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, 58-62); similarly, in *Kindred* the missing limb stands for what cannot be explained using white teleological notions of time and causality on which the Western dominant, progress oriented historical narrative is based,[2] a trauma which, however, would not exist without white oppression.[3] Against white time, as Karla Holloway argues, "cultural black time subverts the Occidental moment of our national location and insists a way of imagining ourselves as both

here and not here and then fixing this particular imaginary to the (re)construction of black culture" (1999, 39), an apparent contradiction which can be resolved only by abandoning linear narratives in favor of nonconforming experiences of temporality.

If, according to Ashraf Rushdy, the social and intellectual logic of neo-slave narratives is to "assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (1999, 3) in order to deconstruct and re-shape the slave narrative and provide a critical examination of contemporary race issues, then *Kindred* is among the first and best examples in this regard – but there is more. Read through the lens of Phantom Limb Syndrome and what it shows about the self's inherent transitoriness and mutability, I argue that the novel's treatment of trauma and temporality allows for "a wholly inclusive definition of Blackness" (Wright 2015, 4-5) to be envisioned, which is instrumental in order to subvert the afterlife of slavery and "imagine a present not tethered to a long history of defeat" (Hartman 2007, 107). To Dana, this implies finally coming to terms with her own history by inhabiting her present self not as traumatized or maimed but as healed instead.

The sensory ghosts of history

Torture, lynching, rape, mutilation, impairment: slavery is a world in which death might appear to be the lesser evil to Black people and yet "some of them will go on struggling to survive, no matter what" (Butler 2018, 275). Dana does not think she is capable of this kind of endurance, but she will have to learn it, at least for a while, albeit reluctantly and imperfectly. As when Tom Weylin, Rufus's father, whips her for the first time and the pain overwhelms her as she vomits and screams and finally returns to 1976 to find an empty house, since her white husband Kevin has remained stuck in the past without her. Alone in her Los Angeles home, the only thing she can hang on to is again pain: "The pain was a friend. Pain had never been a friend to me before, but now it kept me still. It forced reality on me and kept me sane" (Butler 2018, 122). Dana's narrative is one of unwholesomeness, in which "[t]oday and yesterday didn't mesh" (124) and pain seems to be the only thread that gives coherence to an otherwise unreal story. Not surprisingly then, once she is brought back to Maryland, Dana resorts to her pain again: "I rubbed my back, touched the several long scabs to remind myself that I could not afford to make mistakes. And the scabs forced me to remember that I had been away from this place for only a few days. Not that I had forgotten – exactly" (137-138).

As Lisa Long has also pointed out, the physical pain of slavery is a recurring motif in *Kindred* (2002, 462-463), with many of the other characters – such as, for instance, Dana's Black ancestor Alice and her husband Isaac – suffering violence of various kinds, which Butler describes in vivid details and Dana often witnesses helpless and in dismay. Over the course of the novel, she too is repeatedly threatened, worn, beaten, whipped, and survives two rape attempts, the last of which results in the loss of her left arm and in the death of Rufus, ending

her time travels altogether and leaving an indelible mark on her. These episodes can be read both as metaphors for the aching wound of history, still open on the very bodies of those who inherited it, and as tangible representations of how slavery constitutes not only "the oppression of Black people, both enslaved and free, but also […] a systemic racial violence that often produced Black disabled bodyminds via ableist discourses of blackness" (Schalk 2018, 45), which is apparent also in Dana's relationship with her white slave-holding ancestors.

Because of their consanguinity, the line between love and hate is blurred in the dysfunctional relationship Dana develops with Rufus, and yet it pulsates like an open wound inside her head. Theirs is a connection ultimately sealed by a bond of blood – that of kinship, but also of impending death – and which relies on pain to articulate the temporality of the narrative. With each journey, time compresses and expands in a syncopated way, as Dana and Rufus become each other's mutual haunting presence. Actually, if one were to look for a ghost in the story, that would be Dana rather than Rufus: in fact, she is the one who intermittently inhabits a time that is not hers. Through her, Butler thus overturns causality and the linear progress narrative, while problematizing power relations within systemic racism. Surely, the amount of suffering he may inflict on Dana means that Rufus has some kind of control over her, but he does not own her ultimately. To do so, he would actually need to really recognize and treat her as a fellow human being – thus preventing the time-travels to occur and keeping her in the past with him – but even if he tries to accept the fact that, as Dana says, "[h]e has to leave me enough control of my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying" (Butler 2018, 275), he always ends up clutching at her with senseless violence. The more he treats her like property, the less she belongs to him, as when he screams, "You're not leaving! […] Damn you, you're not leaving me!" (207), firing his gun and thus allowing her and Kevin to go back to 1976; or when he threatens to send her back to the fields, sounding like his father: "'Don't you ever walk away from me again!' he said. Strangely, he began to sound a little afraid. He repeated the words, spacing them, emphasizing each one. '*Don't you ever walk away from me again!*'" (238; emphasis in original). As demanding and aggressive as they are, his words sound helpless and void when considering that he cannot control when and how she will 'walk away from him' to go back to the future any more than she can. Still, haunting the past and not succumbing to it is a harrowing experience for Dana, as she soon realizes:

> Rufus's time was a sharper, stronger reality. The work was harder, the smells and tastes were stronger, the danger was greater, the pain was worse… Rufus's time demanded things of me that had never been demanded before, and it could easily kill me if I did not meet its demands. (211)

Materiality is central also in this case, showing how time-travel in antebellum U.S. is so physically and psychologically demanding for Dana that she perceives and feels everything with heightened realism. After her second stay in Rufus's time, fearing for her own life, she sets a 'survival kit' in a canvas bag, hoping that it would improve her chances at making it

home again relatively alright – as much as the past allows her to. "'You know, someday, you're going to have to stop dragging that thing around with you and come back to life'" (272-273), says Kevin right before her last trip into the past, as if to remind her that she does not belong there. However, healing (or 'coming back to life') becomes possible only after the moment of Dana's actual disablement; the event is already in the past at the beginning of the novel but is also foreshadowed throughout the story (Schalk 2018, 50-52), re-produced every time she is attacked, injured, or her life is put at risk. This diluted disablement through and because of time does not allow room for healing, its relentless occurrence impairing Dana much more than her severed arm. But she will need to physically deal with her own 'phantom self' in order to understand what this means.

Fiction as a mirror box

The expression "phantom limb" was coined in the 19th century by U.S. physician S. Weir Mitchell, who first observed the phenomenon in Civil War wounded soldiers. Working with amputees during and after the war, he noticed:

> Nearly every man who loses a limb carries about with him a constant or inconstant *phantom* of the missing member, *a sensory ghost* of that much of himself, and sometimes *a most inconvenient presence, faintly felt at times, but ready to be called up to his perception* by a blow, a touch, or a change of wind. (1872, 348; emphasis mine)

Evocative and almost literary in style as it is, Mitchell's choice of words reflects the bewilderment he must have felt at a phenomenon that seemed to pertain more to the realm of the irrational than to the one of medicine. Indeed, dismissed as a symptom of mental illness or as "merely the result of wishful thinking" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, 23) – or, in the best cases, regarded as being caused by the irritation of the nerve endings in the stump – it was not until the late 20th century that Phantom Limb Syndrome became the object of thorough experimental research, particularly with neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran. In this period, Ramachandran's team carried out tests on a large number of patients and eventually theorized that PLS might originate from a reorganization of the brain's somatosensory cortex, developing what is known as mirror therapy (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, 46-56). This is based on "an ingenious 'virtual reality' device, a simple box with a transposing mirror, [through which] a patient may be helped by merely being given the sight of a normal limb" (Sacks 1998, viii), thus helping the brain to let the phantom go. In the case of *Kindred*, it is the structure of the novel itself that works as a mirror box for Dana, providing a space in which different timelines intersect and confront each other, as well as a means for the self to embody diverse and apparently conflicting identities. Time does not flow linearly from one chapter to the other, so that the novel starts with Dana already injured and her subsequent narration of the past events allows to visualize her missing limb, the actual one and, metaphorically, that of her past.

Building on Sami Schalk's analysis of *Kindred* as a neo-slave narrative in which disability is "simultaneously metaphorical and material" (2018, 46), I argue that Dana's disability – resulting from a severed arm – is a compelling one. Within the temporal frame of the novel, in fact, it is an event which eludes linear, causal categorizations, having already happened in the prologue and yet still about to come in Dana's storyline. Dana's condition thus helps understand how Butler revises and subverts linear, causal notions of temporality not only with regards to the legacy of slavery but also for what concerns representations of Blackness at large.

Although Dana's phantom limb is explicitly referred to only at two specific moments in the text, the prologue and the epilogue, these are the chapters that define the circularity of her experience through time, framing it within the 'now' in which her identity both finds shelter and must re-produce itself anew. Indeed, enclosed between these two moments that are actually the same, Butler's neo-slave narrative "situate[s itself] against history, suggesting that we can best comprehend the truth of slavery by abandoning historical modes of knowing" (Dubey 2010, 784), which is yet another way for the novel to subvert the impositions of white time's dominant linear narrative. Within U.S. literature, Black speculative fiction in particular, in fact, not only offers the possibility to consider alternative forms of temporality but, in doing so, provokes its readers into thinking about history as the result of power relations which impair and silence minoritarian experiences.[4] By resorting to nonrealism to call the attention on the omissions, distortions, amputations operated by white time, neo-slave narratives like *Kindred* – or, for instance, Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* – become the voice of those experiences and traumas. The placement of Dana's missing arm within the narration, therefore, makes it "a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 1996, 4), both metaphorically and historically – given the paucity of reliable accounts/testimonies on the lives of enslaved people.

When Dana is at the hospital – with Kevin at her bedside – recovering from the physical consequences of her last journey and finally able to truly wake up and consider her disabled condition, she relates:

> I was almost comfortable except for *the strange throbbing of my arm. Of where my arm had been*. I moved my head, tried to look at the empty place … the stump.
> Then Kevin was standing over me, his hands on my face turning my head toward him.
> He didn't say anything. After a moment, he sat down again, took my hand, and held it.
> I felt as though I could have lifted my other hand and touched him. I felt as though I had another hand.
> I tried again to look, and this time he let me. Somehow, I had to see to be able to accept what I knew was so. (Butler 2018, 2; emphasis mine)

The throbbing and the illusion of being able to move the absent limb seem to pertain to the realm of the unreal more than her time travels. Indeed, she does not trust her mind: she needs to see, to confront 'the stump,' in order to acknowledge her new body/self and, at the same time, to accept that what she went through did truly happen and is now over, before being able

to voice it. Donawerth and Scally argue that "the marks on Dana in the present enact the feeling of history that is Butler's goal for the novel. Each trip to the past includes loss of agency, loss of control over the body – beating, attempted rape, loss of an arm" (2017, 11). And yet, it is after this final loss that Dana regains control over her own body – and mind. Her painfully recovered agency is embodied in the very act of narration – she is a writer after all – and in the way she inhabits her Blackness as a composite identity, intersecting temporalities and experiences of which she becomes at the same time the result and the origin. "I closed my eyes again remembering the way I had been hurt – remembering the pain" (Butler 2018, 3): the events are excruciatingly vivid in her memory, but readers will learn the details only right before the end of the book. Here, Dana recalls the last moments in the 18th century, when Rufus attacks her and, fearing for her own life one last time, she stabs him and, immediately after, starts feeling the sickness that usually precedes her time-travels. Rufus's hand is still grasping her arm, though, increasingly harder and stronger until it becomes "[s]omething… paint, plaster, wood – a wall. The wall of my living room. […] I pulled my arm toward me, pulled hard. And suddenly, there was an avalanche of pain, red impossible agony! And I screamed and screamed" (291-292). In an oft-quoted interview, Butler has explained how she "couldn't really let [Dana] come all the way back. I couldn't let her return to what she was, I couldn't let her come back whole […]. Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole" (Butler 1991, 498), thus highlighting the link between metaphor and materiality in the novel, which reaches its climax with this horrifying moment. And yet, as disturbing as the image is, pain is not all that is left of Dana in the end; quite the contrary.

The epilogue shows her "as healed and disabled at the same time. Her bodymind is different, yes; it has clearly been impacted by her experience of slavery. Nevertheless [she is] a normal, *disabled,* non-time-traveling woman" (Schalk 2018, 54-55; emphasis in original). By not coming back whole, Dana keeps partaking in other dimensions of Blackness, too, happening and unfolding somewhere else in time and space, and yet conflating in the 'now' of her bodily existence through the absent presence of her arm – that piece of her which remains in the past, literally, and yet keeps affecting the present, who she is 'now'. She – her identity – is located where her body and mind are now, that is, both on one side and on the other of the wall, intersecting points that would not meet when understood according to a linear perception of time. Her phantom limb, then, when understood both metaphorically and materially, aligns with what Christina Sharpe defines as being "in the wake of slavery," a condition through which Black people must "recognize the ways that we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to overwhelming force though not *only* known to ourselves and to each other *by* that force" (2016, 16; emphasis in original). Dana's physical vulnerability thus reclaims an understanding of temporality that "keep[s] mourning an open dynamic" (Rankine 2015), not as a memorial of the past, but as an effort to summon diverse forgotten and/or dismissed histories

of vulnerability and actualize them in the present. Hers is ultimately a story of an ongoing healing, which is made possible, albeit paradoxically, by her disability. Her experience, then, encourages to rethink witness and agency beyond the constrictions of linear time through a composite identity which claims recognition for all its intersecting selves.

In the Epilogue, Dana and Kevin fly to Maryland in search for the Weylin plantation, Rufus's grave, and any trace of the people who used to be enslaved on that land. They find nothing but an old newspaper article mentioning that Rufus Weylin was killed by a fire that erupted in his house and a notice regarding the sale of some of the slaves of his estate (her great-grandmother Hagar is not mentioned, but Dana's existence is proof enough that she must have survived). Dana is tormented by the fact there are no records of many of the people she had become so fond of, no way to know what happened to them, to their families. In the very last paragraph of the book, she seems to be looking for evidence that the memory of these people, their lives, were not just other phantoms in her mind. So, she touches her wounds, the visible and invisible ones, as she talks again to Kevin:

> I touched the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on my face, *touched my empty left sleeve*. "I know," I repeated. "Why did I even want to come here. *You'd think I would have had enough of the past.*"
> "You probably needed to come for the same reason I did." He shrugged. "*To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To reassure yourself that you're sane*." I looked back at the brick building of the Historical Society, itself a converted early mansion. "If we told anyone else about this, anyone at all, they wouldn't think we were so sane."
> "We are," he said. "And now that the boy is dead, we have some chance of staying that way." (Butler 2018, 295; emphasis mine)

At the very least, these final lines suggest an idiosyncratic understanding of closure, in which the relationship between trauma, temporality, and self is radically transformed, although not necessarily for good. First, Kevin's ending remark sounds offbeat: what does it mean "now that the boy is dead"? In 1976, Rufus is supposed to be already dead – and for quite a long time indeed. Just like Dana's disability, Rufus's death is an inescapable event and, in Dana and Kevin's timeline, it has already happened, but both facts seem to require a mirror box in order for the self to see them as real – in this case, traveling to Maryland "to touch solid evidence" that he did live and died, somewhere in the past. Second, perhaps it is true that Dana has not had enough of the past, but for good reasons. Her attitude towards her not-quite-fantastic experience calls the attention to the fact that what white time can only record as an absence – that of a body part, of a past/lost time – often without even acknowledging its involvement in producing it, with Black time becomes a deeply felt presence, both within and without the self. But this does not prevent Dana from living in the present: herself, albeit affected by a traumatic knowledge, is not trapped within an inaccessible Derridean "cryptic incorporation," which "always marks an effect of impossible or refused mourning (melancholy *or* mourning)" (Derrida 1986, xxi). Rather, she seems to be experiencing a peculiar sense of longing which, borrowing from Nathaniel Mackey,

> it's finding out what you have but don't have. You have it in the form of a disposition but that disposition is not the same as the possession of it. So you have it as a reaching toward something. In many ways, you have it as a reaching through things, so that there's a way in which that reaching is not satisfied even when it does seize upon something. It goes on reaching. The phantom limb bespeaks that reach, which continues beyond the grasping of something. It speaks of loss, it speaks of lack, but it also speaks of an insufficiency that's indigenous to the very act of reaching. Reaching wants to go on, in some sense that's troubling to the things it does settle upon and take hold of. It's not that it empties those things. It simply finds that those things are in place in a certain way that the reaching wants to continue to be free of. (Mackey 2018, 196-197)

Dana's phantom limb originates from an impossible temporality, which is nonetheless real in its capacity to affect the very materiality of existence. Hard to believe as it is, Dana's severed arm is "solid evidence" of her story and, for this reason, bears with it the potential to perform Sharpe's wake work, that is "to continue to imagine new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property," thus becoming "a mode of inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" (Sharpe 2016, 18; emphasis in original). Indeed, *Kindred* shows a Black female subject physically maimed by what she experienced, and yet finally possessing a knowledge that may allow her consciousness to go beyond mere survival in whatever present is waiting for her.

Conclusions: reaching out

With Dana's traumatic journeys across time and space, Butler crafts a narrative of doubled identity, a "macabre revision of CPT (colored people's time)" in which "death [is] an untimely accompaniment to the life of black folk" (Holloway 2000, 6), as the relationship between Dana and Rufus seems to prefigure and the author's treatment of pain suggests. Each temporal leap is measured by death and each momentary stay in the two epochs revolves around pain, whether directly experienced or helplessly witnessed.

Dana's doubled condition, however, is eventually testament to the fact that such pattern may be disrupted through a different understanding of time and self. While Butler resorted to speculative fiction to revise the historiography of slavery within the socio-political context of the 1970s, her text resonates with contemporary struggles too, in that it envisions the need to reformulate time according to truly meaningful coordinates for all Black subjects, rescuing marginalized experiences from the void of history and its linearity. This would allow to reckon the history of Blackness in terms that can be considered fully inclusive and open to change, by defying "the implicit linearity we attribute to space and time that inhibits our research and causes a qualitative collapse of Blackness" (Wright 2015, 142). In order to resist that linearity, a horizontal mode of interpellating histories is required (2015, 143-144) which, as in Dana's case, embraces what progress narratives understand as paradoxes and recognizes them as meaningful representations of Blackness.

The experiments with phantom limbs inspired Ramachandran to rethink brain functions as affected by a wide range of factors, among which are also 'non-scientific' phenomena like

love and empathy (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, 61), and to wonder whether "[y]our own body is a phantom, one that your brain has temporarily constructed purely for convenience" (58). According to Ramachandran, the axiomatic assumption "that your 'self' is anchored to a single body that remains stable and permanent at least until death" (Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998, 61) seems unquestionable, but the reality might actually be "that your body image, despite all its appearance of durability, is an entirely transitory internal construct that can be profoundly modified with just a few simple tricks. It is merely a shell that you've temporarily created for successfully passing on your genes to your offspring" (62). By intersecting different bodies (disabled/non-disabled) and identities within the same self, Dana's phantom limb frees her Blackness from such assumptions, a fact that can have political implications, too, in terms of self-awareness. In fact, systemic racism has been imposing specific kinds of 'selves' and 'bodies' on Black subjects and if society still bleakly postulates Black people as "no-citizen," as Sharpe again argues with what I would define militant pessimism, "the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world. And we might use these ways of being in the wake in our responses to terror and the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation" (2016, 22). Similarly, the ending of Butler's novel does not bring with it the relieving exceptionality of an impossible historical redemption – "the book simply ends. Its denouement is neither tragic nor triumphant" (Pickens 2015, 175); however, if some kind of catharsis emerges, this lies in the same kind of awareness that Sharpe is describing and Dana gains in the present as a Black disabled woman. As she learns when back in Maryland, but in 1976, her body and mind have become the only reliable archives for "historical black experiences in America" (Pickens 2015, 170). Since her story is impossible to explain in so-called rational terms – "If we told anyone else about this, anyone at all, they wouldn't think we were so sane" (Butler 2018, 295) – *Kindred*'s epilogue reaches out towards the future because, through the unthinkable materiality of Dana's condition and the uncertainty of her fate, it implicitly but decidedly calls for new modes of thinking about the history of Blackness and imagining Black experience through time.

Notes

[1] Medical sciences show that patients with missing or lost body parts are likely to develop "Phantom Limb Syndrome" (PLS), a condition in which they experience sensations of various nature, in a limb that does not exist, or does not exist anymore; when such sensations are painful, they are labeled as "Phantom Limb Pain" (PLP).

[2] In this regard, Michelle M. Wright argues that "what is most compelling about this linear progress narrative is its transcendence, according to which it assumes a divine status because it is not controlled by earthly endeavors but operates the other way around: time predicates motion. [And yet], on closer inspection the white Western linear progress narrative is linear only through strenuous manipulation of the facts. […] Making the line progressive requires defining European colonialism as altruistic and Nazism as a pure aberration, the exception that proves the rule of progressive (white) Western history" (2015, 40).

[3] Within the context of the temporal turn in the humanities, racialized time, or how time, just like space, serves as a means of power and resistance regarding racial inequality, has been the object of various recent studies which examine the different ways in which "Whiteness remains representative of the human condition through the suppression of the alternative histories, the non-White times, of other humans" (Mills 2014, 32). Charles W. Mills argued for the "need to explore a corresponding 'White temporal imaginary' that is likewise multi-faceted and multi-dimensional in its consequences, structuring social affect as well as social cognition, and helping to constitute exclusionary gated moral communities protected by temporal, no less than spatial, walls" (29), while J. P. Brendese understands white time as "a possessive tense" and "a temporal force field that exerts regulative, normalizing powers that shape the racial order of things as well as subjective experiences of time" (2023, 20).

[4] As Sanchez-Taylor also notes: "[f]or peoples who are more likely to identify with the alien 'other' in traditional sf more than a white human narrator, sf becomes a space to where authors of color (who are typically fans of the genre themselves) can employ recognizable aspects of sf—tropes like the alien, time travel, and immortality—yet also re-work these tropes to make room for peoples of color" (Sanchez-Taylor 2021, 7). With regard to temporality and power dynamics, this is also testified—and reclaimed—by the Afrofuturist movement, which wonders "[c]an a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible future?" (Dery 1993, 182).

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