

Kindred Rites of Sankofa: On Octavia Butler's Histofuturist Approach to Artful Inquiry

Qualitative Inquiry

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DOI: 10.1177/10778004251316191

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Abstract

Using the lens of Sankofa, an Akan folktale symbolizing the value of cultural return, this article explores the potential of Octavia Butler's methodological approach as a transformative framework for qualitative research. Butler's "histofuturist" methodology, which intertwines historical insight with speculative imagination to forge new narratives, invites researchers to reorient their perspectives by integrating diverse temporal and cultural dimensions in their research. By examining her artful inquiry process in the context of her acclaimed novel, *Kindred*, the article highlights how Butler's immersive artful methods—rooted in personal experience, sensory engagement, and emotional depth—pose a challenge to Eurocentric research approaches. The article, then, advocates for artful inquiry as a methodological shift that embraces cultural heritage and personal reflection, proposing that Butler's techniques can enrich contemporary qualitative research through enhanced emotional and contextual understanding and through a commitment to innovation and creativity.

Keywords

histofuturism, Afrocentricity, Octavia Butler, Black qualitative methods

In the Akan tradition, there is an oral folktale that suggests the intrinsic value of cultural heritage and the significance of embracing one's roots (Opoku-Agyemang, 2017; Osei, 2020). In this story, Sankofa, depicted as a self-confident bird, secretly leaves her village, an act that challenges established cultural norms. While on her journey, she gets lost in a nearby forest and meets another bird who insults her and causes her to lose the confidence she once had. Faced with doubt, Sankofa returns to her village, and rather than shun her for breaching cultural etiquette, her community members embrace her and help to rebuild her sense of self. After her confidence is strengthened, she embarks once more to the forest and confronts the antagonistic bird. This time, armed with self-knowledge and communal spirit, she overcomes the insults, and the antagonist disappears. In recognition of her journey, the villagers construct a public statue of Sankofa with her neck turned backward, serving as a symbolic reminder for community members to honor their ancestral roots, embrace their cultural and historical traditions, and remember it is not taboo to go back home and fetch what you have left behind.

The Sankofa narrative serves multiple purposes (Kissi, 2018; Temple, 2010). Namely, the focus on return highlights the importance of Black people maintaining their cultural identity and honoring their communities and histories despite external pressure. The response of Sankofa's community on the bird's return reflects the value of communal

support and solidarity even when one of us strays from home. Sankofa's journey is a symbol of personal and cultural resilience, a way to suggest that, when antagonists attempt to tell people who they are, there is strength in relying on cultural spirit and ancestral connection as the foundation for self-definition. The imagery of the Sankofa bird signifies the power of return and reclamation, of never forgetting who we are and who we once were. And so, the Sankofa story is a reminder, a call, and a warning.

Derived from the words *san* (return) *ko* (go) *fa* (look, seek, take), the collective words have been translated into two important phrases, "it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind" and "go back and fetch it" (George, 2017; Kwartang, 2016). Both suggest the importance of looking forward while also looking back. In this way, Sankofa is a refusal to throw people and histories away; it is an upliftment of cyclical possibility and a denial of linear thinking and rigid paradigm; it is a championing of otherwise trajectories in which one can create new futures by burrowing deeper into the past; and it is a prioritizing of the

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critical examination and patient investigation of which Black people have been forced into forgetting (Dillard, 2000). Sankofa reminds us that to make positive progress, we must find what is good from the past and bring it forward to the present to create better futures.

In qualitative research, the significance of returns to the indigenous roots of Black cultural strength, of African ancestry, and of Black self-definition, is not prominent. In fact, conventional qualitative research methods have traditionally been disjointed from organic processes that inspire how Black people orient, encounter, and move in this world. As Black scholars, we have noticed how our value is often determined by our ability to speak a methodological language that twists our tongues to make Eurocentric sounds devoid of Black cultural ways of researching, analyzing, and sharing (Brown, 2014; Osei-Kofi, 2014). In fact, reviewers and journal editors have asked us to justify our centralization of Blackcentric over Eurocentrified methods of inquiry, suggesting that White-centric approaches to data generation, analysis, and representation are more rigorous and acceptable than Black onto-epistemologies. Ultimately, although Sankofa practices are essential to the foundation of Black being, we have witnessed how traditional qualitative approaches implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) argue that it is, in fact, taboo to go back and fetch what Black people have (deliberately or forcefully) left behind.

Of course, we have sometimes strayed from home and community to make it in this field. We have employed traditional research and writing practices to secure tenure-track positions and achieve academic publication. However, no matter how often we have been lost in the forest of Eurocentric methods, we know we will always be welcomed back home. Thus, like the Sankofa bird, we return home to rebuild our sense of self, arming ourselves with self-knowledge and communal spirit to confront the entrenched predominance of methodological conservatism (Bloch, 2004; Brown et al., 2014; Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004). In our journey back, we aimed to forward Black methodological processes that have been overshadowed by Eurocentrified methods in traditional qualitative research. Even though we were initially unsure of what we would find when we turned our necks backward toward the past, we (re)discovered Octavia Butler, whose artful methodological approach offers valuable guidance for the contemporary moment.

Although Butler is well known in the field of English literature, her role as a qualitative methodologist is less recognized. However, in a journal entry from November 1981, Butler stated that she was a histofuturist, a term she coined to describe someone who is “a historian who extrapolates from the Human past and present as well as the technological past and present” (Jamieson, 2023, par. 7). As a histofuturist, she was dedicated to the process of returning to the past and present to “produc[e] counter-historical narratives

and forms of radical speculation that provide alternatives to dominant histories and ways of knowing” (Streeby, 2018, p. 722). Her histofuturist process of return enabled her to interweave social, environmental, political, and technological information across contemporary and historical contexts to understand their influence on potential futures. In this way, Butler provided more than a product for readers to enjoy; she also illuminated an artful methodological process that invited readers to think differently about the world in hopes that we might ask new questions and engage in alternative explorations of our collective existences. Ultimately, Butler’s approach is artful in its resistance, subversion, intervention, and challenge to scholarly norms of writing, methodology, expression, and (re)presentation. It is a celebration of Black connections to self and others, and a commemoration of the indefinite, of intuition, of feeling. Thus, we return to her work to go back and fetch this artful process in hopes that we may bring forth otherwise qualitative worlds.

Afrocentricity as Foundation for Artful Black Inquiry

Oh, you got to make your own worlds, you got to write yourself in, whether you were a part of the greater society or not, you got to write yourself in. So I got to write myself in. (Butler, 2000, 0:44–1:39)

Drawing upon Asante’s (1997, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007) extensive body of work, we define Afrocentricity as placing African and African Diasporic ways of thinking, knowing, and being at the core of any analytical process that involves Black people. Afrocentricity is both a theory and method, which challenges traditional academic disciplines to reconsider the frameworks and lenses through which knowledge about African and African Diasporic subjects is produced and disseminated. This reorientation aims to ensure that Black people are not merely objects within the academic discourse but are central to defining and interpreting our own experiences and histories. Eurocentric scholarly discourse, which is often mechanistic, detached, and rigid (Ani, 1994), asks Black people to lose (or forget) our cultural centeredness, coercing us to neglect our heritage and constraining our potential by confining us to spaces and methodologies that fail to reflect our cultural backgrounds. When Black scholars participate in this “uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of Western science. . . [we] participate in our own domination and oppression” (Akbar, 1984, p. 395). Afrocentricity, however, reorganizes Blackness from a position of perceived inferiority to one of empowerment, opening new possibilities for theoretical and methodological inquiry.

Particularly, as Afrocentricity involves intentionally placing Black individuals at the forefront of our academic

endeavors and daily experiences, scholars can use the lens to dismantle the dominant Eurocentric frameworks that have long shaped academic and cultural terrains and create methods that can more effectively articulate the complexities of Black identity, culture, and history. With Afrocentricity as the foundation, scholars have space to engage in methodologically rigorous research that envisions futures for Black communities beyond the confines of dominant perspectives, recognizes Blackness as a reservoir of resilience and innovation, forges connections with Black people across geographical and temporal boundaries, acknowledges and celebrates global Black contributions, and draws insights from Black history to inform pathways toward collective progress (Flannery, 2016; Hlela, 2018; Nyaga, 2021; Reviere, 2001). We can create or seek out methods that uplift communal epistemologies, spiritual connections, and symbiotic relationships with nature and the cosmos (Akbar, 1984; Ani, 1994). By embracing Afrocentric methodologies, we can challenge Black epistemicide, and retrieve and revalorize ancestral ways of knowing and doing research.

As self-definition is critical for Afrocentric scholarship, we must consider our own experiences as Black scholars who live and work in the United States. We often find ourselves navigating the dense forest of academia, confronting the antagonism of White intellectualism that seeks to diminish the brilliance of Black minds and erode our sense of identity, leaving us questioning the roots of our understanding of both past and present realities. We consistently grapple with the ethical quandary of participating in institutions of knowledge steeped in violence and deeply entwined with the subjugation of Black bodymindsouls (Carrington, 2022; Schalk, 2018). We constantly battle with well-meaning advice where we are urged to place our faith in the very systems that perpetuate our marginalization and to adopt Western frameworks of thought in hopes that White analyses will be enough for Black liberation (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Dillard, 2018; Flannery, 2016). We are asked to use White-centric methods of analysis to examine and contextualize the experiences and histories of Black people, and in doing so, we are asked to lose the specificity of Blackness (Grimes, 2018; Wallace, 2022). Because of this, we see the ivory tower as a portal to the past, forcibly transporting us to the eras of enslavement and colonialism, masquerading as a benevolent overseer. However, like the Sankofa bird, we find solace in community, in self-awareness, and in reclaiming our cultural heritage. So, we must grant ourselves permission to unearth the treasures of our ancestry and make room for alternative epistemologies that empower us to challenge those who seek to disparage us and make us doubt who we are.

And so, we embrace Afrocentricity as our epistemological foundation and leverage the collective histories of Black thought to bring Butler's artful inquiry to the future because

we must. Within an Afrocentric framework, artfulness, or the cultivation of different processes of thinking and doing research, is a foundational pursuit. Afrocentricity requires scholars to imagine Black worlds despite a global environment that thrives on Black suffering (Dumas, 2014). It demands that researchers are clever enough to retrieve, reclaim, restore, and reimagine forgotten or marginalized narratives that are often erased in a White supremacist society. It necessitates an orientation to the fullness of Black existence, provoking us to shift our onto-epistemological engagement to processes that uplift and acknowledge the power, agency, and voice of Black people. To assume an Afrocentric stance is to understand that Black people and Black ways of knowing matter, that Black people can be known. However, the rigidity of Eurocentricity cannot validate a shift that centers the fullness of Black being, and so, it can never make room for Butler's methodological insight. Through a lens of Afrocentricity, however, Butler becomes an artful counter-methodologist who disturbs tradition as defined in the White ableist cis-heteropatriarchal institution and challenges methodological standpoints that inherently place White perspectives at the center of academic research (Flannery, 2016). Ultimately, we center Afrocentricity because it is the only way to make Butler's inquiry possible, to think differently about Butler's writing process as literary and academic. We center Afrocentricity to write her artful inquiry in, to invite new questions about the qualitative inquiry process.

Characteristics of Butler's Artful Inquiry

Although Butler's body of work is extensive, we focus on her groundbreaking novel, *Kindred* (1979), as our intellectual cornerstone because it incorporates the idea of time travel which aligns with the process of Sankofa. Keeping the Akan tradition in mind, we use this section to weave past, present, and future by connecting the following: (a) our examination of how Butler's novel portrays the process of return through its plot, characters, and conflicts; (b) our analysis of Butler's conceptualization of return in interviews about writing and researching *Kindred*; (c) our reflections on the methodological questions we posed after returning to Butler's novel and interviews for this article. In taking this intertextual approach, we not only aim to uncover the depth of Butler's process but we also consider how Butler's artful methods invite us to ask new questions and engage new methodological processes that can potentially inform and reshape the ways we write, conduct, and interpret research.

Butler's Return to Place

With *Kindred*, I did go to Maryland and spend some time. Well, I mostly spent my time at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in

Baltimore and at the Maryland Historical Society. I also went to the Eastern Shore to Talbot County, to Easton actually, and just walked around, wandered the streets and probably looked fairly disreputable—Octavia Butler. (Kenan, 1991, p. 496)

Octavia Butler described *Kindred* as a “grim fantasy” novel in which the Black woman protagonist, Dana, finds herself repeatedly and inexplicably transported back in time to the Antebellum South (Snider, 2004, par. 38). This return to place is an artful practice. Context acts as a powerful stage for exploring the realities of slavery, racial dynamics, and the complexities of historical memory that are attached to the geographical location. Specifically, as Fields (1987) summarized, Maryland is located on the border between the North and South, and thus represented a critical middle ground in the struggle over slavery and freedom. As a state that straddles Southern and Northern cultural spheres, Maryland symbolized the intersection of different worlds and experiences in ways that other states did not. In fact, the state’s historical role in both accommodating slavery and fostering abolitionist movements further categorized Maryland as a space in tension. By choosing Maryland as the site of the narrative, Butler created more than just a backdrop for the plot. The space became an active participant in the story, as it illustrated the physical manifestation of racial tension, the fluctuating commitments to freedom, and the ongoing impact of historical divisions. In this way, the setting deepened the novel’s exploration of how history, place, and social identity are interwoven, highlighting how geographical landscapes shape and are shaped by human experiences and how humans are shaped by space and place.

Although Butler could have fictionalized the setting, she noted the importance of making *Kindred* “real” by grounding her narrative in a detailed analysis of history and place: “I did a lot of library research, and I went off to Maryland and did some on-the-spot research. I talked to members of my family, and did some personal research that didn’t really have anything to do with the time and place I was writing about, but that gave me a *feeling* of the experience of being black in a time and place where it was very difficult to be black” (Snider, 2004, par. 8). To reach verisimilitude, then, she reviewed documents on slavery, interviewed family members about their experiences with race and racism, and visited locations that would help her understand the geographic realities of enslavement that guided her story (Balagun, 2006; Elliott, 1979; Gross, 1993; Kenan, 1991; Potts, 1996). She also engaged in unstructured wandering, a spontaneous and experiential process of Black knowledge-making (Toliver, 2024) that required her to just “be” in the space without a specific reason to be there. Rather than creating a fictionalized Maryland from her California home, she traveled via train and bus and stayed in “frightening” hotels she could afford. Without predetermined sites of

observation, she wandered the streets, getting the feel of the space as one would if they lived there, attuning her five senses to the place of story. Unstructured wandering as an artful approach allowed Butler to engage in observational research that prioritized the lived experiences of the people, the culture, and the locations of enslavement prior to the writing of the narrative.

In reflecting on Butler’s artful processes of unstructured wandering and immersion in place, we noticed how she taps into Afrocentric research practices by acknowledging the importance of cultural immersion and its impact on how one might represent the data and the site of data more faithfully. Her approach—absorbing the environment, attuning to sensory details, and allowing space for unexpected discoveries that felt true to her creative vision—demonstrates an artful inquiry practice that inspired us to consider how we might incorporate similar principles in our own work. Despite the constraints imposed by IRB protocols, which may limit our ability to engage in complete spontaneity and immersion, we considered how we could enhance our historical analyses to enrich our understanding of the contexts in which our research takes place. We envisioned incorporating a sensory analysis of place, focusing not on analyzing the people but on experiencing the land and the environment. We pondered the value of treating context as a dynamic participant in our research rather than a mere backdrop, and how this shift might uncover deeper insights that communicate information that moves within, between, and beyond time. Butler’s approach advocates for a return to place—this is a deliberate and conscious artful engagement with the setting that transcends a simple detailing of geographical location. By following her example, we may be able to change our relationship to the places in which we conduct research, resulting in a more complex interplay of context and content that adds depth and nuance to our understanding of people and the world.

Butler’s Return to Impressions

My characters are often combinations of people I know or have met, or at least of people who have made me notice them somehow. I collect impressions of people in my notebooks and in my memory. Anyone who impresses me either negatively or positively could wind up contributing to the formation of my characters.—Octavia Butler (Elliott, 1979, p. 21)

Every place I’ve lived is a nonliterary influence, every place and every person who has impressed me enough to keep my attention for a while. If something attracts my attention I am perfectly willing to follow that interest.—Octavia Butler (Kenan, 1991, p. 503)

Although the context of the story is crucial, it is the characters who drive the narrative forward. Characterization

here is an artful practice, the impossibility of knowing and locating through complex impressions. Each journey to the past pulls Dana into the lives of her ancestors—Alice Greenwood, Dana’s great-great grandmother, but also Rufus Weylin, the White man who sexually assaulted Alice and is the father of Dana’s great-grandmother. Dana understands that Rufus is her forebear, and by saving his life, she is, in a sense, ensuring her own existence. However, this knowledge creates a moral dilemma: should she allow Rufus to die to save the many enslaved people bound to his plantation, or should she allow Rufus to live to secure her own future? Despite the complex dynamics of her relationship with Rufus, Dana ultimately decides to kill him to escape his abusive grip and to prevent herself from suffering the same fate as Alice. This decision underscores the brutal intersections of power, race, gender, ancestry, and enslavement that Dana must navigate throughout her journey.

Other characters are equally complex. As examples, Kevin, Dana’s husband, is a progressive liberal White man who marries Dana despite his family’s disapproval. Although he opposes the abhorrent institution of slavery, his understanding of racial issues remains superficial. He fails to recognize how everyday acts of violence and subtle forms of anti-Blackness and White supremacy are equally dehumanizing. Moreover, when Kevin returns to the past with Dana, he uses his privilege as a White man to free slaves, risking his own life in the process. However, his actions are marred by a lack of deep empathy for the enslaved people around him. His efforts, though courageous, often come off as performative and insufficiently attuned to the complexities of their situation. In addition, Rufus is a character that is driven by the misguided belief that he wants to do good in the world, but his purportedly altruistic actions are frequently undermined by his selfishness and privilege. His actions create a damaging cycle where his initial impulses result in harm to Black people, but his violence is always followed by genuine regret for his actions. Despite his occasional remorse, Rufus refuses to alter his exploitative behavior, suggesting that his actions are more about maintaining his own comfort and power than creating real, positive change, ultimately demonstrating that his notion of doing good is intrinsically flawed and self-serving.

In each example, Butler showcases a deep understanding of humanity that extends beyond simple characterization to address broader conversations about people, history, and relationality. This understanding was developed through her immersive artful approach that enabled her to gather impressions of people, places, and ideas (Harrison, 2010; Schweitzer, 2003). Butler saw every encounter, every location, and every concept as integral to the larger narrative of human experience. For her, writing or formal research was

not a prerequisite for collecting these impressions, for she asserted that it was impossible for writers to know what is, is not, or will be important. As she put it, “writers use absolutely everything that happens to us, and surely if [she] had a different sort of childhood and still come out a writer, [she’d] be a different kind of writer” (Sanders, 2018, par. 31). In other words, every person, place, book, research article, and idea contributes to the work, suggesting that nothing can be discarded as irrelevant in an artful research process.

This methodological process suggests that Butler viewed life itself as a source of research material. She embraced the spontaneity of creative exploration, allowing intuition and interest to captivate her attention, rather than being driven by a research question. Instead of limiting herself to details that were essential in advance to a particular writing project, she gathered together impressions from various sources and, as she states, let “those ideas bounce off of each other, simmer, reproduce in some odd way, so that [she] came up with ideas that [she] might not have come up with” if she had limited herself (Butler & Delaney, 1998, par. 40). In this way, Butler demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity, recognizing that deliberate awareness of the existence and impact of a multitude of texts, people, and experiences is crucial to the writing and researching process. Essentially, Butler’s method suggests embodying an artful inquiry, a mode of thinking in which nothing of interest gets thrown away. In embodying this stance, she suggests the need to adopt an adaptability of research design, a dedication to holistic understanding of the world within and beyond the research context, an attention to contextual and cultural distinctions, and the recognition that every person has value.

When we re-evaluated our research practice through Butler’s artful practices, we questioned how our methods of inquiry might evolve if we embraced the value of unconventional sources of insight that artful inquiry privileges—those that might not fit neatly within traditional research or disciplinary frameworks but offer deep understanding nonetheless. How might our inquiry expand if we made room for a broader range of information, rather than confining ourselves to specific paradigms? What complexities might we uncover by revisiting the impressions we have gathered throughout our lives, impressions that may alter our views on data, writing, and the world? Butler’s method champions an iterative process of reflection and adaptation, where we continually revisit and integrate our observations and experiences. In doing the same, we might ensure that our research more accurately reflects the multifaceted nature of human experience, capturing its inherent complexity and nuance. In addition, we might acknowledge the interconnectedness of our personal and professional experiences and how they impact the kinds of writers and researchers we have grown to be.

Butler's Return to Emotion

What I was trying to do is make the time real, I wanted to take them back into it. The idea was always to make that time emotionally real to people.—Octavia Butler (Sanders, 2018, par. 47)

I was trying to make real the emotional reality of slavery. I was trying make people feel more about the data they had learned. I wanted to make the past real and [show] how it scars the present.—Octavia Butler (Balagun, 2006, par. 9)

Time travel is another major facet of *Kindred*, as Dana is spontaneously transported from the 1970s to the period of enslavement. There is no impetus for Dana's travel; it just happens, as if the blood of her ancestors calls to her own. Although there are theories delineating the larger meaning behind the novel's temporal elements, Butler was more concerned with the feeling and emotion of traveling back to the period of enslavement, rather than the scientific mechanism of travel. Thus, Butler's artful inquiry process invites the reader to not only learn about her research but also to emotionally connect with the lived experiences of her focal population, thus fostering empathy, understanding, and, possibly, social change. In one interview, she recounted a moment when she met a Black middle-class man who was well versed in Black history and contemporary anti-Blackness. However, she noted that although this man had much knowledge, he could not emotionally connect to the core of Black historical life because he was unable to recognize the struggle of Black survival (McCaffery & McMenamin, 1988; Rowell, 1997). In another interview, she stated that *Kindred* was a "novel about feelings as much as about history" that she wrote because she realized that "young people did not really understand on the level of feelings—they could quote facts for you—but they didn't really understand what it might have been like to live then" (McGonigal, 1998, par. 6). Her words suggest that she used her writing to convey details about the world, but she also wanted readers to aesthetically respond to those words. The data were important, but readers' feelings about the data were critical, so she used her writing to help readers think and feel differently about the world.

Butler sought to bridge the gap between fact and feeling because she believed that knowledge was nothing detached from emotional depth. In doing so, she invited readers to not only comprehend the historical realities of slavery but also to emotionally engage with human experiences at their core. Her aim was aligned with artful inquiry, seeking to evoke empathy, provoke reflection, and foster a deeper understanding of the data. By incorporating emotion as foundational to her research findings, she was able to offer a nuanced portrayal of the psychological and interpersonal

moments affecting enslaved people, illustrate an important context for understanding that exemplified the broader sociocultural and emotional environments that made enslavement possible, and create authentic and relatable characters whose experiences with modern and historical antiblackness might resonate with readers on a visceral level. Through her characters, she made space for readers to witness the resilience, ingenuity, and humanity of enslaved people, challenging prevailing narratives of victimhood and offering a broader understanding of Black agency and survival strategies.

As we returned to our work, guided by Butler's artful methodological process, we realized how often we removed feeling from our work. In our work, we provide facts and details that often showcase the reality of anti-Blackness in our cultural context, and we are honest about the pain and violence Black people encounter in a White supremacist society. But often, we present facts without helping readers aesthetically respond to the reality of Black life. We wonder, what would a return to emotion make possible in our research? How might we use storytelling more effectively to make time, and place, and people emotionally real to the readers of our work? How might we, as researchers, emotionally engage with the core of human experience more deftly in our research, analysis, and writing? Where might we let emotion return to our work. . .to us? Butler supported a return to emotion because it caused people to change their relationship to facts, opening possibilities on how we might address social issues. In following her guidance and artful practices, we might conceptualize the "doing" of research differently, attuning to scholarship that moves beyond the page and into our hearts.

Conclusion

At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity. It gets the reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what "everyone" is saying, doing, thinking—whoever "everyone" happens to be this year.—Octavia Butler (1996, p. 134)

Butler acknowledged that science fiction and other speculative literary forms are crucial to ongoing explorations of past, present, and future worlds because it forces both the reader and the writer to assume alternate stances, those unbound by what is considered normal, traditional, and common. She showed this orientation through her histofuturist method, a research process built on the practice of return—on going back to events, people, places, and self, and bringing them forward into her science fiction writing. It is her dedication to moving beyond the narrow path of believed normalcy, her enthusiasm for interdisciplinary thinking, and her resolve to forward a fluid, organic, and holistic approach to understanding the world that makes her

artful inquiry process a gem that must be forwarded into our methodological future.

By returning to place, Butler outlines a process of how we might better immerse ourselves in the world and with the people in our work. By returning to impressions, Butler suggests that our thinking about people, place, and time is influenced by a multitude of encounters that affect who we are as researchers, so no concept, idea, or person should be dismissed or discarded. Furthermore, by returning to feeling, she illustrates a mode of thinking in which we are constantly considering facts and emotion alongside each other to make our research real to others and to ourselves.

Our analysis of Octavia Butler's work as artful inquiry is a reminder that we must not fear return. We must look back and bring knowledge forward, for there is power in remembering our ancestral roots, of embracing our cultural and historical traditions, of finding the gems and carrying them with us. Moreover, when we have gained our courage once again, we, like the Sankofa bird, can return to the forest and remind others that it is not taboo to go back and fetch what we have left behind.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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