



all that you touch,
you change.
all that you change,
changes you.
octavia e. butler

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Anna Selina Tholl

Maske
Diane Buthia, Denise
Christen, Corinne Gujer

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Kontakt
+41 (0)44 267 64 64
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Katharina Nill

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star magnolia

The piece “Star Magnolia” is inspired by Octavia E. Butler’s sci-fi novels “The Parable of the Sower” (1993) and “The Parable of the Talents” (1998). “Star Magnolia” is a speculative fabulation, an open imagination departing from where the second novel ends, which is in the year 2090.

Hayat Erdoğan What is “Star Magnolia” about?

Jeremy Nedd We can say that Octavia E. Butler proposed a framework for a future. Being a black woman in sci-fi, perhaps birthing Afrofuturism, she was paving the way for black and brown bodies in the future. And “Star Magnolia” is floating around in that framework, in that fiction or, let’s say, in that reality.

HE Butler narrates the journey of a black protagonist named Lauren Olamina, which starts in the year 2023. Olamina creates her own belief system, dreaming of a new community, and on a bigger scale a society and eventually humanity based on that belief system called “Earthseed”, but she wants to take it to another planet ...

JN ... yeah, to take root among the stars.

HE Olamina’s journey takes about 70 years and comes to an end with a(nother) departure: Her starship takes off. That’s where part two ends. Leaving earth is not only a wish but a necessity since her world is literally on fire. Climate catastrophe, collapsing economy, poverty, mass migration, persecution, suppression, drug abuse, killing, rape, violence ...

JN ... the regression of humanity.

HE Yes, and from our perspective none of this sounds like science fiction.

JN Yeah, it doesn’t. But to put a quote on sci-fi to which I hold on to pretty closely: “More generally, science fiction as a genre does not claim to actually predict the future. Rather, it works to extrapolate elements of the present, to consider what these elements might lead to if allowed to reach their full potential. That is to say, science fiction is not about the actual future but about the futurity that haunts the present.” (Steven Shaviro) You see the ecological issue, the climate issue and the social issue just unfurled to their worst and that’s what makes it this tangible sci-fi. It makes it super scary, but also very optimistic, because in the end of “The Parable of the Talents”, it doesn’t stay in dystopia. We don’t know how it goes and if the utopian dream comes true, but it alludes to the possibility that it is achievable, that maybe humanity can do it.

HE There is hope and optimism, but also losses and compromise.

JN It can’t be a completely optimistic space. It is a product of turbulence. Just because they achieve something, doesn’t mean that they are out of the shit, just yet. It’s more like the next step to what comes next, the step to the stars, which you have to take, because you have no other choice.

HE Who are these people leaving earth, who is the crew of “Star Magnolia”?

JN This crew is us, a cool group of people. This crew is, I hope, a reflection of a society that Miss Butler portrays in her novels. I would call this “crew” rather an assemblage of bodies or a diverse group of people, leaning towards a PoC representation. They represent all the bodies that wouldn’t necessarily have a place in a sci-fi future. They are living together. They’re going someplace into the future, and I think it’s super important that they are doing just that. Living with the unknown, an unknown destination, living to live. Living with the cost that it takes to let go of earth, of home, of what you know and have known is just enough.

HE When Olamina develops “Earthseed” she focuses on life and living. She says that all dominant religions are obsessed with death and what comes after. For her life and living matter. Especially in her world where living means surviving. Her vision for a future life is not based on competition, growth and the satisfaction of the individual, it’s more about finding a way of living together as a ...

JN ... collective, yes. And that is interesting in this philosophy or belief system. In our rehearsal process I have tried to have our practice embody what “Earthseed” could or does represent. Talking about the things that we wanted in our future, and to see how they connect to the future Miss Butler proposes was influential

in our process. So, I think that energy and that spirit is represented in the scenes that you see in the piece. For example, we spent a day just gardening, we had gatherings and discussed space, time, the cosmos. The process of creating “Star Magnolia” was very much based on practices of togetherness and the cultivation of the idea of care. I didn’t want to pretend the fiction for the stage, I wanted it to come from a real place.

HE Is there something that has accompanied you through the creation process of “Star Magnolia”?

JN A lot of things. But mostly, I guess, the leitmotif of “Earthseed”: *All that you touch you change, all that you change changes you.* That’s constantly echoed in the two novels and it’s a friendly reminder for adaptability – especially in this moment right now, where we’re living in a very sci-fi moment. So, yeah, the only truth is change.

Das Gespräch führten Hayat Erdoğan, Dramaturgin, und Jeremy Nedd, Regisseur des Stücks «Star Magnolia» am 16.09.2020



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