

MB: Thank you so much Adrienne Maree Brown for joining me and talking about your *Octavia Butler Strategic Reader*. I am really geeked to talk to you about Octavia because I love Octavia and you love Octavia and when you first introduced the reader at AMC [Allied Media Conference] I was very excited about it. So I wonder if you could just start with who you are and how you found out about Octavia Butler

AB: Great. I am a writer, a facilitator. I facilitate mostly socially and I am an artist and I sing sometimes. I make art. And I live in Detroit and I started reading Octavia Butler when I was fifteen or sixteen the first time and I think I was told about her by a teacher who thought I'd be interested in her work and I think I read a little bit of her work and then when I was in college I got to see her speak and I was kind of blown away by her existence and you know I hadn't read enough to be like "I'm a reader." I didn't get it yet I don't think. And then I started reading her work and then I kept reading it over and over and over again it's become a little bit of a biblical experience for me reading her work and in terms of what drew me into it, I think having a woman of color protagonist in these experiences that really fundamentally asks what does it mean to be human has been really moving to me and it really resonates with me how complex her characters are. There's not necessarily a distinct good and evil there's a lot of her characters that are really trying to do the very best they can in the circumstances that they are in and they have to make complex decisions and that resonates with my life.

MB: I really appreciate you bringing up like the kind of messiness, the non-clarity around good and evil that people have both of those things. That makes me think of this other quote by another science fiction writer: "thrown away where? The world is round," like you can't throw anyone away so if people are doing bad things we have to figure out how to deal with that. Do you see that as part of what science fiction brings to the conversation or the fact that

Octavia uses science fiction to deal with some of the messiness of human beings?

AB: Yeah I mean I feel like the thing about science fiction that is interesting to me is that it's just saying like let's just take something that is, and you know that we know which is the science component and even that is constantly changing, but let's take something that we know for now and extrapolate from that and create worlds going backward and forward from that so anything is possible within that. You know there's the *Left Behind* series you know where it's a Christian story about the rapture happening. I don't know that science fiction necessarily brings the complexity to it but I feel like a good writer can export complexity probably better in science fiction better than in any other genre because you are unhinged from the sort of moral code of the society you are in at that moment and so I feel like Octavia talked about some of her protagonists were looked like they were eleven years old having love affairs with people of all different ages races and backgrounds or you know she had a fifteen-year-old who becomes a spiritual leader and she has an incestuous relationship and all these polyamorous relationships – it definitely messes with homo- and heteronormative dynamics in it. It's just interesting to me because she places it all in the context of what would it look like if that was not really questioned by society then what would be the next thing that was questioned by society? We are in a society where obviously everyone was just in polyamorous relationships and that wasn't a big deal what's the next thing and then you start to get into with some of her books what does it look like to actually have genetic control and power over each other and over your lovers? How do

you manage those dynamics and some other things so I feel like she really took it to say that if we stop having like this staunch good and bad line then what becomes possible and actually then we can sort of turn back and look at those things and say what are the real issues in there? What are we really talking about? Nine times out of ten it's about power — who's holding power and how are they holding it and what does it look like to share holding that power?

MB: So that raises an interesting question for me that makes me think about how her work is feminist, because feminism definitely talks about power relationships and how we as human beings are trying to navigate our oppression, our marginalization. So what do you think about feminism as it relates to power and Octavia Butler's work?

AB: Well, I think it's one of the most interesting pieces, you know? Rather than going at stuff explicitly, none of her lead characters are people that I would consider to be like activists per se, people like "I'm organizing around feminism and that's how I'm identifying," but the way they were practicing feminism was by fully embodying the leadership style is emerging in them, whatever that looked like. In the parables, it looked like even though you know I'm fifteen years old I have a spiritual truth that is coming through me that I need to bring into the world and it requires challenging everything. It requires looking at every single person as a potential revolutionary or ally in the work with me

MB: mmm...

AB: . . . when I think about what was so distinct in the Parables is between Christianity and the Earthseed religions. I mean there's the obvious — one of them believes in one god and another one doesn't. But then I think a lot of it is pretty similar, so it's like you live your life you go to heaven or we're Earthseed on the earth and then we go off to other lands so we're here for a period of time and then we go away to someplace else, but this fundamental difference here is that in Christianity there's good people who are going to get to make that transition and go someplace good and there's bad people and with Earthseed it's god as a change force is working on every single being and that means every single being qualifies to be able to fulfill the destiny to go to the stars. I've been really messing around lately with womanist and feminist distinctions just to really hold them but I feel like that piece of it is the kind of thinking that comes from someone who holds the power for creation and where you know having been a doula for a period of time you do start to, it changes the way you look at every single human beings once you've seen birth and experienced birth. I think that it's not necessarily a gendered thing but I think it is a having a value on the creation aspect of life and what it means to be responsible for the next generation and what does that look like? Once you start to tune into that then you see every single person, every prisoner, every criminal, everyone that you know, every homeless person, everyone that we might think is you know "oh they've done something wrong in their life so they're not as good as we are," you start to see like it's just circumstantial, so much of it is circumstantial and I think that creates a new potential world where restorative justice is possible, transformative justice is possible, restoring someone's life is possible . . . I'm not sure if that makes the connection but to me those are the ways I see feminism show up in addition to the obvious — all of her protagonists are women who are leading societies, waking up humanity — but I tend to think that especially now when we have so many women who have elevated into positions of leadership that doesn't, that's not the whole picture you know. There's something about the way people are actually leading and in the way that they're showing up that we have to pay more attention to.

MB: No. I really appreciate that. I think what you're talking about makes me think even beyond feminism as it's been constructed. You know how people usually use the term – it definitely has this Afrofuturistic feel to it. Can you speak a little bit to that? About how Octavia's work fits into Afrofuturism and the ways we are trying to reimagine a world that we want?

AB: Yeah, I still like a lot of what she plays with — it looks to be in radical collaboration and I think that when I think about a lot of the work that I've read — Afrofuturist work — coming from other than the capitalistic democratic start that we have here in the US the main thing that I pick up on is this radical collaborative energy. How communities work is with each other rather than competing against each other... I think that there's a lot of dynamism, there's a lot of really distinct ways that people are making their lives on the continent but when it comes to the writing and the social norms that have been put out there, there's so much more togetherness and collaboration in it and so I feel like so much of Octavia's role and work uplifts that in practice. What does it actually look like for humans to literally live and work together day in day out and make children together and make food together? I think her work offers a serious critique of what was happening in the US during the time that she was writing and longing for other approaches for how we live our lives and I think the places that she was looking to find those answers were places that went to living collaboratively, living in community, which is deep because she spent so much of her time alone, creating alone — a self-described recluse hermit — which I think is also powerful, but maybe gets to different questions, different sets of thoughts. I also think that she sparked conversation in the US that I think now we are starting to see the fruits of some of that. There are so many women coming up through the work and black women coming up and writing science-fiction but something I'm really curious about and want to do more study on is how much she's inspired people in other places because it's something that I actually don't know that much about. I know for me she was really the entryway, but I wonder if the same thing is true for writers who are coming up and claiming Afrofuturism across the country, across the continent, across other places. That's a major way she sparked their work, you know. There's this gathering that's coming up next week that I wish I could be at — I'm curious about how many of those writers really started their work or entered science fiction through her work.

MB: I will definitely let you know what people say. Speaking of her work and how it inspired you, I'm wondering if there are pieces of her work that are hard for you to hold. I too am a big Octavia fan, but then some of the things that you mentioned — the questions around incest and consent and some of the sexual relationships that people have — how do you negotiate that? How does that also fit into the framework of you know not evil not good — kind of that messiness?

AB: I think this is why I like her so much. Because like most people, I constantly suspect that I'm actually not a good person or that some of the thoughts that I'm having are naughty or bad or there's something wrong with them and shame is like a major component of how our society functions and how we maintain control over each other or give our control away to other people and so I feel one of the things that she does that is so interesting is that she leans into all these places where shame is normally the response and you get to experience it without the shame. I still have total discomfort – I don't like this, this is not cool — but I mean it's not like she makes a case for it, you know?

MB: right.

AB: But some of the stuff I wrestle with is how the end of the parables sees folks going off in a ship called Christopher Columbus to colonize new worlds and I think that so much of my politics has been rooted in the ideas of anti-colonization – not moving beyond the impacts of colonialism and I don't think there's ever been a time as an adult in my analysis where I could be like "oh colonization that can be a good thing." you know? And yet she calls the question for it, right? If you're a group of people who are not able to survive in the way of your society, at what point do you have to go off and find some other place to be and is there any respectful way to do that or do you just say it will just die rather than doing that right and then I think she starts to answer that a little bit with *Lilith's Brood* and the *Xenogenesis* series where you get to interact with for all intents and purposes a benevolent colonizer. What does it feel like to actually be getting integrated into someone else's genetic existence and you know and I feel like it for me it's a deeply uncomfortable place. I feel like each time I read it I'm like "I don't like this" and I don't like that she makes them so erotically compelling that they literally feel that they smell good and they make us physically healthier and you know that she makes it a benefit. And yet I think that what she's saying there is that there is not an easy answer to this question of how we survive long term and so if we want to have the right to survive then we have to be willing to ask ourselves the hard question of what we do on all these circumstances instead of developing these hard lines. There are no circumstances in her books in which a hard line leads to survival and I feel like that has been really instructive for me many times in my life where I was for instance stepping into a position of leadership and I'm an anti-hierarchical person and you know holding that staunchly and then I'm stepping into a position of

leadership where it's not clear that there is anyone else who can share the leadership with me at that point in a way that's going to actually work for the situation. So instead of just being, "well I'm anti hierarchal so I'm going to screw this up by partnering with people who are not ready for partnership it's like I have to go do the hard work of making sure that the folks are getting developed to a point where they can actually share leadership right and it just means that generally things have to be more complex and that we have to take more responsibility. In terms of the sexual consent — one of the things I think she gets at that I don't think I've read in any other work that didn't feel totally creepy to me is how early on we are actually sexual creatures and physical creatures and feeling our bodies. It's been such an interesting thing for me to have three kids in my life now my sister's children. I don't know if I remember this part of my life per se but just noticing how early on they're really aware of their bodies and of their... my nephew is like "my penis is amazing." He loves it and he just wants to spend all of his time playing with it. But there are so few spaces in which children can just safely be their whole selves without that being taken advantage of. So much of it is the mental age. My nephew doesn't have the mental capacity to tell someone anything about that necessarily. All we can do as the adults around him is protect him and make sure he doesn't learn to feel shame around that so I feel like one of the things that she speaks to a lot is eleven-year-olds are feeling a lot of feelings in their bodies and that's possible and so are fifteen year olds and eighteen-year-olds and so on and so forth and much older. She also goes on the other side of it, you know, that people being in their sixties, seventies, and eighties this doesn't turn off any of their erotic potential. So then I think she starts to get to the question of what really makes consent real and so you know you have this in the fledgling book which I wish was a series. You got someone who looks like an eleven-year-old who has a whole field of lovers but you know her real age is hundreds of years old and she has the capacity to make decisions about what happens to her body and from a powerful position because she has the most lived experience of any of the people that she's interacting with. It makes me uncomfortable and it also makes me feel like yes at this point in my life I have much more personal power than I did at thirteen and fifteen when I was sexually assaulted to make decisions about my body and it's not

necessarily anything that's changed to my body. Because everything was awakening in me in that period of my life and then that was taking advantage of and so just being able to say so much of it is mental versus physical and I feel like she opens up the door for that conversation

MB: Absolutely. Absolutely. In that regard and just kind of flowing with that, what lessons do you feel like you've gotten from Octavia's work?. How does it apply to you? I heard you talk about how you are protecting your nephew's right to be a sexual being as a little person. What other lessons do you think you've gotten from Octavia?

AB: So many of the ways I look at the world were shaped by reading her work at a formative age so thinking about relationships as something that should be open and free rather than sort of locked into — you know, it's only going to be this one way for all time. I think that that is multiple lovers or to choose not to have multiple lovers, but the idea that a relationship is not a place of ownership but a place of choice — she did so much presenting of that. I learned a lesson about writing that is this. Octavia's work is not the most beautifully written work by any means and there's a lot of writers I've read that have much more beautiful work or are more technically gifted writers and yet the ideas she was presenting were so genius and she was able to present them in such an accessible way that it didn't matter that she didn't write some kind of way. And I think for me as a writer that's been a really important lesson: to go ahead and put my work out there and not worry about perfection so much as being honest and feeling like if there's wisdom coming I need to let it flow through me and I feel like I've really learned a lot about what leadership looks like. What's happening with the development of these strategic readers has been trying to put a finger on what I've learned about strategy and leadership from her work. We are using the term emergent strategy to talk about the kind of strategies her leaders use which is over and over again adaptive and flexible and done in a relationship and done in a collaborative way and able to take in new information and organic, you know? Ultimately it's strategic if it grows up from the ground and grows up from the relationships rather than being forced down onto them and as someone who has held various leadership positions and has always felt a little uncomfortable with just the idea of we need to smash our opponent into the ground and we need to win them over and you know when we do that everything is just going to be all good we need to smash capitalism and smash hierarchy and smash all these things. I hate those things and they're all inside of us. I think our social justice movements would look so different if we weren't all capitalist within them. I know we are trying not to be but I feel that the ways that we hold power or the ways you make decisions so much of that's isolated and not shared and so much of it is competitive. So the naming emergent strategy and giving ourselves away to begin to have a conversation or a way to have a common conversations — the conversation has been happening for a long time but to say you want this to be an emergent strategy and we want to develop leaders who are schooled in emergent strategy and are emergent leaders — what does that look like and what does that make possible for us? A lot of that for me has come from Octavia on so much and as a woman of color I don't think I have something like Earthseed coming through but I definitely get transmissions of... things that feel really true for me from observing in the world and I love going back and rereading the

Parables and just seeing that that's important. I write those things down and share them and it doesn't matter whether they fit into existing ideologies or traditions or philosophies. What matters is that they feel really true and I can articulate them

MB: Right. Thank you. I'm glad that we've moved into the conversation about the strategic reader and how that itself is a model of a collaborative process and an emergent strategy

for dealing with the world, creating the world that we want. Can you talk a bit about how you decided to create the reader? How the collaborative process of creating the reader emerged?

AB: That's a great plan. Well, I'll say a couple of things on this. One is, I'm trying to think if I even really fully remember the process itself but the thing I think it's important to know is collaboration does not come easy to me. It's actually one of my more challenging areas, one of my places where I'm constantly trying to learn. You know, I'm a Virgo, I'm the first-born and have always been a little bit of an over achiever. I've been positioned into leadership early on in my life and regularly, so collaboration is something that I started to become aware was necessary and important but still wasn't quite sure how to do right. And I feel like the Allied Media process — being a part of Allied Media Conference and the Allied Media Projects

Community — gave me one of my first spaces to be able to say "Oh, this is what collaboration can actually look like! We can have principles that we share with each other and we can share the creative process and develop ideas with each and it's not like I'll go off and have my great idea and then come pitch it to you and if you like it we'll do it you know. We can actually let stuff be more emergent so that was the fertile ground in which the reader came out of. We had an Octavia Butler symposium I think four years ago now and that was basically just a geek out. I offered some thoughts on Octavia and then we had a fishbowl conversation. Some of the key folks who've been throughout the whole process are Leah Lakshmi, Alexis Gumbs, and other folks were in that room. You were in that room, right?

MB: Yes, I was in that room.

AB: Sitting in that room having a conversation with each other — something magical really entered the room in the process of the conversation and it was like how can we gather all this magical energy into something that we can share with others? I don't think I'd ever seen something like this strategic leader necessarily but I definitely knew that at the end of a lot of books they'll have sets of questions for readers to use. So what would it look like if we just generated sets of questions we have on all of Octavia's books and then pulled that together? So that's what that room did. After the larger conversation, which was really titillating and magical, folks broke into small groups and each group just generated themes and major questions they have about her work. We focused mostly on the Parables, *Lilith's Brood*, some of the Patternist series, which is actually one of my favorites and the first one she wrote. Then we had a small group that was looking at short stories and *Fledgling* all together and maybe *Kindred*, too. People weren't as familiar with those pieces of work so we didn't have as much content there. I'm hoping we can return to it. We just gathered the questions and pulled them into the reader. After the session I reached out to Alexis because in my mind Alexis is like one of our bright shining lights of thinking and really understands how to do more academic texts writing looking at things that are like this — you know, publishing something and putting something out. So I asked her to read through what we gathered. We read through it and without too much shifting, we arranged the questions but didn't do too much else to it cuz you know the allied media community is really brilliant and able to say what they mean so it was published the next year. We had it together and then we brought it to the next Allied Media conference a year later and shared it with people and folks went kind of crazy about it. It was really good. The following year, we did a transformative justice science-fiction reader. In my dream, I want to combine the two of them because they're both really powerful and the transformative justice science fiction reader was a much more collaborative process in terms of four people took on writing

different pieces to help frame science-fiction work and putting those together into reader and that reader has incredibly strong pieces and Octavia Butler has incredibly strong questions. I always send them out to people at this point and it looks like we have more readers coming. We're going to develop one on parenting in science fiction and parenting in science fiction. We're still trying to figure out the angle for it. There's a bunch of parents who are like "Science-fiction is shaping how I parent so I want to write about that and think about that." And there might be one on spirituality or the sacred in science fiction.

MB: Mmm.

AB: I've been traveling around the country for other work and doing this Octavia Butler and emergent strategy sessions almost everywhere I've landed for the past month and it's been incredible that one of the things I'm seeing is that there are so many other angles and conversations and questions. Even the collaborative process is not done yet. We are trying to figure out how to take it to the next level – integrate more questions, integrate more pieces, do next iterations of the reader, and that's all still out there and happening which is just really exciting

MB: One of the things I really love about seeing you create these spaces, like the space you create at AMC, is you are just an excellent facilitator and I think that's part of what makes people believe in the collaborative process. Can you speak a little bit about how you create and hold space for the collaborative process you're creating?

AB: Yes, I could speak to that [laughter]. The background of it is that I grew up in a household where there were a lot of distinctions. Both my parents came from very different class backgrounds, race backgrounds, gender backgrounds, and every other thing, so I grew up in an environment where I was able to constantly see how bringing loving attention to a space could help create possibility and that is the key component that is needed for facilitating a collaborative process because if people have access or people are suspicious of each other or if people have critiques of each other that they're holding and they're not be able to feel loved themselves and loving towards the people in the room, it's actually really hard to open up enough to share creative process and collaborate. When I'm thinking about collaborating in a group one of the first things that I do is I try to figure out actually what the group wants to do so there's usually something alive in the group already whether they'd met each other and whether they haven't, whether they were together long-term or not. There's usually some common interests, some common thread that's alive in the group and there are a lot of ways to tease that out. If I'm working with a group longer term, I'll do some pre-surveying and stuff like that – interviews beforehand – to find out, but if I'm just coming into the room now you would ask a room, why did you come here? When everyone answers that question, if you synthesize it you can figure out, well, here are two or three things that this group will definitely benefit from one of the few things that I feel like I've learned a lot is that it very rarely works to just come in with an agenda and try to press a group through it

MB: Mm hmmm.

AB: And this is this is one of the reasons why I feel like I chose facilitation early on in my life as opposed to becoming a teacher. I think teaching work is super important and I don't think the skill set that I have is being able to come in and give people content. I'm really interested in coming in and figuring out what is the content of the room that will grow everyone. Another major piece of my facilitation stuff that I'm learning is to stay in a

process so if something changes you know so this idea Octavia Butler talks about “god is change” and the only lasting truth is change everything you’ve touched you change, everything you change changes you –what that looks like in facilitation is that at any given moment there are how many people in the room and that’s how many processes going on and what we each know as humans is that within our own selves at any given moment we have literally millions of processes happening, right? What’s happening in our bodies and minds, our hearts, our spirits? So having all that in a room is an opportunity for us to tune in and pay attention to that stuff attention and say “Oh, we’re supposed to go to collaborative small group moment right now that someone just opened up something that was very emotional for the large group. We need to stay together here for another second to really receive what just got offered and then we can move on.” I think so much facilitation gets stopped because people are trying to press on and not tuning into what changes are happening and what does that make possible now? I can’t tell you the number of times that as a facilitator taking three deep breaths myself before moving on has allowed the space for something massive emotional and heartfelt and really transformative to happen that wouldn’t happen if I decided to be like ,“Welp, that’s not on plan. We don’t have time to do that. We got to keep moving and that requires trusting people. So growing, just keep continuously growing your capacity to trust the group to attend to itself.”

MB: To me that definitely speaks to what you talk about with emergent strategy being about relationships — the relationships that the people in the group are communicating. So how do you feel like people participating helps build those particular strategies?

AB: Well, I feel like vulnerability begets more vulnerability. And I think that it’s one of the major things we lose in the way we are oriented through capitalism, right? It’s like if you’re vulnerable, then someone can get ahead of you. So I feel like one of the major things we are trying to retrain people about is actually if you’re vulnerable and you say exactly what is you are actually feeling, then your needs can get met and I think once people have that intoxicating delicious feeling of having their needs met in a group, then they want more so then they also start to be people who hold space in different ways.

MB: Yes.

AB: And I think that’s one thing that feels super true. So much of it is figuring it out. The session that we are doing at the allied media conference this year on emergent strategy is going to be a tool build, basically because this is still pretty new for me and it’s one of those things I know when I feel it, but how to actually articulate it and write it up and share it with others, that still feels like a growing edge. So some of the stuff I know for sure is giving people the experience of being held in a collaborative space where emergence is the leading energy tends to be very transformative for people. Once they have the experience one time, they long for it again and knowing that that’s the truth for people... I just recently relistened to Audre Lorde’s *The Uses of the Erotic* and she talks about it with the erotic — with this sense of truly being alive, fully being present in the place of the pleasure, of what needs to be alive and present and well used once and once you have that experience, it makes it harder to settle for suffering.

MB: Yes.

AB: I think about that related to this like once you’ve had the experience of emergent strategy where everything that’s happening is just data that is flowing in and being processed to make them next best thing, move the most elegant possible move — once you

have any experience then it's hard to go back to being a part of lock-step plans that don't adapt to the circumstances or being a part of competitive work environments or being a part of even self-sacrificing environments where you are doing something you don't want to do. I find it nearly impossible to do something I don't 100% want to do at this point in my life and I think that's emergent strategy for me in practice. So much of it is you just need a little taste and the rest of it takes care of itself.

MB: Mmm... I love that and relatedly these new strategies, these emergent strategies, to be present and to communicate there's a real embodied element to this, and that I've seen you use the term *embodied organizing*. Can you say a little bit about that and how that connects to ableism and class?

AB: That's great. So let's see... many people in the social justice realm . . . I have spent a lot of time in my head thinking about what is wrong with the world and what needs to be done about it and what tends to happen is that I get completely overwhelmed by what is wrong with the world and I can't imagine ever having any solutions that will actually work so to me the process of having embodied organizing, being an embodied organism, is being able to actually expand from my brain to the other parts of myself that are feeling and connecting and in contact with the earth so that what's happening. What I'm feeling has more space to land in but also that I can connect with other people who give me a different truth, which is the things that I can't figure out with my brain. I can feel when I'm in a room . . . I've had multiple experiences of being in rooms where I suddenly knew that it was going to be okay or I knew that being with my nephew and my niece, that it's okay that they are alive in this really terrifying age and that in my body I know what to do to take care of them and I've heard a lot of parents speak about that so there's one level. I've been taking courses with this group called Generative Somatics that studies the process of healing and trauma in the body and how stuff gets stored in our bodies and how to release it. Then it also starts to say what are we doing with our bodies like how are we feeding ourselves, how are we spending our time together — that piece on ableism is really fascinating. There's a whole conversation that's been happening around disability justice in the somatics work that I've been doing and it's also comes up several times in the Octavia Butler conversations. What does it mean in the future if you can't run away from the aliens or run away from someone who's being violent on the road and how do we actually maintain and care for and see the power of all of the people without discarding any? So I feel like embodied organism — why do I want to say organism right now? I'm sure there's some good reason, but embodied organizing to me looks like being able to embrace the full body of the people who are in the room or in the group or in the community and figure out what is the best way to apply that towards justice and towards what's needed. In terms of class, the main thing that I've been noticing lately is the privilege to walk away from things and to step away or move away from things and to say "I believe in this — oh and now I believe in that. Yeah, it's okay to make that shift and you know I've done that many times in my life because I have the privilege of being a good facilitator and knowing that people will continue to hire me to come facilitate for them. So I can leave a job behind and the people want me to facilitate in different places, so that means I get to travel and, you know, it's just different options that have been there for me to continue to change what I'm thinking and what I'm doing that a lot of the organizers I speak to don't feel like they have options. They feel like whoever brought them into the political process and what they were told is the right way to move forward you know that they have to stick with that and a lot of that is because these folks are coming from working-class backgrounds where they don't necessarily have a lot of financial options for making different choices. Their sense of community is the people that are directly around them because they are not necessarily taking off and traveling and going seeking other places and stuff, right? To me, one of the things that's been very

interesting is to figure out how do we give every single person no matter where they are on the class spectrum the experience of getting to choose what they believe in and getting to choose what they're going to do about that and make it so there's not just a privilege is getting to travel or having resources, but rather it's a privilege of how we share information with each other. When I travel I'm not going to stay in like five-star hotels far away from everyone, right? How do I go and make sure that I'm spending time in people's homes and that I see part of my work as being a borrower, coming and saying here's a story from the last place that I was in that feels relevant to this place or here, let me connect you with this. For instance, I was just in New Orleans and they have this parents' organizing guide that looks at all the schools in the city and really rates them — how good are they and what parents need to know about them and it's like every city should have that. But they're not necessarily promoting themselves to every city as a model for what other cities should have, so something I can do is go to parents in another city who don't have the financial or time resource to travel as much as I do you and make sure they know about it and put them in touch. They can say we could do this, to. To me all of that is a part of it and I think about this and I think about that and I'm challenged by a lot because I think one of the things I hear that is happening in our work that makes me really sad is people claiming or using the Oppression Olympics: like I am the poorest, I am the most oppressed, and I have the least access. Starting to use that as something to be proud about — I think that doesn't feel like the right path to me. I feel like instead being able to say "Whoever I am and however I am, I'm exactly that and my experience is relevant" and so whatever background you come from. Not privileging one background over another or one experience over another, but being able to say when we're looking at a specific issue — and I think, Octavia, this is one of the major lessons that comes out of her work — those who have survived and experienced a certain thing, they're the experts on that thing and so they're going to know the most about it to apply forward and to me that means like doing embodied organizing in the context of class means that people who've actually experienced poverty are the ones who need to be generating the solutions around what actually resolves that. If you talk to really rich people, they're like, well, we need to just get rid of poverty. If you talk to people who are poor, they're like we need to get rid of wealth, right? The problem is not that there's no monolithic viewpoint, but you a lot of folks have the analysis that if there weren't people hoarding, there wouldn't be this lack, right? It's just different; it's like who has the solutions. I think that's it.

MB: Yeah, well, I mean you really kind of already answered my next question, which was about how does food and educational justice fit into what you see the reader making possible. It seems like having these opportunities to meet people where they are that the local communities are creating, it's also a bit of that patternmaster that I see in you in making those connections between organizations and what people are doing.

AB: Absolutely. You know it's been an interesting experience lately — to really start to understand and accept myself as being a really nomadic person. My interest is really in, I love hearing stories about what people are doing locally and I love supporting what people are doing locally and I love traveling and so being able to put these two pieces together to see what can I do that is useful — sharing the work of Octavia Butler as a framework for helping people see what cool things they are doing locally and patterns into what other people are doing is really an exciting thing and I feel like I'm just, it almost feels like I'm just on the cusp of it and that there are other people on the cusp of it and are starting to just really form community around what does it mean to be leaders in a way that is about storytelling rather than about you know being the most brilliant strategist in the room or being the most cutthroat fixer and I love watching my *Scandal* and other stuff, but like the leader that I want to be . . . I love the model of Lauren, you know going door-to-door and

telling people stories, sharing her beliefs with them and seeing who resonates with it and growing from this place.

MB: Mmmm... I think you again have kind of gotten to my last little bit. What do you want for the legacy of Octavia and your work in relation to her?

AB: I really want particularly people who are thinking about changing the world to read her work politically and strategically. She offers all these case studies that if you read her work I think it really expands the way we can think of ourselves and think about what leadership means. I want to be someone who continues to make her work more accessible to other people in whatever way that is. So for people who are like, well, the writing style doesn't work for me you know encouraging them to go back because the ideas are worth it or for people who say, "Well, I don't read science fiction," well then, start with the parables, that's all happening right now, you know? And just finding ways, entry points for people to read it and make it easier and easier to walk in the door. The other piece that I am really committed to more and more is getting people to write science fiction. Octavia started writing science fiction when she was eight or nine years old and was just like, "I think I can do this better" and she didn't spend her life as an organizer. She spent her life creating these incredible beautiful genius stories and I feel like there are so many of us who would benefit from engaging our creativity more and writing it down, writing the future that we want to see, making it palatable and having conversations around these visions. There's a project that I'm working on with a writer named Walidah Imarisha who is based out of Portland where we have invited people who are currently doing social change work to write science fiction that emerges from the work they're doing currently and then just doing sessions with more people and individual private stuff with people. Just send to me what you're writing and I'll send you what I'm writing and just starting to build more network around that and each of the cities where we've done the Octavia Butler and emergent strategy sessions there are folks who want to continue the conversation with each other in reading groups and writing groups and other things so that feels like a big piece of it. If we have more people who see themselves as co-creators — co-writers — of the future then I'll feel good at the end of the day.

MB: Thank you so much Adrienne, this was wonderful.

AB: Thank you so much for these amazing questions and just thinking of speaking to me about this stuff. It's my favorite topic.

MB: YAY!

ONE THOUGHT ON "TRANSCRIPT: MOYA BAILEY WITH ADRIENNE BROWN"

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