Reclaiming Apocalypse

Representation of Neurodiversity in Apocalyptic Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis treats the apocalypse as a site of queer potential. Defining queerness as José Esteban Muñoz does, as a utopian "doing" or "striving" towards alternative ways of being, I argue that the apocalypse presents a concept through which to disrupt what is "normal," sequential and linear, and imagine alternative, queer futurities. In mainstream apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, the dis-order of the apocalypse poses a challenge to survivors: whether or not they can 'salvage' the remnants of their pre-apocalypse life. Yet, I argue, from the collapse of existing structures of civilisation and sociality arises potential for alternative ways of being with the world that are more sustainable, cosmopolitan and inclusive. In this thesis, I explore how three authors engage with apocalypse as a catalyst for change, radical hope and resistance against established, repressive institutions. My authors address the conventional, Darwinist trends of survival and liberate their protagonists from these normative logics, queerly striving towards alternative futures. Octavia Butler (she/her), Corinne Duyvis (she/her) and Rivers Solomon (they/them and fae/faer) all portray dominant narratives of survival as relying on colonial, imperial discourses which story epistemic authority, human purpose, and agency as accessible only to a privileged few. This thesis explores these approaches through the lens of three overarching themes: the survival narrative, locating and navigating apocalypse, and imagining alternative futurities. I argue that exploring apocalypse as ideology, space, temporality and futurity provides a broad basis from which to subvert the key functions of apocalyptic thinking in popular culture and redefine apocalypse from a Black, neurologically queer perspective.

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Remi Yergeau's *Authoring Autism* has been a massive inspiration for this project, not just in the arguments they make, but in their openness about how their personal history and experiences are intimately connected with their research. Their experiences, and the experiences of the autistic authors whose works I have read over the past two years, have completely changed the way I think about myself as an autist and as a queer, gendervague person. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to discover them, and for being able to build a project around their inspiring work.

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Introduction

> 'Autism destroys – and norms need destroying.'
>
> Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism* (2018)

> 'Queerness is not yet here. […] We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an identity that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain.'
>
> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (2009)

This thesis treats the apocalypse as a site of queer potential. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz argues queerness is a utopian "doing" or "striving" towards the future, disrupting the norms and assumptions perpetuated by dominant social and political discourses of the present. In claiming the apocalypse as a site of queer potential, I refer to popular, contemporary representations of the apocalypse as a force which disrupts what is "normal," sequential and linear, and foreground the apocalyptic genre's obsessiveness with futurity. In mainstream apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, the dis-order of the apocalypse poses a challenge to survivors: whether or not they can 'salvage' the remnants of their pre-apocalypse life.[1] Yet, I argue, from the collapse of existing structures of civilisation and sociality arises potential for alternative ways of being with the world that are more sustainable, cosmopolitan and inclusive. In this thesis, I explore how three authors engage with apocalypse as a catalyst for change, radical hope and resistance against established, repressive institutions. My chosen authors address the conventional, Darwinist trends of survival and liberate their protagonists from these institutions, queerly striving towards alternative futures. Octavia Butler (she/her), Corinne Duyvis (she/her) and Rivers Solomon (they/them and fae/faer) all portray dominant narratives of survival as relying on colonial, imperial logics which story epistemic authority, human purpose, and agency as accessible only to a privileged few. Through their use of Black, neurodivergent perspectives, epistemes and ways of being and moving through apocalyptic environments, new survival ideologies emerge, queerly disrupting the 'here and now' to strive towards 'something' else.[2] By foregrounding ways of surviving, interpreting and moving through apocalypse from the margins, these authors approach futurities founded in 'radical hope for […] more sustainable future[s].'[3] Whilst

[1] Heather J. Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity beyond Salvage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 3.
[2] José Esteban Muñoz and others, *Cruising Utopia, 10th Anniversary Edition: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2019), p. 1.
[3] Kim Q. Hall, 'No Failure: Climate Change, Radical Hope, and Queer Crip Feminist Eco-Futures,' in *Radical Philosophy Review*, 17:1 (2014), p. 223.

my authors' visions of the future differ enormously, their shared hopefulness diverts from the traditional apocalyptic narrative of a revelatory end to history. Instead, apocalypse is a spatio-temporality through which alternative, sustainable futures can be imagined, presenting apocalypse as a source for positive change.

My thesis explores three overarching themes: the survival narrative, locating and navigating apocalypse, and imagining alternative futurities. Collectively, exploring apocalypse as ideology, space, temporality and futurity provides a broad basis from which to subvert the key functions of apocalyptic thinking in popular culture and redefine apocalypse through an alternative intersectional theoretical perspective: Black neuroqueer theory. My interest in apocalypse is inspired by the widespread use of apocalyptic imagery in Anglophone cultures. As Germanà and Mousoutzanis observe in their introduction to *Apocalyptic Discourse* (2014), the term 'apocalyptic' is a word the average person seems to draw on increasingly frequently, especially as the global northern hemisphere begins to experience more pronounced and obvious effects of climate change.[4] Apocalyptic discourse, as a system of symbols and inferences that denote events as 'terminal' and as 'disclosing some kind of truth' about the world, may be applied to anything which disrupts, unsettles or is out of place.[5] Local disasters, such as the wildfires in Britain in July and August of 2022, both constitute the ends of individual peoples' and communities' worlds and are symptomatic of national, continental and global instability. This trend in popular culture subverts dominant literary tropes which frame apocalypse as exclusively global, inviting a culturally based interpretation of apocalypse as the immediate, personal, subjective experiences of either real or perceived disruption to daily life.

My thesis addresses the particularly unsettling parallel that has been drawn in the last twenty years between apocalypse and autism.[6] Early in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), McCarthy makes a disturbing reference: '[The man] rose and stood tottering in that cold autistic dark with his arms outheld for balance while the vestibular calculations in his skull cranked out their reckonings.'[7] McCarthy uses the word "autistic" as an adjective to evoke feelings of instability and disorientation, immersing the reader in a post-apocalyptic environment which is unfamiliar, uncanny and inhospitable. This kind of negative evocation of autism in literature has real, lived consequences for autistic people. Autism is a style of neurocognitive functioning, characterised by being primarily object-orientated (as opposed to primarily socially-orientated), having diverse sensory processing

[4] Monica Germanà & Aris Mousoutzanis, 'Introduction: After the End?,' *Apocalyptic Discourse in Contemporary Culture : Post-Millennial Perspectives on the End of the World*, ed. by Monica Germanà & Aris Mousoutzanis (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[5] Germanà & Mousoutzanis, p. 1.
[6] At the time of writing, the autistic community are debating the capitalisation of autism/Autism and autistic/Autistic. In this thesis, I take leave from my primary author in neuroqueer theory, Remi Yergeau, and do not capitalise autism/autistic/autist.
[7] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Borzoi Book, 2006), p. 14.

styles, having communication styles that favour honesty and emotionality and privilege rhetorical ambiguities, and monotropic task-orientation (focusing on one thing at a time).[8] Autistic people are a neurominority group who face social, political and cultural exclusion.[9] They are made subjects of medical practices which are descended from gay conversion therapy and are routinely storied as less-than-human by allistic (non-autistic) writers, directions, actors, medical professionals, law makers, and autistic hate groups such as Autism Speaks.[10]

Contrary to popular belief, however, autistics have a huge capacity for emotion, thrive in accepting social spaces and are capable of forming a vast array of deeply personal, intimate and long-lasting friendships and partnerships, in particular with other autists. Yet, dominant narratives of autism in popular Anglophone writing remain characterised by infantilisation, deficit, social dysfunction and loss of humanity. Neurotypical 'fascination' with autism, with the 'allure of potentially unquantifiable human difference and the nightmare of not somehow being 'fully' human,' has resulted in a multitude of outside-looking-in representations of autism for the expressed indulgence of neurotypical audiences.[11] McCarthy's evocation of autism to characterise apocalypse is symptomatic of this literary trend, reproducing autistiphobic attitudes of autism as a condition of disorientation, darkness, and unquantifiable difference in the process.

It is significant that autism is not only a style of neurocognitive functioning that is readable in apocalyptic fictions, but that dominant rhetoric around autistic people is often framed by the apocalypse as well. Within medical and deficit-based discourses (discourses which autistic scholar Nick Walker groups under the "pathology paradigm"), autism is a condition "suffered" by an otherwise "normal," "healthy" child, and life writing by autistiphobic parents and journalists frequently use

[8] This definition stands in contrast to medical definitions of autism as a "disorder." Although in recent years organisations such as the NHS and National Autistic Society (UK) have moved away from calling autism a "condition," the requirement for getting a diagnosis for autism still requires psychiatrist and autist to use deficit-based language that focuses on a person's weaknesses in relation to a neurotypical norm.
Please see: National Autistic Society, *What is autism?* (2022) <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism> [9 August 2022].
NHS, *Signs of autism in children* (2019) <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/signs/children/> [9 August 2022].

[9] Nick Walker, 'Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions,' <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/> [14 July 2022].

[10] M. Remi Yergeau, *Authoring Autism* (Durham & London: Duke University, 2018), p. 29;
Cheyenne Thornton, 'Sia's Film and the Deficit Model of Disability,' <https://neuroclastic.com/sias-film-and-the-deficit-model-of-disability/> [9 August 2022];
Elizabeth Bartmess, 'Review: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon,' <http://disabilityinkidlit.com/2015/04/04/review-the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-by-mark-haddon/> [9 August 2022]; Shannon Des Roches Rosa and others, 'The Autistic Community's concerns regarding Spectrum 10K and Eugenics are Valid,' <https://thinkingautismguide.com/2021/08/the-autistic-communitys-concerns.html> [9 August 2022].

[11] Stuart Murray, *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 5.

apocalyptic imagery to convey this story, even sometimes foreshadowing a so-called 'Autism Apocalypse.'[12] References to disease and the struggle to survive as family are central to Michael Alan's book *I Wish My Kids Had Cancer: A Family Surviving the Autism Epidemic*, for example.[13] At its extremity, living "with" autism is supposedly so life-shattering that parents and caregivers of autistic children will be awarded sympathy and humanity denied to the autistic person.[14] Parents who believed the MMR vaccine gave their children autism were interviewed as part of the BBC Panorama documentary 'MMR: Every Parent's Choice.' One parent, called 2nd Mother in the document's transcript, tells the interviewer that her 'son was damaged by MMR.'[15] The interview centres the parent and privileges their perspective. After having the vaccine, 2nd Mother claims her son was 'never the same again' weaving a narrative characterised by a sense of tragedy and by her feelings of nostalgia for something lost and unrecoverable.[16]

Margaret Atwood, another popular author of post-/apocalyptic fiction, draws more heavily on the idea that autism itself is the catalyst for the apocalypse in her novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Crake is coded as autistic. To code a character as autistic means to insinuate, usually through the use of stereotyped behaviourisms, that a character is autistic without providing confirmation of the fact. It is a technique which relies on the reader perceiving a character's divergences from societal norms and attributing those deviances to neurological difference. Crake is portrayed as an anti-social genius who goes to 'Asperger's U.,' a university so named 'because of the high percentage of brilliant weirdos that strolled and hopped and lurched through its corridors.'[17] From the safety of the university, Crake develops a virus which he then administers to the global population, starting the events of the apocalypse. Atwood labels the students 'demi-autistic' (there is no such thing), which she defines as possessing 'single-track tunnel-vision minds' and 'a marked degree of social ineptitude.'[18] Atwood's inhumane portrayal of autism and autistic people can be traced to scholarly work in the 1980s and 1990s into theory of mind, in particular to Simon Baron-Cohen's work on so-called mindblindness.

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[12] Amy S.F. Lutz, "Autism Apocalypse by 2025?," *Psychology Today* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inspectrum/201409/autism-apocalypse-2025> (2014) [06 July 2022].
[13] Michael Alan, *I Wish My Kids Had Cancer: A Family Surviving the Autism Epidemic* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2008).
[14] Sam Corbishley, *Mum who suffocated disabled son during lockdown given hospital order* (2021) <https://metro.co.uk/2021/02/11/mum-who-killed-disabled-son-in-lockdown-sentenced-with-hospital-order-14064301/> [27 July 2022]; *Woman denies autistic son's murder* (2011) <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/woman-denies-autistic-sons-murder-1832227> [27 July 2022]; Alexander Nazaryan, *Autism, Murder and a Woman on the Ledge* (2014) <https://www.newsweek.com/did-sons-autism-drive-woman-murder-278389> [27 July 2022].
[15] 'MMR: Every Parent's Choice,' *Panorama*, BBC1, 3 February 2002.
[16] 'MMR: …'.
[17] Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 228.
[18] Atwood, p. 228.

Mindblindness is 'the notion that autistic people are pathologically impaired in recognizing and attributing mental states.'[19] Contemporary cultural stereotypes of autistic people as unempathic and unfeeling began with 'god theories' such as mindblindness and have prevailed in mainstream depictions of autism despite such theories having been repeatedly debunked in the twenty-first century.[20] The pathology paradigm has become so prevalent that a mutually enforced relationship now exists between pathologizing clinical research on autism and public perceptions and literary representations of autism.

Chris Bonnello's novel *Underdogs* (2019) is one example of a text which breaks the cycle of pathologizing representation of autistic people. The first of a trilogy of the same name, *Underdogs* is set in a dystopian Britain where all bar a few people have been rounded up and incarcerated in 'giant walled Citadels.'[21] The novel follows a neurodiverse group of adolescents who Bonnello presents as the 'final armed forces' of the United Kingdom as they fight back against the military dictatorship.[22] By portraying a neurodiverse group of "special school" students as Britain's last hope, Bonnello creates the opportunity to highlight the strengths and personalities of each neurodivergent character. In his Note from the Author, Bonnello eloquently explains that the neurodivergent characters represented in the text are not 'poster children for their conditions, disabilities or differences,' resisting normative, outside-looking-in and token representations of neurodivergent people.[23] However, Bonnello's representation of neurodiversity is limited by a lack of discussion of intersecting experiences of neurodivergence and race, gender, sexuality and other marginalised identities. Work by disability critical race theorists reveals that Black disabled and neurodivergent children are more likely to be vilified and ostracised in educational institutions, more likely to be placed in "special schools" such as the one Bonnello represents in *Underdogs*, and yet the one Black character portrayed in the novel is neurotypical, almost all of the neurodivergent characters are white, and none of them are queer, transgender or have other disabilities.[24] *Underdogs* does not adequately address these intersecting oppressions and, in doing so, does not represent the true breadth and depth of neurodiverse histories, cultures, identities and communities.

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[19] Yergeau, p. 12.

[20] Yergeau, p. 12; Morton Ann Gernsbacher & Melanie Yergeau, 'Empirical Failures of the Claim That Autistic People Lack a Theory of Mind', *Arch Sci Psychol*, 7.1, (2019), 102-118, <*https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6959478/*> *[accessed 29 November 2022].*

[21] Chris Bonnello, *Underdogs* (London: Unbound, 2019), p. 4.

[22] Bonnello, p. 15.

[23] Bonnello.

[24] David Gillborn, 'Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primary of Racism: Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in Education,' in *Qualitative Enquiry*, 21:3 (2015), pp. 277-287; Subini Ancy Annamma, David Connor & Beth Ferri, 'Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): theorising at the intersections of race and dis/ability,' in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 16:1 (2013); Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York & London: New York University, 2014).

Taken together, *The Road*, *Oryx and Crake* and *Underdogs* represent three contemporary texts which have either failed or fallen short of representing neurodiverse people, experiences and lives. McCarthy uses autism as a symbol for suffering; Atwood portrays autism as causing the collapse of civilisation, and Bonnello's *Underdogs* is so overlaid with privilege that the text remains a poor representation of neurodiversity. In turning to neuroqueer theory and Black feminist studies, I prioritise intersectional experiences and perspectives of neurodiversity. The primary texts I analyse in this thesis have been chosen for their informed representations of Black, neurodivergent characters. Combined, a Black neuroqueer perspective on Black neuroqueer experiences of apocalypse lays the foundations for addressing the dangerous perceptions of autism as apocalyptic and apocalypse as autistic which McCarthy and Atwood propagate and that authors such as Bonnello leave unexplored. Beyond seeking validating portrayals of autistic characters, each chapter will show how neurodivergent perspectives on the themes, assumptions and narratives of apocalypse are valuable to the literary study of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres. I reclaim the apocalyptic narrative of autism through highlighting the empowering, transformative ways authors use their protagonists to reimagine mainstream tropes of apocalyptic fiction. I argue that neurodivergent perspectives queer, subvert and challenge assumptions of white, male, neurotypical epistemic authority, and that theories born from neurodiverse scholarly communities sit alongside other transformative schools of thought in challenging dominant narratives.

I am reclaiming a relation between autism and apocalypse, as opposed to limiting the project to debunking these damaging narratives, because I follow avenues of queer thought that argue there is radical power in embracing non-conformity. In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau argues autism is an 'asociality' that 'defies, reclaims, and embraces' all that deficit-based narratives of autism cast as dangerously disruptive and in need of fixing.[25] I do not look to argue that autism and apocalypse are inseparable, but that narratives which look to compare the two should belong to autistic people, for them to define and narrate. I argue reclaiming an apocalyptic narrative of autism is an important to step to taking control of wider public perceptions of autistic people and to realising autistic potential to dissect and challenge neurotypical norms.

To reclaim a relation between autism and apocalypse from autistiphobic narratives requires an approach which centres the principles of neurodiversity and the values of the neurodiversity paradigm. Neurodiversity is the biological fact of diversity of neurology and neurocognitive functioning in the human species, spanning both neurotypical and neurodivergent styles. The neurodiversity paradigm values diversity in human neurology as 'natural' and 'valuable' and rejects the pathological belief that there is one "normal" or "healthy" style of neurocognitive functioning or

[25] Yergeau, p. 19.

neurotype.[26] Using the neurodiversity paradigm as starting point for reclaiming apocalyptic narratives of autism necessitates foregrounding neurodivergent perspectives on and experiences of apocalypse. The texts I explore centre neurodivergent narrative voices and value the narrative perspectives they afford. An important aspect of these texts is the authors' use of identity-first language when describing characters' neurodivergences.[27] Identity-first language acknowledges and respects the ways in which being neurodivergent or multiply neurodivergent informs a person's perspective and personality. This is in contrast to person-first language, aka: "person with autism," which autistiphobic people falsely claim is more respectful than "autistic person" on the basis that it separates the autism from the individual. As Walker argues, this belief is ableist and rests on the premise that there is something inherently wrong with being autistic.[28] As a comparison, to say a person "lives with lesbianism" or "suffers from blackness" would be unarguably homophobic and racist. Just as being a lesbian, or being Black, and being part of associated communities, can inform a person's lived experiences, worldview and identity, so can being neurodivergent. The neurodiversity paradigm understands that there are neurodivergences which are 'genetic and innate' to a person's identity and other forms which 'could be removed from an individual without erasing fundamental aspects of the individual's selfhood' such as epilepsy or anxiety.[29]

My primary texts all feature protagonists whose neurodivergences are fundamental to their selfhood and to how they encounter apocalypse as ideology and environment. Denise (*On the Edge of Gone* (2016), hereafter referred to as *Edge of Gone*) is openly characterised as autistic and Duyvis addresses contemporary injustices, prejudices and institutionalised discrimination faced by autistics through Denise's first-person narrative voice. To convey Denise's autistic experiences of apocalypse Duyvis uses a first-person narrative style, subverting the neurotypical gaze. Aster (*An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017), hereafter referred to as *Ghosts*) is also characterised as autistic, though Solomon only uses words native to Tarland languages and dialects to describe her neurodivergences. Lauren (*Parable of the Sower* (1993), hereafter referred to as *Parable*) has hyperempathy syndrome, a style of neurocognitive functioning Butler also calls "sharing," a direct reference to Butler's Black feminist influences in which empathy is a gateway to solidarity between diversely marginalised and oppressed identity groups. Through their experiences, apocalyptic environments are sources of inspiration and new ways of being. Through embracing their neurodivergent identities, working through and with

[26] Walker, 'Neurodiversity…'.
[27] Neurodivergence refers to 'the state of being neurodivergent' and I use the term when describing the ways in which a character is portrayed as neurodivergent, or how a character's neurodivergence is inferred through their gestures and inner voice. Taken from Walker, 'Neurodiversity…'.
[28] Walker, 'Person-first Language is the Language of Autistiphobic Bigots,' <https://neuroqueer.com/person-first-language-is-the-language-of-autistiphobic-bigots/> [03 October 2022].
[29] Walker, 'Neurodiversity…'.

apocalypse lays the grounds for transformative resistance, founding cosmopolitan communities and nurturing solidarity with other neurominority and broader minority identity groups.

The neurodiversity paradigm stands in defiance of widespread emphasis on the need for intervention, assimilation and rehabilitation of neurodivergent bodyminds into independent participants of society. Medical models of disability usually assume a binary between healthy and unhealthy, under which unhealthy subjects are incapable of living whole, purposeful lives, underscoring the necessity for clinical intervention. This pathology paradigm frames "normal" neurocognitive functioning as a set of social and communicative behaviours which allow for productive, meaningful connection with other human beings. Autistic people do not fulfil these norms, therefore autism conversion therapies such as applied behavioural analysis (ABA) endeavour to 'shap[e] [the autist] toward the normative, toward the prosocial, toward compliance.'[30] The rhetorics of the pathology paradigm mirror colonial rhetorics of white supremacy and manifest destiny which scholars of apocalyptic literature have identified as underscoring traditional apocalypse discourses. The logics of racism, which deny non-white people full humanity, are grounded in the logics of ableism, which deny disabled people agency and self-determination. I argue my authors portray dominant narratives of survival in which racism and ableism uphold each other to maintain the status-quo regarding who gets to survive, how they get to survive and what kinds of futures are deemed desirable, and that neurodivergent ways of collating and evaluating knowledge can help to queer the ableist, neuro-ableist and racist assumptions underpinning these logics.

Whilst my thesis is situated within academic discourses, the neurodiversity movement, which 'seeks civil rights, equality, respect, and full societal inclusion for the neurodivergent,' is essential to the reclamatory approach I take to autism and apocalypse.[31] Neurodiversity-focused academic and activist work often overlap and inform each other. The website NeuroClastic (neuroclastic.com), primarily run by and for autistics, is one such example: an online space dedicated to the writings of autistic people, education about autism, and organising and spreading awareness of autism justice movements, such as ending the use of electric shock therapy, ending the use of restraint and seclusion, and speaking out against harmful representations of autism in TV, film, literature and the media. In my thesis, especially the first chapter's focus on how narratives of survival create and bestow authority, I highlight the consequences of restrictive, exclusive survival ideologies on neurodivergent characters. Autistic modes of self-expression (both intended and unintended), such as stimming (repetitive body movements: often soothing, or just fun), ticcing (involuntary movements, noises, sounds, actions), echoing, jumping, monologuing, and hyper-focusing, are not granted rhetorical

[30] Yergeau, p. 29.
[31] Walker, 'Neurodiversity…'.

significance through neurotypical norms. Just as under the pathology paradigm, under the restrictive ideologies of survival, autistic styles of communication, in/action and knowing are discredited and rendered meaningless, denying autistic agency, self-knowledge and self-determination. Butler, Duyvis and Solomon are deeply concerned with power structures of knowledge and sociality; each portray their protagonists struggling against discriminatory, reductionist attitudes towards their neurodivergences. I highlight these struggles and use them to construct a starting point from which to argue for the need for alternative narratives of survival, locating the foundations of my thesis in the real, lived concerns of neurodivergent people and neurodiverse communities.

Methodology

My research is made possible by recent, coinciding developments in the fields of post-/apocalypse studies and neurodiversity studies in which authors from both fields have independently argued for the transformative, radical potential of post/-apocalyptic literature and neurodivergent beingness (ways of being in the world) to imagining alternatives futurities. In *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel* (2019), Diletta De Cristofaro examines the contemporary literary shift from traditional, linear apocalyptic discourses which 'uphold a teleological conception of history' to post-apocalyptic narratives 'in which the utopian end is removed' and is 'no longer the privileged site of meaning.'[32] De Cristofaro argues that contemporary popular apocalyptic narratives are rooted in Western, (neo)colonial and neoliberal conceptions of risk and power, which are themselves underpinned by stories of a utopian end of history.

De Cristofaro serves as a point of origin for how I understand apocalypse. She traces apocalyptic narratives through past and present as well as future, situating apocalypse within 'today's world and power structures.'[33] Apocalypse may conventionally be something located in the future, at the end of time and history, but narratives and imaginings of the end of the world have been a part of the fabric of western cultures for over two millennia. Whilst I agree with De Cristofaro that apocalyptic history is socially and culturally constructed, I argue that apocalypse is a site of queer potential for change. De Cristofaro frames the contemporary post-apocalypse novel as the 'fictions [which] invite us to reconceive our understanding of narrative and history beyond the apocalyptic sense of an ending, opening up alternative possibilities, thus unwritten, non-teleological futures, beyond the foreclosed possibilities of apocalyptic logic.'[34] This interpretation of the relationship between apocalypse and post-apocalypse confines apocalypse to prescribed, fixed meanings and functions within existing

[32] Diletta De Cristofaro, *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), p. 2.
[33] De Cristofaro, p. 19.
[34] De Cristofaro, p. 19.

contemporary western Anglophone writing. However, my primary texts experiment with, challenge and queer traditional apocalyptic discourses from within, not after, apocalyptic spaces and temporalities. As I will explore further in Chapter Two, I understand the apocalypse as an inherently meaningless, queerly demi space which has had colonial, teleological, linear narratives imposed upon it. My method to reclaiming the apocalypse for autists to reshape and redefine rests in dismantling these imposed structures and working through apocalypse's queer dis-/unorientation towards alternative futures.

De Cristofaro's concerns with agency, sites of meaning, alternative futurities and the powerful influence of narrative structures are paralleled by recent works in neurodiversity studies. *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm* (2021) is the first major collection of interdisciplinary critical writing on neurodiversity and neurodivergence, and includes contributions on the cultural production of the "normal" (neurotypical) child; the use of language games to 'construct autism as pathology;' an examination of eugenicist approaches to "curing" autism; a neurodiversity studies approach to agency; and, theorising the neurodiversity paradigm for use in academic contexts.[35] In 'Defining Neurodiversity for Research and Practice,' Robert Chapman argues the neurodiversity paradigm is epistemically useful in 'helping us access and generate new forms of knowledge.'[36] Combined, a critical temporalities and neurodiversity studies approach to the co-occurring representation of autism and apocalypse helps me to position autism's subversion of social norms and inter-personal relations as a radical disruption of neoliberal progression, something I will explore in more depth in Chapter Two.

Partnering these schools of thought has never been done before in an academic context. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic criticism tends to focus on texts' political, environmental and religious commentary, tracing shifts in how the end of the world is imagined in the context of global crises.[37] Marginalised experiences of apocalypse are rarely made central to explorations of apocalyptic fiction. When they are, race, (cis)gender, class and (more well-known and socially accepted types of) sexuality tend to be privileged before transgender identities, disability, and neurodiversity. Gurr's exploration of *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film* (2015) draws on post-colonial theory and queer studies to argue that post-apocalyptic narratives 'frequently fail to imagine new experiences of race, gender, and sexuality, […] uncritically reinstalling previous hierarchies and

[35] Hanna Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist and others, *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, ed. by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, Anna Stenning, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2021). Quote taken from the title of Nick Chown's chapter, 'Language games used to construct autism as pathology,' pp. 27-38.
[36] Robert Chapman, 'Defining Neurodiversity for Research and Practice,' *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, ed. by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, Anna Stenning, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 218-220, p. 219.
[37] Hicks's critique of apocalypse and modernity is one such example.

race, gender and sexuality expectations,' yet disability receives very limited attention and is merely mentioned in passing in the introduction.[38] Parallel to the absence of discussion on disability is an absence of scholarly perspectives on apocalypse beyond traditional historical, temporal, post-colonial and political. Hicks's work heavily references the colonial trends in apocalyptic concerns with modernity yet does not mention works by Black feminists which position the onset of modernity as the advent of apocalypse for Black and Indigenous peoples. Meanwhile, in Disability Studies and Critical Autism Studies, attention has been given to the quantity and quality of representation of disability, Deaf culture and neurodivergence, and Disability Studies has recently started being applied as a critical perspective in analysing ableist tropes in literature, media and TV.[39] However, at the time of writing, a critical application of work produced under the umbrella of neurodiversity studies to popular literary tropes and themes has not been established. This thesis therefore addresses two co-existing gaps in critical thought: the lack of attention in scholarly work on apocalypse given to representations of neurodivergence and the absence of any scholarly application of neurodiversity studies or critical neurodivergent perspectives to literary tropes beyond direct portrayal of neurodivergent characters.

To address these gaps, I depart from established theoretical frameworks often used to analyse apocalyptic literature and turn to a theoretical lens born from the neurodiversity movement, neurodiverse online communities, and scholarly work in neurodiversity studies: neuroqueer theory. The term neuroqueer was originally coined by Nick Walker, Remi Yergeau and Athena Lynn Michaels-Dillon as a verbed doing of neurological queerness. "Queer" defies easy definition. For the purposes of this thesis, queer describes a practice, a doing, in which individuals and communities reject the notion of fixed gender identities in favour of a flexible, fluid approach to gendered embodiment and expression.[40] Neuroqueer is an extension of queer. David Gray-Hammond, Katie Munday and Tanya Adkin argue that neuroqueer is 'the idea that individuals who do not conform to neurotypical standards are neurologically queer, further queering their bodyminds. Queerness begets more queerness. Not everyone who is Neurodivergent neuroqueers, but everyone who neuroqueers is Neurodivergent.'[41]

[38] Barbara Gurr, 'Introduction: After the World Ends, Again,' in *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, ed. by Barbara Gurr (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp. 1-13, p. 2.
[39] Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).
[40] For a short history of "queer," see: Annamarie Jagose, 'Queer Theory,' *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 4, (1996), <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/1996/12/01/queer-theory/> [accessed 14 August 2022].
[41] David Gray-Hammond, Katie Munday & Tanya Adkin, 'Neuroqueer: An introduction to theory,' <https://emergentdivergence.com/2022/07/12/neuroqueer-an-introduction-to-theory/> (2022) [29 July 2022].

Neuroqueer theory is the theoretical application of neuroqueering and neuroqueerness. At the time of writing, neuroqueer and the objects and practices associated with neuroqueering have been in the neurodiverse public sphere for just over a decade. Nick Walker originally arrived at neuroqueer theory as an 'approach to the topic of neurodiversity that's based largely in the fields of queer theory and somatic psychology.'[42] Somatic psychology considers 'psyche and selfhood [as] developed through processes of bodily experience and action, with the implied corollary that new bodily experience and new habits of action have the power to effect significant mental transformations.'[43] Applying Walker's definition, my application of neuroqueer theory draws attention to how bodily experiences and actions shape characters and how narration of experiences and actions are used to construct apocalypse and survival as embodied experiences. In *Authoring Autism* (2017), Remi Yergeau applies neuroqueer theory within the field of rhetoric. They foreground the 'cunning,' 'unruly unfixity' of autistics' rhetorical abilities and frame autism as a 'constellation of stories – stories about embodiment and intention, […] humanity and hierarchies.'[44] I adopt Yergeau's framework to explore how my authors story neurodivergence and apocalypse in relation to one another. Yergeau's application of neuroqueer theory to a socially constructed concept such as rhetoricity serves as a model for understanding apocalypse as a culturally constructed system of symbolism and meaning. Dismantling the meaning of meaning, I use neuroqueer theory to build on claims made by Gurr, Hicks and De Cristofaro that apocalypse constitutes a site of symbolic collapse and potential opening for alternative systems of meaning-making and social organisation. Just as Yergeau challenges the boundaries, edges and fixity of rhetoric, I challenge the popular boundaries, temporalities and finality of apocalypse, using characters' alternative ways of being in, navigating and thinking to reclaim apocalypse as neuroqueer.

As defined by Walker, the act of neuroqueering (one's identity, a text, a media representation of neurodivergence and/or gender) challenges, subverts and liberates the individual doing the neuroqueering from heteronormativity and neuronormativity simultaneously.[45] Heteronormativity is broadly defined as culturally based, widespread assumptions surrounding sexuality which position heterosexuality as the "normal" sexual orientation experienced by all human beings until proven otherwise (by "coming out"). Neuronormativity describes a similar structure of cultural assumptions which privilege neurotypical styles of communicating, information processing and cognitive

[42] David Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future: an Interview with Dr. Nick Walker – author of Neuroqueer Heresies,' interviewed by David Gray-Hammond on *NeuroClastic* <https://neuroclastic.com/neuroqueering-the-future-an-interview-with-dr-nick-walker-author-of-neuroqueer-heresies/> (2022) [29 July 2022].
[43] David Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future…'.
[44] Yergeau, p. 41; Yergeau, p. 41; Yergeau, p. 20.
[45] Nick Walker, 'Neuroqueer: An Introduction,' <https://neuroqueer.com/neuroqueer-an-introduction/> [26 July 2022].

functioning. Neuroqueer theorists such as Nick Walker and Remi Yergeau understand heteronormativity and neuronormativity to be inter-reliant. Historically, autism 'as a condition has, since its very conception, been crafted as a disorder of neurological queerness, rending autism incipient to multiple panics around gender and sexuality.'[46] To have a normal neurology, one must also have a normal sexuality and vice versa.

In Chapter Three in particular, I focus on how protagonists experience and embody their gender and neurology, specifically how divergent experiences and embodiments lead to different interactions with environment and power structures. In order to explore these experiences and embodiments in all their diversity, I draw on different models of queerness and futurity, namely queer failure and radical hope. Queer failure describes a branch of queer theory in which queer people and scholars reject cis-heterocentric narratives of the future and their implied heteronormative temporalities, instead embracing the here and now as a means to discovering new, subversive ways of being. Scholars who advocate for imagining and striving towards queer futurities, on the other hand, understand the future as 'queerness's domain' and argue that queer theorists need to 'reimagine, not reject, the future.'[47] The two theories are often interpreted as opposing one another, however, I argue that in reclaiming the relationship between apocalypse and autism there is value in drawing inspiration from both theories. In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau adopts both queer failure's method of rejection and queer futurity's method of striving to re/imagine autism's queer potentiality. Neuroqueering representations of futurity in *Ghosts*, *Parable* and *Edge of Gone*, I locate moments where authors portray their character's worlds as 'not enough,' where characters feel 'that […] something is missing.'[48] As I will explore more in Chapter Three, scholars of neuroqueer/ness are deeply concerned with the changes in cultural attitudes that need to happen for neurodivergent, queer people to be able to live and move through the world freely, safely and authentically. Neuroqueering these texts, I argue, integrates how my authors envisage the future into existing thought on what a neuro-inclusive future might look like.

Alongside neuroqueer theory and queer theorists work on futurity, I draw from disability critical race studies (DisCrit), Black feminist and environmentalist thought, and philosophical writings on space and landscape. A cross-theoretical, intersectional approach to these texts allows exploration of how authors represent co-existing dynamics of inequality interacting with and supporting one another. As I have mentioned, the protagonists in *Ghosts*, *Parable* and *Edge of Gone* are Black, mixed-race, queer, neurodivergent and come from poor and/or working-class backgrounds. In liberating characters from heteronormative and neuronormative narratives of apocalypse, my authors imagine

[46] Yergeau, p. 184.
[47] Muñoz, p. 1; Hall, p. 209.
[48] Muñoz, p. 1.

futurities which centre around racially and ethnically diverse communities, cosmopolitan cultures or non-human environments. My authors' perspectives on and representations of apocalypse are intersectional, and in response I adopt an intersectional framework that draws from Black feminist and environmentalist thought, queer crip theory, and post-colonial studies alongside neuroqueer theory. I use Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear's intercategorical framework of intersectionality, which places primary emphasis on the 'structural conditions within which […] social categories are constructed' and how these categories are 'intermeshed with each other in specific historical contexts.'[49] Erevelles and Minear designed the framework to avoid models of intersectionality which examine multiple identities through one primary identity. I apply this model to my thesis by contextualising my reclamation of apocalypse as autistic within the broader project to understand apocalypse through Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+ and other marginalised lenses. By utilising diverse perspectives on apocalypse, I establish a stronger foundation to explore the alternative futurities represented by Butler, Duyvis and Solomon.

Structure

My thesis comprises of three chapters. Chapter One considers the role of survival ideologies in each text. I argue that authors contrast conservative survival ideologies which seek to uphold pre-apocalypse power structures with alternative survival ideologies grounded in the experiences of the novels' protagonists. Chapter Two considers apocalyptic spaces and temporalities, arguing for a neuroqueer approach to thinking through and with apocalyptic nonmeanings. Finally, Chapter Three considers futurities, the ways in which multiply marginalised people are denied agency over their futures and the strategies authors use to liberate their protagonists from restrictive ideas about humanity's future.

The apocalypses in each text are heavily informed by the texts' settings. Duyvis and Solomon's novels both take place on generation ships. I read Duyvis's generation ship, the Nassau, as an experiment in institutionalised survival underpinned by ideas of human usefulness, whilst Solomon structures Matilda in the style of the American Antebellum south. Butler, meanwhile, sets her novel in mid to late 2020s America and presents an apocalypse fuelled by capitalist greed and dysfunctional government leadership. Whilst *Parable* is set on Earth, Butler creates a destiny that the characters can look forward to, which is to leave Earth and colonise other planets. Read in comparison to each other, each text represents a different temporality in relation to space travel, being in space (*Ghosts*), wanting to go to space (*Parable*) and waiting to go to space (*Edge of Gone*). These different

[49] Nirmala Erevelles & Andrea Minear, 'Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability in Discourses of Intersectionality,' in *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 14:3 (2020), p. 131.

temporalities result in different relationships between the protagonists, their past, present and future, and the contexts of ancestry, slavery and the legacies of colonialism that each author writes from. Read together, these texts criticise the power structures that maintain and take advantage of apocalyptic climates, present diverse ways in which landscapes might be queerly navigated and futurities which extend from protagonists' neuroqueer orientations to apocalypse.

Chapter One explores how the protagonists Denise, Aster and Lauren each relate to popular ideologies and narratives about survival. Focusing on critical examinations of heteronormative and neuronormative attitudes towards survival, I argue that institutionalised, "big picture" narratives of survival repress alternative methods of surviving. Butler, Duyvis and Solomon use Black, queer, neurodivergent perspectives to highlight the ableist and classist notions of worth and necessity which underpin popular survival narratives. The work of Fiona A. Kumari Campbell and David Gillborn, among others, in DisCrit provide the basis from which I argue that author's representations of exclusionary ideologies of survival all share the same colonial, ableist roots. To subvert and challenge these ideologies, authors create knowledge perspectives which draw on protagonists' Black, neurodivergent experiences. I use Patricia Hill Collins's work on a Black feminist episteme alongside Yergeau's writing on autistic neurological queerness to foreground moments where protagonists' perspectives subvert the heteronormative, neuronormative, colonial logic of dominant apocalyptic discourses. From these subversions, supposedly 'well-oiled' institutions are revealed to be fragile, easily undermined and destabilised.[50] It is by exploiting this fragility that multiply marginalised people might claim authority and agency to survive apocalypse on their own terms.

In Chapter Two, I argue that to generate new ways of working through and with apocalypse, characters must be able to embody and move through environments authentically. Butler, Duyvis and Solomon locate their apocalypses in different temporalities, meaning multiply marginalised characters orientate towards apocalypse in unique ways. Despite their differences, my authors draw on a similar set of themes, namely binary spaces of inside and outside, here and there. Using Edward S. Casey's work on edges in landscape and space combined with Yergeau's work on autistic demi-ness, I argue these binaries uphold established structures of socio-political power. In all three texts, the protagonists think and move through their respective environments in ways that disrupt these binaries, embracing the unfixity, instability and changeable nature of the apocalypse as opportunity instead of barrier. Importantly, I theorise the apocalypse as a series of events as opposed to a singular event and argue that authors deny the revelatory function of apocalyptic endings to open up alternative possible futurities, as De Cristofaro argues of the twenty-first century post-apocalyptic novel. Drawing on the parallels between De Cristofaro's work and Yergeau's exploration of

[50] Collins, p.282.

neuroqueer demi-ness combined with Black environmental thought, I argue that the apocalypse constitutes a neuroqueer space which is colonised by, not constituted by, the presence of colonial and neo-colonial powers. The colonisation of apocalyptic space is mirrored by the colonisation of narratives of apocalypse, including those narratives which compare autism to (mainstream imaginings of) apocalypse. Through arguing for apocalypse's neuroqueerness, I reclaim those narratives and offer up an alternative vision of apocalyptic space and time that can be radically used by autistic people as a source of empowerment.

Chapter Three moves from how authors locate apocalypse to how authors imagine their protagonists' futures. I examine the attitudes protagonists take towards their future and argue that authors avoid reproducing race, sexuality, gender and neurological norms by imagining futurities through the queer desire for something else (Muñoz). These futurities are boundless and ambiguous, transgressing traditional apocalyptic logic through remaining open to new identities and ways of existing in apocalyptic spaces. Whilst my chosen texts have vastly different endings, they share an emphasis on the need to embrace uncertainty in a context of possibility and all have the Earth as a point of personal and historical connection for their protagonists. Aster returns to Earth having escaped the Matilda, Denise leaves Earth on the Nassau with the hope of returning to Earth in the near future, and, whilst Lauren desires future generations to leave Earth, her Earthseed community is intimately tied to the land of their home. I draw on Ralph Savarese's neurocosmopolitanism, and Muñoz and Hall's work on queer futurity to argue that neuroqueer orientations towards the future succeed in breaking from deterministic narratives through nurturing relationships with the Earth that are more sustainable and inclusive.

Chapter 1: Survival Ideologies

In *Ghosts*, *Edge of Gone* and *Parable*, the 'big picture' is a perspective on survival which is proliferated and upheld by established institutions who believe themselves to be humanity's only hope of surviving the apocalypse.[51] Solomon and Butler both refer to a big picture in passing as part of their broader critique of hierarchies of knowledge and epistemic authority. For Duyvis, the big picture is a central theme, used to exemplify and critique the ways in which institutions prioritise collective survival over the needs and wellbeing of individuals. In the context of this thesis, I define institution as an organisation of people who advocate for and pursue an established ideology, goal or doctrine. These ideologies are the big pictures I and my chosen authors refer to: complex, but generalising, perspectives on how society, culture, the economy and the environment should be governed, if at all. Within institutions, rules, regulations and decisions are made according to the organisation's principles, as opposed to the diverse, unique needs of the individuals who rely on them. In my chosen texts, institutions of survival such as generation ships and corporate towns are portrayed as having rigid, inflexible rules which serve the organisation's big picture. These rules exclude and oppress those who would challenge the status quo. Thinking back to my introduction, my understanding of the big picture aligns with Gurr's observation that post-apocalyptic novels have a tendency to re-produce contemporary power structures and social hierarchies. Texts such as *The Road*, *Oryx and Crake* and, to a lesser extent, *Underdogs* conform to a big picture perspective of survival which centres white, male, cis-heterosexual and non-disabled experiences. Throughout this chapter, I refer to narratives which centre multiply privileged perspectives as big picture survival narratives, and argue that in order to imagine alternative, inclusive futurities, these big picture survival narratives and the institutions which uphold them need to be problematised and dismantled.

In researching Duyvis's portrayal of the big picture perspective, I have come to understand that the notion of a big picture is rooted in neuronormative logic, among other normative assumptions, and that critiquing the notion of a supposedly universal big picture is a neuroqueer project born from neurodiverse cultures. For those neurodivergent people for whom the tinniest detail can take up the entirety of our attention, the big picture is a rhetorical concept called upon by neuro-ableist parents, partners, educators and clinicians as a way of telling us that we do not fully understand or comprehend the world around us. As Yergeau argues in *Authoring Autism*, autistic people are frequently storied as partial and incomplete, and, as a consequence, our perspectives, emotions and lived experiences are

[51] Corinne Duyvis, *On the Edge of Gone* (New York: Amulet Books, 2016), p. 279; Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (New York: Akashic Books, 2017), p. 241.

similarly partial and incomplete. From a neuroqueer perspective, the big picture is a restrictive, oppressive tool which is used to deny marginalised identity groups agency and epistemic authority.

This chapter argues that big picture survival narratives, and the institutions which produce and maintain them, are repressive, privilege all forms of normativity, and uphold structures of power which would otherwise be destroyed by the apocalypse. I build on a cross-disciplinary perspective, including disability critical race studies and Jack Halberstam's work on queer failure to shine a light on how heteronormativity, neuronormativity and racism support and uphold each other in maintaining a narrative of necessary exclusion. These narratives are underpinned by colonial and imperial discourses of race, white supremacy and white epistemic authority (I define epistemic authority as a structure of knowledge which privileges white, cis-heteronormative, neurotypical ideas, cultural assumptions and knowledge validation processes). Linking these discourses to my primary texts, I argue all three authors portray big picture perspectives and narratives as essentialist, reductive and exclusionary. In *Edge of Gone*, the big picture is used to weave a narrative of scarcity which in turn necessitates that only skilled, and therefore valuable, passengers be allowed on board. In *Ghosts*, the big picture is used by the white, upper-class rulers of the Matilda to belittle and disregard the suffering of dark-skinned lowdeck passengers. In *Parable*, whilst Butler does not explicitly invoke a big picture, government-backed corporate institutions take advantage of environmental and social instability to exploit their workers just as the Nassau and the Matilda's governing bodies exploit their passengers under the guise of necessity and the survival of the human race.

Neuroqueering epistemic authority in my three primary texts highlights how authors use their neurodivergent, Black, female protagonists to disrupt, challenge and subvert the notions of epistemic authority and necessity. I use Yergeau's work on autistic socialities and Jane Lydon's *Imperial Emotions* to argue that big picture survival narratives repress alternative means and methods of surviving which have the potential to be more inclusive and cosmopolitan. Centring their multiply marginalised characters' perspectives, lived experiences and knowledge validation processes, Butler, Duyvis and Solomon each reveal these flaws in institutionalised big picture survival ideologies and reveal ways of striving towards inclusive, cosmopolitan methods of surviving.

Duyvis: Necessity and Neuronormativity

Duyvis's representation of institutionalised survival takes issue with popular contemporary attitudes towards resource scarcity, migration and the individual's contribution to society.[52] The plot of *Edge of*

[52] Corinne Duyvis, 'Interview with Corinne Duyvis about *Otherbound* and *On the Edge of Gone*,' interview by Ada Hoffman and Jessica Walton for *Disability in Kidlit,* <https://disabilityinkidlit.com/2016/03/24/interview-with-corinne-duyvis-about-otherbound-and-on-the-edge-of-gone/> (2016) [22 Jul 2022].

Gone revolves round the mission of Duyvis' protagonist, Denise, to find her lost sister and get her family a place on board a generation ship, named the Nassau. The novel takes place over the Nassau's last week on Earth, before departing and travelling to a new habitable planet. To build and maintain the ship and to ensure the smooth transition and establishment of a civilisation, the Nassau requires resources and people with certain skillsets and knowledge. Places on the Nassau are granted based on 'skills and luck.'[53] Early on in the novel, readers learn that the ship was purchased from the government by its Captain, Van Zand, in return for the resources his pre-apocalypse company owned. In need of professions such as teachers, cooks, doctors, the ship has been populated by the Captain, who 'spread the word in the right circles.'[54] Applicants were judged on their 'skills, age, health, number of dependents' and were permitted on with close family.[55] Throughout the novel, certain characters maintain that the Nassau is one of the best ships for inclusivity and diversity, and Duyvis' representation of the Nassau is that it is multicultural, diverse in ability, ethnicity, sexuality and faith. However, Duyvis is attentive to the classism and ableism that underpins a society where a person is assigned value based on their perceived usefulness and skill. Only people from the 'right circles,' implying a certain standard of education and social standing, were informed about the opportunity to apply, and the revelation that applicants were judged on age, health and dependents as well as skills betrays bias towards those who are considered to need less support and will therefore be less of a drain on the Nassau's limited resources. The Captain 'makes sure everyone's useful.'[56] A place on board the Nassau is earned by contributing to the success and survival of all. Hence, someone who is perceived as less able to contribute, less educated, less networked, or has complex medical needs is not perceived as someone worthy of a place.

Institutional classism and ableism disadvantages Denise and her mother. Denise is an autistic, Black mixed-race young woman who, because of her intersecting socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender and neurodivergences has faced systematic exclusion, prejudice and discrimination in educational and medical institutions. DisCrit explores these intersections through the central argument that racism and ableism 'rely upon each other' in the act of repressing Black and or dis/abled people.[57] Racism and ableism 'reinforce' each other and 'validate' each other.[58] Duyvis explores how these interlocking oppressions have affected Denise's school experiences and fight for an autism recognition through examining her ex-teacher's internalised prejudices about race, gender and

[53] Duyvis, p. 71.
[54] Duyvis, p. 73.
[55] Duyvis, p. 73.
[56] Duyvis, p. 66.
[57] Annamma, Connor & Ferri, p. 5. The forward slash represents how some Black people are labelled as disabled when they are not, whilst other disabled Black people's disabilities go unrecognised or unaccommodated.
[58] Annamma, Connor & Ferri, p. 6.

autism. Learning Denise is autistic, Els begins to profess her assumptions '[she] just thought [Denise was]…,' but does not finish, leaving Denise to assume Els was going to say 'mulish,' or 'antisocial,' or '*difficult*.'[59] Els later conveys another bigoted assumption that autistics girls fail to be diagnosed as early as autistic boys because they 'don't often run into trouble until a later age.'[60] In fact, Denise was non-verbal as a small child, was physically violent towards three of her teachers and had stims that were self-harmful, but, being a 'Black *girl* […] many psychologists were loath to even consider [a diagnosis of] autism' and so Denise went misdiagnosed as 'psychotic, as having oppositional defiant disorder, as intellectually disabled, and as just straight-up difficult' until the age of nine.[61] Having been multiply-disadvantaged by these institutions and denied the adjustments and support she needed to succeed in school, Denise was gatekept from the opportunity to prove her worth to Nassau because her class, race, neurodivergence and gender automatically excluded her from the "right circles". In attempting to prove her usefulness to Nassau, Denise must not only exhibit skill, but challenge and subvert the (lack of) value that has already been assigned to her.

The Nassau's exclusivity is further exacerbated by the heteronormative narrative of survival the Nassau is storied as fulfilling. Els explains to Denise that there is a 'big picture' that must be prioritised in all decisions made concerning the Nassau and that passengers must sacrifice their own interests in serving.[62] In this example, the big picture perspective functions as a vision of the future and assumes certain necessary actions must be taken for the good of humanity. Duyvis's version of the big picture primarily focuses on the future generations the ship is designed to support. Els argues that the 'generations that come after [them] […] need a chance,' and that this justifies and necessitates limiting the number of people who are allowed on the Nassau.[63] Lee Edelman is widely acknowledged as the author who first named this brand of child-orientated futurity heterofuturity. Building on Edelman, Jack Halberstam argues that heterofuturity is upheld by a 'heteronormative common sense' which equates success 'with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope' (for a future), whilst other 'subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common-sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, […] nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique.'[64] Els's argument for limiting the Nassau's current population in order to support future generations follows a heteronormative common sense, positioning survival as something achieved through future generations, as opposed to something achieved through helping those who are alive in the present. Whilst queer people on board the ship may indeed bring-up and nurture both their own children and

[59] Duyvis, p. 59. Original italics.
[60] Duyvis, p. 209.
[61] Duyvis, p. 210.
[62] Duyvis, p. 279.
[63] Duyvis, p. 279.
[64] J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham & London: Duke University, 2011), p. 89.

children in the community, this restrictive vision of survival assumes a reproductive narrative that many queer people, in particular transgender people, may not be able to or want to fulfil.

Iris, Denise's sister, is trans. Whilst she has skills with organising people, Duyvis portrays Iris as undesirable from the perspective of the Nassau's big picture. The ship's authorities 'want younger people on board' to (re)produce the future generations that the ship exists for.[65] Trans people can and do have children. However, for Iris, reproduction is either something she cannot or does not want for herself, telling Denise it is '[n]ot happening.'[66] Young people are primarily valued through the cis-heteronormative temporalities of straight relationships and (re)production. Productivity as a heteronormative mode of success is a running theme throughout *Edge of Gone*. A disaster occurs on the Nassau before it is able to leave in which several people are killed. In the aftermath, passengers begin competing with each other to win favour with Captain Van Zand and get family members on board to replace those who have died. The productivity wars, as called by the passengers, arise from the Nassau's policies of usefulness and necessity. By contributing to the shared purpose of the Nassau, passengers hope they will get their relatives moved up the waiting list, the irony being that the more the passengers contribute to the big picture, the more they solidify and strengthen the rules and regulations which barred them from bringing their relatives on board in the first place. Conducting themselves via the ethicacy of heteronormative success prevents the passengers from imagining alternative ways of surviving which would enable them to look after their families and secure the Nassau as a life-support vessel for all peoples' futures.

In addition to being cis-heteronormative, the Nassau's big picture survival narrative is also neuronormative. Neuronormativity describes a set of compulsory ways of being and thinking which are socially imposed in the same way that heteronormativity is socially imposed. It encompasses the assumptions that there is a "normal" style of neurocognitive functioning, and "normal" ways of communicating, reacting and behaving towards and around other people. Neuronormative cultures rely on the assumption that "normal" outwards behaviours must necessarily reflect a certain pattern of thought or set of ideas, and that those rhetorical gestures have intended meanings which are directed towards communication with another person. Denise is unaware of the productivity wars even though she has the same goal of securing a place on the Nassau for her family. Her lack of knowledge is best understood through analysing the productivity wars as culturally constructed. The productivity wars refer to the socio-political climate of the Nassau, created by many of the passengers behaving in the same way and competing via the same heteronormative modes of conduct. Of neuronormative rhetoric, Yergeau observes that 'symbols must be shared; meaning must

[65] Duyvis, p. 248.
[66] Duyvis, p. 248.

proliferate.'[67] Without the sharing of symbols and the proliferation of meaning, constructs of "normal" would not hold the social, political and cultural significance attributed to them. The Nassau's big picture survival narrative, and the cultures that emerge from it, embody a conglomeration of prescribed symbols with prescribed meanings through which passengers are expected to envisage their heterofuturity and mould their heteronormative present. Being autistic and already socially and politically excluded from the Nassau, Denise does not share the symbolism or meaning by which to value the productivity wars, and, being undervalued by the Nassau's policies of usefulness, the culture of competition is not one in which Denise can succeed.[68]

For the big picture survival narrative to hold its integrity, the Nassau's governing bodies must justify the close management of resources and population. Upon entering the Nassau for the first time, Denise and her mother are told they can stay for two days. A condition of their brief stay, as stipulated by Van Zand, is that after departing they 'don't tell *anyone* there's a ship here.'[69] Els, Denise's ex-schoolteacher and agricultural specialist for the Nassau, explains to Denise that the ship has to feed passengers 'for generations to come,' which requires a 'fully self-sustaining farming system.'[70] As this could take years, it is necessary to limit Nassau's population. Conceptually, necessity evokes the rhetoricity of extremity, compulsivity and definitiveness. If something is necessary, is unequivocally needed and indispensable; and, if an event or happening is necessary, it is unavoidable and can be enforced through certain courses of action or inaction. In this example, limiting the Nassau's population requires a total secrecy amongst passengers about the existence of the Nassau, so that people from outside won't come to the ship and demand a place on it. I argue framing the people outside as a threat to the Nassau's resources stories them as an Other. Duyvis has described her intention for the Nassau's exclusionary practices to be read as a commentary on how 'the illusion of scarcity and competition' is used to justify 'cuts to welfare and tightened immigration policies,' and fuels things like 'the kneejerk "what about me?" response of privileged people when marginalized people ask for equal treatment.'[71] Othering the people outside dehumanises them and also creates a convenient narrative for punishing those who do not follow the Nassau's rules. Duyvis writes that a passenger had been 'kicked off' the Nassau for sharing its location and another person was forced to leave for hoarding food from storage and the diner, symbolically identifying dissenting passengers with the threat of the outside.[72] Passengers may have been granted a place on the Nassau through

[67] Yergeau, p. 52.
[68] Denise takes direct action outside of the Nassau's policies instead, which I explore in Chapter Two.
[69] Duyvis, p. 26.
[70] Duyvis, p. 50.
[71] Corinne Duyvis, 'Interview…'.
[72] Duyvis, p. 115.

their indispensable skills or knowledge, but they must keep their place by believing in the threat of the Other and conducting themselves in accordance with the laws which keep the threat at bay.

Navigating an environment which demands conformity pressures Denise to repress her personality and identity and perform neuronormativity to persuade the passengers that she is, in fact, useful and valuable. Autistic people call this performance of neuronormativity masking. Masking is widely considered to be damaging to an autistic individual's sense of identity and self-worth. It involves suppressing deviant parts of one's personality or communication style and projecting a neurotypical façade that neurotypical people may find more familiar and palatable. An individual may mask to avoid discrimination, or gain favour with neurotypical peers, employers or authority figures. Having learned that people are granted a place on board if they prove themselves useful, Denise searches for a job. When approaching people to ask for work, she smiles, keeps her hands still and makes eye contact 'for half a second at a time.'[73] Repressing her natural ways of communicating is exhausting and makes Denise feel 'nothing like [herself].'[74] However, she is prepared to push herself, because she is willing to '[d]o what's necessary' to survive.[75] I read Denise's internalisation of the Nassau's rules and culture as internalised ableism. Campbell defines internalised ableism as the 'complicit' reproduction of compulsory ableness.[76] In liberal societies, Campbell argues that efforts by non-disabled members of society to engage disabled people in daily life involves 'assimilating people with disabilities into normative society.'[77] Faced with this culture, disabled individuals must emulate the norm, distance themselves from other disabled people and 'assume' a more socially acceptable identity.[78] In Duyvis' imagining of the generation ship survival narrative, assimilation is the only way Denise can hope to prove herself worthy of a place on the Nassau.

Whether or not a passenger conforms or adequately assimilates into the Nassau's rigid socio-political structure dictates whether the passenger is viewed as deserving of a chance to survive. Denise is offered a place on the Nassau after she saves a group of people from a tsunami that is sweeping through Amsterdam. Van Zand offers Denise a place based on the fact that she 'saved lives' and, being sixteen, 'deserves a chance.'[79] Denise's mother, however, has 'proved [she] can't be trusted.'[80] Duyvis

[73] Duyvis, p. 68.
[74] Duyvis, p. 68.
[75] Duyvis, p. 85.
[76] Fiona A. Kumari Campbell, 'Exploring internalised ableism using Critical Race Theory,' in *Disability & Society*, 23:2 (2008), p. 159;
Internalised ableism is a phrase borrowed from critical race theory, internalised racism. The parallels between internalised ableism and internalised racism Campbell draws, along with the use of Othering to characterise the Nassau's policies, highlights how closely intertwined ableism, neuro-ableism and racism are in popular discourses of survival.
[77] Campbell, p. 152.
[78] Campbell, p. 157.
[79] Duyvis, p. 144.
[80] Duyvis, p. 144.

heavily implies that Van Zand does not trust Denise's mother because of her history with drug addiction, something Van Zand has been informed about by another passenger who has a history with her. Duyvis subtly implies a culture of surveillance that exists alongside the Othering of people from outside the Nassau and encourages passengers to inform on each other when they suspect any sign of subversion. Denise only gets a place on the ship because of her actions – actions which Duyvis frames as selfless. A group of young people from the Nassau were scavenging in the nearby airport when Denise first learned of the tsunami. Sanne, one of the group, tells Van Zand that Denise could have gone straight to the ship, but 'came back' for the group instead.[81] Denise's actions saved lives, but Duyvis' framing of them suggests it is the selfless and caring behavioural traits represented by these actions – and towards valued members of the Nassau's community – which persuade Van Zand to give Denise a place.

Denise securing a place on board the Nassau is treated as a reward for good behaviour. Van Zand's system of reward and punishment, the same system which moulds a monoculture, upholds the productivity wars and encourages surveillance, strikes a chord with conversion therapies used on autistic children, such as ABA (applied behavioural analysis). Yergeau argues that in clinical practices the autistic subject is storied as one whose actions are 'in need of disciplining and normalization.'[82] Clinical interventions such as ABA attempt to mould the subject's behaviour so that they perform vocalisations and body language conforming with neurotypical systems of communication and self-expression. Clinicians will use several techniques to monitor, encourage and/or punish the behaviour of autistic children, ranging from withholding toys and food to administering electric shocks. Surveillance, punishment and reward are encouraged at home and in school as well, so that every environment the child finds themselves in demands they repress their autistic beingness and perform neuronormativity. Through this lens, Van Zand's rewarding Denise with a place on the Nassau and punishing Denise's mother by forcing her to leave the ship is symptomatic of an institution which is run on the same kinds of surveillance, punishment and reward used by autism conversion therapies. The troubling connotations of these similarities is that, in popular narratives of survival where resources are perceived to be limited, it is acceptable for an institution to adopt means of social and political control that explicitly function to make everyone think and act within the same system of symbolism and meaning, rewarding those who are better accommodated by such a system and punishing those who fail to emulate the so-called proper values.

[81] Duyvis, p. 143.
[82] Yergeau, p. 26.

Solomon: Colonial Legacies

In *Ghosts*, a similar interpretation of what is deemed necessary to survive is present in Solomon's rendering of the Matilda, a generation ship carrying the last of humanity through the void of space to a mythical Promised Land. Solomon models the generation ship on America antebellum slave plantations. It is governed by the Sovereignty, a religious institution made up of white upperdeck men, who use the intersecting power dynamics of racism, ableism and sexism to justify the enslavement and repression of Black, intersex and gender non-conforming lowdeck peoples. Survival is interpreted through a teleological, Christian belief system which stories Matilda's 'purpose' to follow 'God's path' through the void of space and reach said Promised Land.[83] The Sovereignty and Sovereignty's guards use Matilda's purpose to enforce "necessary," socially constructed, hetero- and neuronormative moral codes of etiquette, behaviour, relationships and socio-political hierarchies. To break the rules which keep these etiquettes in place is to sin against the Matilda, the Sovereignty, the Sovereign and God. To sin is to widen the 'great gulf' between the Matilda and her destination.[84] Hence, Solomon positions the end goal of survival as dependent on the repression of multiply marginalised people.

Like Duyvis, Solomon uses a big picture narrative of survival, which fae locate in colonial and imperial discourses of white epistemic authority, non-white immorality and "racial betterment". Curfews, rationed food and perpetual cold created by enforced blackouts are just some of the indignities lowdeck peoples are made to suffer. Distribution of resources, knowledge and trading between decks is heavily policed, gatekeeping lowdeck peoples from accessing the skills and resources to help them survive, leading to outbreaks of illness, disease and avoidable disablement and death. Lieutenant is a member of the Sovereignty and becomes Sovereign part way through the novel. He is responsible for governing the lowdeck nations and functions as an antagonist. When Aster is given an opportunity to confront Lieutenant about why the cold is necessary, Lieutenant claims that Aster cannot understand the reasons for the cold because she cannot perceive 'the big picture, only the petty, small, meaningless pleasures and pains of [her] tiny [life].'[85] Lieutenant uses ableist rhetoric to uphold racist beliefs of white intellectual superiority, reflecting real historical and contemporary narratives in which medical models of disability are used 'as a means of shifting the focus away from [institutionalised racism] and onto a supposed individual deficit within the Black [person].'[86] From these beliefs, Lieutenant claims epistemic authority over Aster, wielding the big picture as a divine truth about human ontology, only perceptible by those who are morally pure and fully human. Aster and her "kind" are denied this wisdom, because within the socio-political structures of the Nassau,

[83] Solomon, p. 241.
[84] Solomon, p. 239.
[85] Solomon, p. 241.
[86] Gillborn, p. 281.

they are the subjects upon which this wisdom is exercised. They are 'animals' and that 'if it weren't for [the Sovereignty] bending them into some kind of shape, they'd live in chaos and sin.'[87]

Over the last century, the colonial project of civilising the racialised Other has seeped into clinical discourses of autism. These discourses are 'haunted by broader narratives of so-called racial betterment, as well as narratives concerned with eradicating intellectual and psychiatric disability,' casting autists as sites of intervention, as passive subjects who must be worked upon as opposed to worked with.[88] Within this framework the possibility of autistic agency is denied along with the ability to 'exercis[e] free will' or 'access[…] self-knowledge and knowledge of human others.'[89] Aster's claims to the suffering of lowdeck peoples cannot hold meaning under Lieutenant's big picture ideology, because as a Black autist in a racist, ableist institution, she is perceived as incapable of obtaining or perceiving knowledge of anything more complex than base emotions or sensations. Storied as unable to obtain or examine complex ideas, Aster's intricate socio-political relationships to Matilda, and to the power structures she is forced to navigate, are denied. Abstract concepts such as justice or futurity, concepts which, as I will explore in Chapter Two, are deeply important to how Tarland cultures locate themselves within Matilda's history, are supposedly automatically beyond her reach. Therefore, any argument Aster makes on behalf of the lowdeck nations is easily dismissed as meaningless utterance.

The institutionalised acceptance of non-white intellectual inferiority, in *Ghosts*, creates environments in which dark-skinned people find themselves constantly tested against white racist, sentimental social and morals orders. Whilst working in the field decks, Aster is approached by a white, middle-class woman, Samantha, who laments that she has 'lost her way' and petitions Aster to 'escort […]' her out of the field deck.[90] Samantha embodies the sentimental white woman of nineteenth century colonial cultural writing about race and the role of the domestic. In *Imperial Emotions*, Jane Lydon explores how the politicisation of 'compassionate emotions' and white, middle-class culture of sentimentality was used to structure imperial discourses.[91] She argues these discourses established binary ideas about human difference which 'acted to exclude non-white peoples from full humanity.'[92] Emotion and reason constituted one of these contrasts under which 'so-called savage people were less in control of their emotions and therefore lacked capacity for civility,' civility being encapsulated by the white, middle-class woman and her private, domestic home.[93] The underlying purpose of

[87] Solomon, p. 101.
[88] Yergeau, p. 28.
[89] Yergeau, p. 8.
[90] Solomon, p. 113.
[91] Lydon, p. 2.
[92] Lydon, p. 9.
[93] Lydon, p. 9.

Samantha's request is to test whether Aster is able to express sympathetic emotion towards Samantha and her plight, sympathy being deemed a 'natural and virtuous' emotion in imperial discourses of the traditional (white, feminine) home and domesticity.[94] Samantha's test has gendered, racialised and neuronormative aspects that Aster either refuses to perform or fails to embody. She ignores Samantha's questions and then verbally clarifies that by ignoring Samantha she 'wished to convey [she] had no desire to speak with [her].'[95] Instead of performing compassion, Aster thinks she does not 'have time for the ship's Samanthas – not yesterday, not today, and very likely not tomorrow.'[96]

Aster's refusal and failure to react in the heteronormative, neuronormative, racially coded way desired by Samantha neuroqueerly disrupts the social power dynamics between the two characters. When Aster goes to leave the field deck she is once again confronted by Samantha and a guard. Samantha claims that Aster must apologise, arguing that Matilda's 'social order depends on […] ethical order, and […] ethical order depends on acknowledging and rectifying moral wrongs… [for] the benefit of the society in which we all live.'[97] Yergeau maintains that autists neurologically queer through their failure to 'acknowledge social order's very existence' and therefore pose 'a kind of neuroqueer threat to normalcy, to society's very essence.'[98] Aster's in/actions resist, subvert and queer the ableist compulsory sociality at work in upperdeck perceptions of order, embodying an alternative set of social relations based on neuroqueer, Black ways of being. She threatens to destabilise the foundations upon which Sovereignty justifies and upholds the Matilda's restrictive big picture survival narrative. Drawing upon seemingly universally shared morals and ethics and supported by colonial stereotypes of the sentimental white woman, Samantha would 'de-queer[…]' Aster in the same way that colonial protector practices looked to "civilise" the "savage," or clinical autism conversion practices look to "normalise" the autist's outward behaviour.[99] As in *Edge of Gone*, in which the Nassau's policies and dominant culture encourage Denise to repress her personal interests in favour of being perceived as productive and valuable, Samantha attempts to repress Aster's neuroqueerness and assimilate Aster into her own culture of sentimentality and domesticity. The social order does not serve Aster; it did not serve her yesterday, nor will is serve her today or tomorrow.

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[94] Lydon, p. 10.

[95] Solomon, p. 114.
Further exemplifying how racism and ableism support each other, Samantha first attributes Aster's lack of response as a sign she is deaf or dumb, assuming physical or cognitive disability where racist expectations of interaction are not met.

[96] Solomon, p. 115.

[97] Solomon, p. 116.

[98] Yergeau, p. 27.

[99] Yergeau, p. 27.
Yergeau's use of 'compulsory sociality' is taken from Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse & New York: Syracuse University, 2014), p. 114.

Yergeau argues that asociality arises as one aspect of autistic neuroqueer failure. Yergeau takes their definition of neuroqueer failure from Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, in which failure 'stand[s] in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon "trying and trying again."'[100] Applied to neurological queerness, neuroqueer failure subverts the negative portrayal of autistics who are unable to comply with neuronormative social customs: who fail to recognise facial expressions, who fail to cope with types of sensory stimulation, or who fail to live independently. In failing to perform neuronormativity, autistic beingness 'perverts notions of intent, affect, meaning, and socially appropriate response.'[101] Instead of failure being something to improve from, it is something to embrace. In the wider context of the novel, embrace of failure, especially in the context of a sovereign ideology that bars Black lowdeck peoples from ever being considered successful, propels the plot towards the climactic mutiny and Aster's escape from Matilda. Within these separate confrontations, neuroqueer failure disrupts behavioural codes and rhetorics of Sovereignty's survival narrative.

The first time Aster meets Lieutenant, he reprimands her for being out of her cabin during curfew. Lieutenant asks Aster if she knows the meaning of his name. Aster knows the etymology of the word, however, she understands that Lieutenant is not looking for an etymological definition. She observes that when people ask if you know something, they '[don't] want you to know it. They [want] to be able to explain it themselves, to prove themselves bearers of esoteric knowledge.'[102] Lieutenant defines his name as meaning 'second only to God Himself.'[103] It is a name that has been passed through the generations of his family to remind them of their duty to God. This being so, Lieutenant's duty in the context of Aster breaking curfew is to 'enforce Matilda's laws' by reprimanding her.[104] Lieutenant's claim to authority exemplifies what Jay Dolmage calls the 'circulation of power through communication.'[105] Both Dolmage and Yergeau assert that discourses on rhetoricity, both who is storied as possessing it and popular perceptions about what gestures are rhetorical, work to bestow authority on those who are multiply privileged and who use rhetorics of persuasion, diplomacy and sociality in "normative" ways. Normative discourses of rhetoricity associate a person's "proper application" of rhetoric with their humanity, hence those who are multiply marginalised and use deviant rhetoric, or use rhetoric deviantly, are excluded from full humanity (read: are rendered non-human).[106] Lieutenant's rhetoric therefore both creates and constitutes a source of constructed

[100] Halberstam, p. 3.
[101] Yergeau, 144.
[102] Solomon, p. 199.
[103] Solomon, p. 199.
[104] Solomon, p. 199.
[105] Dolmage, p. 3.
[106] Yergeau, pp. 49-50.

epistemic authority and socio-political power, his ability to command rhetoric being indicative of the power he makes a claim to.

Solomon uses Aster's definition of 'lieutenant' to subvert Lieutenant's epistemic authority. Aster fails to understand Lieutenant's intended meaning in positioning himself as God's authority over her and fails to perform understanding, either real or pretended. Instead, Solomon positions Aster as the primary narrative site of epistemic authority, critiquing Lieutenant's definition as taking 'liberties' in comparison to her own etymological definition.[107] Whilst Lieutenant would ascribe Aster's failure to understand as a symptom of intellectual inferiority, Solomon centres an alternative system of meaning-making and subverts the neurotypical gaze to make Lieutenant's claims the subject of study. Solomon's method of defining the word's etymology breaks the name apart into two halves; '*lieu* meant *place*' and '*tenant* meant *holds*, as in, a *tenant of Crow Wing*,' so together Lieutenant meant '*placeholder*.'[108] Aster's definition of the name ascribes to it no more meaning than its etymology, symbolically deconstructing the name, the roles and responsibilities ascribed to that name and so the power Lieutenant draws from the name. Seeing things in halves or parts is part of Aster's system of symbolism and meaning making. Solomon writes that '[w]holes were foreign to [Aster]. Halves made more sense. A split nucleus could end Matilda's tiny universe.'[109] Aster's episteme appeals to a destructive mode of being, something I explore more in Chapter Three. Solomon deconstructs Lieutenant's name, and therefore Lieutenant himself, using the same process of bifurcation as fae use to imagine Matilda's destruction, making Aster's neuroqueer episteme the gateway through which Solomon rejects traditional, teleological, progressive narratives of survival and futurity.

Whilst Aster's neurological queerness is a powerful force of dissent, it makes navigating interlocking racism and sexism as a Black, autistic woman especially difficult and dangerous. Samantha leaves Aster alone with the guard she informs about Aster's deviance, and he confronts her. Aster struggles to process the guard's comments and questions. She cannot 'make sense of the sounds issuing' from the guard's mouth, an experience Solomon calls 'The Silence,' but that contemporary medical discourses would pathologically term selective hearing.[110] Using faer own terms for describing autistic experiences allows Solomon greater accuracy and authenticity in representing Aster's neurodivergences, a technique Butler also uses in *Parable* to explore the lived experience of hyperempathy, or sharing. The Silence is a 'temporary deafness,' brought on by intense stress.[111] Aster wants to tell the guard to 'Please slow down,' but 'her tongue [will] not cooperate.'[112] Eventually, she

[107] Solomon, p. 199.
[108] Solomon, p. 199.
[109] Solomon, p. 213.
[110] Solomon, p. 118.
[111] Solomon, p. 118.
[112] Solomon, p. 118.

hears a question she understands, 'Are you listening,' and replies 'no,' because she physically has not been able to.[113] The guard calls her a cow and Aster repeats the insult back, because mimicry 'reminded her how to use words.'[114] Whilst Aster is perfectly aware of the danger she is in and that there are ways of behaving that would likely pacify the guard, her autistic mode of communication prevents her from performing the humbled slave the guard wants her to be.

Both Duyvis and Solomon share a perspective that popular and/or traditional narratives of survival, when used to implement institutionalised survival, fail to be inclusive and result in the violent repression of multiply marginalised characters. Both Denise and Aster embody alternative ways of being in the world that are unacknowledged and actively repressed. Hence, the alternative survival narratives that might be imagined through Black, autistic perspectives cannot be realised whilst the Nassau and Matilda continue to exist as they do. It is with this need for alternative, Black, queerly subversive and neurologically deviant perspectives that I now turn to Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

Butler: A Black Feminist, Neuroqueer approach to Survival

Lauren, Butler's protagonist, has hyperempathy syndrome, a neurodivergence which enables her to feel the physical experiences of other people. She has been told all her life, mostly by her ableist father, that her "condition" is something to hide from others. At the beginning of *Parable* Butler stories Lauren as 'drug damaged,' referring to the cause of Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome, her mother's drug abuse.[115] Lauren's father, who happens to be a preacher and a dean, finds 'the whole business shameful,' an opinion that Butler portrays as having dictated how Lauren relates to her condition as something to hide.[116] Read through Campbell's work on internalised ableism, Lauren's father's shame and Lauren's own deficit-based language resonates with Duyvis's portrayal of internalised ableism. Butler configures hyperempathy as a weakness and vulnerability, especially when paired with Lauren being a Black woman. Throughout the novel, Lauren masks her condition when in dangerous environments and disguises herself as a man in order for the group she travels with on the road to appear stronger. A neuroqueer reading may conclude that Butler fails to imagine ways in which Lauren can survive whilst feeling free to express her neurodivergence and womanhood through authentic behaviour, communication and gender presentation. Instead, I am proposing that a combination of Black feminist thought and neuroqueer theory highlights more complex tensions between survival, environment and the "doing" of neuroqueerness.

[113] Solomon, p. 119.
[114] Solomon, p. 119.
[115] Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York & Boston: Grand Central, 1993), p. 12.
[116] Butler, p. 12.

Compared with Duyvis's representation of masking, both authors share a concern for how other people who know of Denise's or Lauren's neurodivergences exploit or might exploit that neurodivergence as a weakness. Denise's mother discloses Denise's autism recognition and portrays Denise as dependent on others looking after her in a bid to get herself a place on the Nassau. Other characters' biases regarding what autism's so-called weaknesses should constitute have a different, but no less negative, effect on how they treat Denise: the Captain's brother refuses to believe Denise's autism recognition due to his preconceived belief that autistics are incapable of motivation or agency and is consequently unwilling to make adjustments for her. Similarly, Butler explains in Lauren's coming-out conversation with Harry and Zahra that Lauren had to 'pretend to be normal' growing up.[117] Lauren is acutely aware of how other people would be able to manipulate her if they had knowledge of her having hyperempathy syndrome. Her younger brother, Keith, used to 'pretend to be hurt' to 'trick [Lauren] into sharing' his pretend pain, once using red ink to fake bleeding which made Lauren actually bleed.[118] As Butler explores in the latter half of the novel, the ability to control when someone experiences pain, the ability to disable someone by putting them in the vicinity of an injured person or animal, is a power dynamic easily exploitable by those who are willing to see other people as no more than objectified Others.

Lauren is both a sharer and a Black woman in a racially divided country. In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2014), Patricia Hill Collins writes that survival is an 'all-consuming activity' for Black women in America, historically and in the present.[119] Collins argues that Black women's survival in America has led to cultivation of a Black feminist epistemology: 'the historical conditions of Black women's work […] fostered a series of experiences that when shared and passed on became a collective wisdom of a Black women's standpoint.'[120] Empathy plays an important role in collating this wisdom, building bridges between individuals and identity groups who may not navigate structures of power in the same way, but can use shared experiences as gateways to solidarity.[121] Lauren's hyperempathy syndrome, or sharing, as she comes to call it, can and should be read as a metaphysical embodiment of the kind of epistemic process Collins describes. Lauren draws wisdom from her experiences of sharing others' pain and pleasure, collating an empathetic knowledge of those around her. In the second chapter of the novel, Lauren and other members of her neighbourhood ride their bikes through Robledo to the local Baptist chapel to be baptised. The street poor and homeless people they pass on their way to the church 'have

[117] Butler, p. 194.
[118] Butler, p. 11.
[119] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 4.
[120] Collins, p. 256.
[121] Collins, p. 277.

things wrong with them.'[122] They have 'cut off each other's ears, arms, legs,' carry 'untreated diseases and festering wounds.'[123] They have no money, no fresh water, not enough food and Lauren cannot help 'collecting' some of the people's 'general misery.'[124] Although Lauren does not live in the outside world, she feels, bodily and mentally, what it is like to survive on nothing. This experience gives Lauren a wisdom that other people in her neighbourhood do not have and is integral to how she thinks long-term about the neighbourhood's future and the necessity to prepare in a context of environmental and economic uncertainty.

Butler's decision to have Lauren mask her neurodivergence is, therefore, a decision that stems from a Black feminist perspective on African American women's survival. Solomon makes an almost identical argument about survival and masking in *Ghosts*; Aster 'learned to hide [her] weaknesses well,' and this is 'the secret of surviving.'[125] Whilst Solomon and Butler value and celebrate their protagonists' neurodivergences, they both differentiate between personal embrace of oneself and the need to carefully construct an outward personality with which to navigate complex power structures in which Black people in particular are disadvantaged. Collins writes that Black women require a wisdom which is characterised by 'knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions' because their 'objectification as the Other denies [them] the protections that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer.'[126] Applied to *Ghosts*, *Parable*, and *Edge of Gone*, as Black women, Aster, Lauren and Denise require wisdom when interacting with individuals and institutions who would harm them. This is not to say that it is the responsibility of multiply marginalised individuals to appease, pander to, or deflect racism, sexism, or ableism, but to highlight that those intersecting oppressions are life-threatening. For these characters, survival did not begin with a global apocalypse: as Collins states, it is a legacy of Black women's lives and ancestry.[127]

Butler's portrayal of surviving as a sharer disrupts binaries of savagery and civility commonly used in mainstream Western apocalyptic and post-/apocalyptic fiction to differentiate between pre-apocalypse and post-/apocalypse. From McCarthy's *The Road*, to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, to the recent apocalypse satire film *Don't Look Up* (2021) in which Earth is destroyed by comet, the audience is presented with contrasting exhibits of 'conscience, empathy, and mutual aid' pre-apocalypse, and a decline to 'barbaric intimidation and nonrational ritualistic violence' in the post-/apocalypse.[128] As

[122] Butler, p. 10.
[123] Butler, pp. 10-11.
[124] Butler, p. 11.
[125] Solomon, p. 291.
[126] Collins, p. 257.
[127] A more in-depth analysis of how authors locate apocalypse and how protagonists navigate apocalyptic landscapes will follow in Chapter Two.
[128] Hicks, p. 83; Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Borzoi Book, 2006); Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); 'Don't Look Up', dir. by Adam McKay (Netflix, 2021).

explored in my analysis of *Ghosts*, these themes have racialised and gender connotations descended from colonial and imperial discourses that insist on binary distinctions between emotion and reason, savagery and civility. Within these frameworks, violence indicates an absence of empathy and humanity, yet hyperempathy is the reason Lauren is, on occasion, pushed to choose violence. Halfway through the novel, Lauren's neighbourhood is destroyed and she and two others from the neighbourhood find themselves surviving outside. They decide to travel north, and a few nights into their journey, they are attacked by two men. Harry kills a man in self-defence and Lauren wounds another. Being a sharer means that Lauren feels the blow she deals to her attacker's head on her own and she passes out. When she comes to and realises that the man she injured is still alive, she kills him to protect herself from feeling his pain. Where, in *Ghosts*, the ability to perform empathy is used by Samantha to test and judge Aster's humanity, Butler's portrayal of hyperempathy is that it is a bodily experience which influences a person's actions. Through a neuroqueer lens, the separation of emotion and act disrupts neuronormative constructs of rhetoric which privilege 'linear or developmental trajectories,' and a 'social symbolic.'[129] Contrary to popular apocalyptic symbolism, Butler does not cast Lauren as a savage for taking away a man's life, instead emphasising that the man posed a 'special' threat to Lauren as someone who is disabled by other's pain.[130]

Butler uses Harry's reactions to Lauren's approach to survival and her identity as a sharer to further critique popular apocalyptic imagery. Harry judges Lauren in a similar way to how Samantha judges Aster, appealing to a social order that categorises different behaviours as human and unhuman. Having grown up in the relative safety of the neighbourhood, Harry's instinct is to trust and pity strangers. He demands of Lauren and Zahra, who both disagree with him, what strangers would need to do to 'prove themselves,' insisting that survival need not necessitate the three of them turning 'into animals.'[131] In response to finding out Lauren is a sharer, Harry demands to know whether Lauren would have killed the man 'to escape the pain' if he had only broken an arm, and what Lauren would do if he, Harry, was badly hurt, reflecting imperial discourses which associate savagery with being unable to control ones emotions.[132] Ironically, Harry attributes a lack of empathy to Lauren's actions, viewing hyperempathy syndrome as a disorder that might prevent Lauren from having "real" empathy for others who are hurt. He calls Lauren a 'lie,' framing her need to 'pretend to be normal' as reflective of a deceitful, untrustworthy personality, failing himself to empathise with Lauren's lived experiences as a neurodivergent, Black woman.[133] Through Harry's ignorance, Butler highlights the hypocrisy of

[129] Yergeau, p. 42.
[130] Butler, p. 191.
[131] Butler, pp. 181 & 182.
[132] Butler, p. 193.
[133] Butler, pp. 195 & 194.

popular survival narratives that hold the performance of empathy as a marker of civilised society whilst omitting the often painful, vulnerablising realities of sharing other peoples' lived experiences. Through a neurodivergent, Black feminist perspective, the binaries of savagery and civilisation are not a realistic framework for surviving as a Black, neurodivergent woman.

Earthseed, the belief system and the verses Butler weaves into the novel, constitutes Butler's alternative survival narrative, and is a testament to Butler's distinction between Lauren's need to mask her sharing and Lauren's acceptance of her sharing as a necessary source of wisdom. The verse that summarises Earthseed's belief system is:

> 'All that you touch
> You Change.
>
> All that you Change
> Changes you.
>
> The only lasting truth
> Is Change.
>
> God
> Is Change.'[134]

Lauren reaches these conclusions through analysing and observing the world around her, learning from 'other people, […] [her]self, everything [she] could read, hear [and] see.'[135] Sharing is an essential aspect of how Lauren gleans, processes and assigns meaning to these observations. Just as Denise and Aster assign meaning to rhetoric, information, objects and concepts through an autistic lens, privileging literal interpretations, direct instruction and action, and opportunity to become familiar with environments through touch and experimentation, Lauren assigns meanings to ideas, information, objects and concepts through their 'literal truth' or application to the real world in which real people live.[136] The world is full of people who are suffering, a suffering that Lauren cannot distance herself from, and, like sharing, the ideas of Earthseed are ones that Lauren cannot ignore. Her neurology, which is part of her beingness, means she must assign meaning and significance to those ideas, observations and experiences which demand her attention. Butler portrays Change as a 'common wisdom,' a 'part of life, of existence.'[137] As a Black woman, to ignore these observations of truths would be to dismiss a wisdom that could help her navigate the outside world. As Black woman

[134] Butler, p. 3.
[135] Butler, p. 217.
[136] Butler, p. 25.
[137] Butler, p. 26.

and sharer, the inevitability of change is just as impossible for Lauren to ignore as the pain and pleasure of her fellow human beings.

Lauren's Black, neurodivergent wisdom lays the foundations for critiquing attitudes to survival expressed in government legislation, corporate policies and Lauren's own neighbourhood. Early on in the novel, a new President of the United States is elected. In a bid to tackle America's economic instability, he promises to 'suspend '"overly restrictive" minimum wage, environment, and worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees,' legalising the means for corporations to abuse workers' human rights.[138] Butler's depiction of a government which would rather further jeopardise human rights, environmental stability and public safety instead of addressing these issues as interlocking causes and outcomes of economic stability is very similar to the big picture survival ideologies represented by the generation ships in *Edge of Gone* and *Ghosts*. In particular, Donner's use of inflation, high unemployment and homelessness levels as justification for the roll-back of worker's rights mirrors Captain Van Zand's use of the perceived scarcity of resources to enforce strict secrecy laws on the Nassau. Underlying Donner's rhetoric is a belief that such policies are necessary for the survival of America in its current political model, and that the American economy is more important than individual Americans. With these laws in place, large families will be deemed 'bad investments' to companies whose primary concern is financial profit.[139] A comparison with Duyvis's representation of exclusivity and desirability reveals the big picture narrative of survival treats human beings as resources with which to achieve a larger goal, even if that larger goal is the survival of those human beings.

Butler examines the impact of Donner's laissez-fare economic policies in the stories told by characters who work under them. Emery and Tori are sharers, like Lauren, and escape from indentured labour in a 'big agribusiness conglomerate.'[140] Employee's wages are paid in company script and are never enough to pay bills. 'According to new laws that might or might not exist' workers must pay off debt to an employer before being able to leave the company, enabling employers to force debt slaves into working longer hours for less pay.[141] They can be 'disciplined' if they fail to meet quota, traded and sold.[142] The socio-economic oppression Emery and Tori face is exacerbated by how sharers are perceived and treated in structures of worker exploitation. In Butler's future America, slave owners 'pay more for people who have [hyperempathy syndrome],' especially children, because of the ease with which a slave driver can physically and emotionally manipulate the individual sharer or group of

[138] Butler, p. 27.
[139] Butler, p. 27.
[140] Butler, p. 287.
[141] Butler, p. 288.
[142] Butler, p. 288.

sharers through their shared pain.[143] Compared with Duyvis's and Solomon's portrayals of desirability, morality and sociality, institutionalised racism and ableism interlock in dehumanising Black, neurodivergent people to different ends. Yet, the language of desirability underpinning all three authors' representations is rooted in colonial and imperial logics of necessary exploitation. As I will explore in Chapter Two, these government-backed institutions are presented to prospective employees as sanctuaries which can shelter individuals and families from the apocalyptic times. Contrary to these misrepresentations, and as exemplified through Emery and Tori's experiences, these institutions are only safe for those who are granted socio-political status and power.

Whilst the neighbourhood Lauren grows up in is independent from corporate institutions, it is reliant on the familiar symbol of the President as a source of hope. The adults of the community hope that President Donner will bring about a return to normality. Butler describes Donner as a 'human banister,' a wooden, brittle 'symbol of the past for [people] to hold on to as [they are] pushed into the future.'[144] The desire for normality gestures towards the significance of cis-heteronormativity and neuronormativity in maintaining the neighbourhood's cultural and structural integrity. The symbolic significance of a President functions to maintain the authority of established institutions in the same way that Solomon's Lieutenant maintains epistemic authority through the symbolism of his name. Just as Solomon uses Aster's Black, autistic episteme to invalidate Lieutenant's claims, so Butler uses Lauren's Black, neurodivergent wisdom to perceive Donner's lack of 'substance.'[145] Building on this, the comfort of being able to 'feel that […] the culture [the adults] grew up with is still here' mirrors how the Nassau reproduces pre-apocalypse structures of social, political and economic organisation in order to maintain established systems of governance and authority.[146] Through Lauren's Black, neurologically queer narrative lens, Butler unpicks the symbolism of the president, the normative gender roles and the reliance on established community structures and reveals the inherent instability therein. To survive the apocalypse as a multiply marginalised individual, Butler argues that alternative structures of dependency are required.

In the second half of the novel, Butler builds an Earthseed community around Lauren which is grounded in Black feminist notions of sharing and community-building. Through a neuroqueer reading, I interpret Lauren's sharing as analogous to the inter-personal sharing of experiences, events and trauma which provide the foundations for the new community. As a form of neurodivergence, sharing troubles the traditionally conceived singularity of the bodymind, in which one person experiences the sensations of their bodymind only. Yergeau argues that neuroqueer rhetorics

[143] Butler, p. 305.
[144] Butler, p. 56.
[145] Butler, p. 56.
[146] Butler, p. 56.

'reconfigure bodies and language by obliterating their boundedness,' which, I argue, includes the traditionally conceived physical and sensory boundaries of the individual bodymind.[147] Just as Lauren embodies her environment through both her own bodymind and the bodyminds of others, the Earthseed community is built through empathising across identities and experiences. A mixed-race family are 'natural allies' to an already mixed-race group; a Black man called Bankole, and Lauren both have African surnames adopted by their ancestors in the nineteen-sixties, which Butler describes as an 'instant bond' between them; an orphaned child named Justin chooses a character named Allie as his 'substitute mother' and in turn he becomes a substitute for Allie's baby, who was killed when just a few months old.[148] The journey north is punctuated by these moments of connection, story-telling and empathising between characters. I argue that, just as Lauren's inter-bodily sharing creates a Black, neurodivergent epistemology, so the groups' interconnectedness and interdependency nurtures a multi-racial, cross-neurotype episteme with Earthseed at its centre.

Butler's Black feminist and, I argue, neuroqueer method of survival transcends many of the limitations of institutionalised big picture survival narratives, the primary difference being that there is no prescribed narrative. The Nassau, the Matilda, the corporations and Lauren's childhood neighbourhood are all structurally designed to fulfil pre-existing, teleological narratives of survival, which, as I have argued, are universally upheld and maintained by multiply privileged people in the aim of preserving structures of inequality which keep them in power. Lauren's new community is guided by individual needs, points of inter-personal connection and shared experiences, as opposed to forcing survivors to conform to established social structures in which the needs of individuals are occluded by normative assumptions. The group's approach to surviving apocalyptic America is condensed from examining and responding to the collective knowledge and experience of the group. The group develop a shared moral and ethical compass which upholds their desire for a 'community where people look out for each other,' whilst also addressing practical concerns such as safety, access to water and distribution of resources.[149] Butler reflects that Lauren's new community are not a gang, they do not have an intrinsic need to 'dominate, rob and terrorize.'[150] Yet, to survive, the group may need to dominate, rob or kill. As argued early, Butler is attentive to the difference between an individual's personhood and their actions, distinguishing between the act and the intent of action. Collins argues that whilst organised groups are traditionally perceived as 'fixed, unchanging, and with clear-cut boundaries,' African American women as individuals and as a collective are fluid.[151] Butler's

[147] Yergeau, p. 84.
[148] Butler, p. 206; Butler, p. 230; Butler, p. 254.
[149] Butler, p. 223.
[150] Butler, p. 223.
[151] Collins, p. 246.

Earthseed community embodies Collins's Black feminist model of organisation. Having an approach to survival built on lived experience means it is flexible and can develop and evolve as that experience diversifies, something that it is not just beyond institutionalised big picture survival narratives, but completely subverts them. As I will argue in Chapter Two, the diversity of the group enables them to adapt to different environments in ways that are beyond the physical and imaginative limits of the neighbourhood.

Big picture perspectives and narratives of survival are inlaid with centuries of colonial, imperial, ableist, sexist and heteronormative discourses, within which multiply marginalised people are frequently treated as burdens and/or as in need of controlling and correcting. In dismantling the big picture perspectives of their respective institutions, Butler, Duyvis and Solomon centre Black, neurodivergent experiences of navigating and resisting these narratives. Using a combination of Black, queer and neuroqueer theoretical perspectives, I have shown how institutionalised big picture perspectives on survival emulate colonial discourses on race and dis/ability and clinical practices such as autism conversion therapy in attempting to justify exclusionary, "necessary" policies. Understanding that these claims rely on neuronormative rhetorics makes way for a neuroqueer dismantling of the assumptions, apocalyptic legacies and biases that underpin such perspectives. Looking forward to Chapter Two, exploring my authors' Black, neuroqueer epistemes provides the basis from which to argue that institutions cannot implement their big picture narratives of survival on an ideological level without also manipulating and restricting how a population can interact and embody their environments.

Chapter 2: Locating and Navigating Apocalypse

In *Authoring Autism*, Remi Yergeau argues that to 'be autistic is to live and lie in a between space,' in the 'crevices that neurotypicals can ignore,' but that 'often function as the entirety of what neuroqueer subjects perceive.'[152] I also understand apocalypse as a spatial and temporal in-between. Combining Yergeau's work with Edward S. Casey's study of edges in landscape, I argue that teleological narratives of apocalypse rely on clear, distinguishable spatio-temporal boundaries. These boundaries have the potential to both aid and restrict how characters move through different environments, especially considering which characters are permitted to dictate the physical and/or metaphorical edges of these landscapes and which characters' movements are then confined by those dictations. Building on my exploration of big picture perspectives and narratives of survival in Chapter One, I identify a co-dependent relationship between the orderly narrative edges of institutionalised big pictures and the ways in which apocalyptic environments are storied as antithetical to that order, as edgeless and chaotic. In mainstream narratives of apocalypse and post-apocalypse, a singular cataclysmic event typically marks the end of pre-apocalypse Earth. The apocalypse then plays out with survivors establishing new civilisations (or re-establishing past civilisations), so that a post-apocalyptic era is born. In these narratives, pre-apocalypse and post-apocalypse mark the spatio-temporal edges of what comes in between, establishing the apocalypse as a between space which characters must journey through and overcome in order to reach the "end." Endings are of particular interest to me. They imply finality, conclusions and therefore answers. In the context of the history of apocalyptic fiction, endings and revelations come hand in hand. In archetypal narratives, knowledge, truth and the meaning behind the journey are all discovered near or at the end of the character's trials. These truths, once established, are believed to have always been true, and so the promise of an ending is used to frame and structure all that has come before. As explored by Gurr, Hicks and De Cristofaro, this linear narrative relies heavily on colonial discourses which privilege a white, western patriarchal perspective of apocalypse. What is to come is assumed to be a mirror of what has been and current is, and so projects such as re/colonisation of land become the futures, or endings, many protagonists in apocalyptic fiction aspire towards. Yet, the authors in this thesis present multi-layered arguments against interpreting the apocalypse as a definitive event with definitive spatio-temporal edges. Instead, they portray Black, neuroqueer perspectives of apocalypse as subjective experiences of a landscape in which temporal and spatial edges are blurred, fluid and porous.

[152] Yergeau, p. 177.

Key to my definition of apocalypse is distinguishing between unstable, fluid, borderless apocalyptic landscapes and the borders and binaries institutions enforce onto these landscapes. Black environmentalism and Black studies perspectives on apocalypticism in modernity provides the basis from which to make this distinction, establishing apocalypse as a cyclical, repetitious culmination of socio-political and economic inequality. In each of my primary texts, institutions with power and influence maintain power through physically and narratively positioning apocalypse "over there" (spatially distant) or "back then" (temporally distant), reproducing oppressive legacies of modernity in the process. Butler's neighbourhood has a wall between them and the increasingly unstable outside world; Solomon's generation ship has travelled for three-hundred years away from Earth since Earth became uninhabitable; and Duyvis's generation ship creates a binary between the inside and outside spaces of the Nassau and apocalyptic Amsterdam. I argue that established institutions' efforts to keep apocalypse "out there" and "back then" represses apocalyptic potential for change. In Chapter One, I demonstrate how authors use their protagonists' multiply marginalised perspectives to argue for confronting and working through apocalypse as a method of survival. In this chapter, I develop this argument further, using a neuroqueer perspective to locate and navigate apocalypse in ways that allow for alternative methods of survival to thrive.

Alongside edges and environment, motion is another key concept I explore in this chapter. In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau explains that autistic people are often storied as lacking intention, having intentions being reliant on perceiving social queues, thereby denying autistic people the ability to act. Yergeau responds to this pathologizing representation by claiming autistic rhetoricity as a 'neurologically queer motioning' which subverts the perceived importance of intention and directedness in neuronormative socialities.[153] In each of my texts, characters find themselves in between spaces and temporalities in which acting with intention and directedness holds little or no symbolic significance: the road in *Parable*, the flooded city in *Edge of Gone*, and the void of space in *Ghosts*. Moving through these spaces, authors portray their characters rejecting prescribed ways of moving through their respective environments, and, in doing so, reject linear temporalities which underpin normative navigations of apocalyptic space and time. I understand authors' alternative portrayals of navigating apocalypse as a neuroqueer 'rejection of arrival' and a neuroqueer potentiality.[154] Protagonists work through and with apocalyptic environments by existing in and moving around the crevices which other characters do not perceive or ignore. Lauren, Aster and Denise are all portrayed as locating and take advantage of the flaws which exist in dominant, neurotypical, colonial constructs of apocalyptic space and time. They interact with apocalypse as a

[153] Yergeau, p. 18.
[154] Yergeau, p. 18.

spatially and temporally fluid landscape, transcending the binaries imposed on apocalypse, moving between inside and outside spaces, traversing boundaries, disrupting notions of linearity and pushing against structures of containment.

Butler: The Neuroqueer Apocalypse

At its foundations, I read Butler's apocalypse as drawing inspiration from Black environmentalist thought and Black studies' perspectives on modernity. Black environmental thought responds to and pushes against the assumption proliferated in popular Western media that 'black people do not care about or are indifferent to issues pertaining to the natural environment.'[155] As Chelsea M. Frazier argues in 'Troubling Ecology: Wangechi Mutu, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism,' a Black feminist perspective on environment offers 'alternative perspectives that often go overlooked in feminist and environmentalist circles.'[156] These perspectives are located at the intersection of feminist, Black, poor and working-class wisdom and unearth social inequalities that mainstream white environmental politics fails to address. As Kevin Modestino notes of *Parable*, Butler portrays a dystopian ecology in which '[n]atural beauty is […] a sign not that destructive progress has been averted (as it has been for so many conservationists) but that [the American landscape] has come to catastrophe.'[157] Modestino refers to a moment at the beginning of the novel in which Lauren's step-mother, Cora, tells Lauren about the '[c]ity lights' which used to block out the starts from the night sky.[158] Now that everyone is 'too hot and too poor,' neoliberal pursuits of 'progress' and 'growth' are no longer desirable, and as a result, the stars are now visible in the night sky.[159] The return of this natural phenomenon is the direct result of environmental, economic and social collapse, which disproportionately affects Black and Brown working-class communities.

It is in the context of Black feminist interventions in environmental politics in the early nineties that Butler wrote *Parable*, and therefore is a crucial part of the theoretic perspective I use to discuss her representation of neurodiversity and apocalyptic landscapes. Butler's novel depicts an apocalyptic social, economic and political climate which is felt unequally between different communities, countries and between the global north and south. Encountered through Lauren's Black, neuroqueer perspective, apocalypse is a cumulative experience of the many intersecting inequalities experienced by her neighbourhood community and by the people she meets whilst travelling on the road. Using

[155] Chelsea M. Frazier, 'Troubling Ecology: Wangechi Mutu, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism,' in *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 2:1 (2016), pp. 40-72, p. 41.
[156] Frazier, p. 41.
[157] Kevin Modestino, 'Octavia Butler's Parable Novels and Genealogies of African American Environmental Literature,' in *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*, 9:1 (2021), pp. 56-79, p. 56.
[158] Butler, p. 5.
[159] Butler, p. 5.

Yergeau's theorisation of an in-between, I build on Butler's critique of modernity to argue that apocalypse has a neuroqueer between spatio-temporality, and that Butler's concept of Change emerges as a neuroqueer method of navigating apocalypse which is founded in Black feminist environmental politics.

Throughout *Parable*, Butler portrays Lauren navigating apocalypse through understanding how she and the people around her are affected by interlocking global, national and local shifts in social, political, economic and environmental stability. The reader learns early on that, nationally, there is cholera spreading in South Mississippi and Louisiana, brought about by lack of access to clean water and made worse by high illiteracy and homelessness. Tornadoes are 'smashing the hell' out of Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee and a blizzard is 'freezing the northern midwest.'[160] Environmental instability contributes to declining public infrastructure, which has pushed many communities into poverty. In Butler's fictional town of Robledo, where Lauren's neighbourhood is set, burglary and arson have increased as more people outside the neighbourhood lose access to food, water, medicine and safe shelter. Whilst separated from the outside by the wall of their compound, Lauren's neighbourhood is still affected by changes and shifts in the apocalyptic climate outside. One of the neighbourhood children is killed by a stray bullet penetrating the community gate and burglaries in Lauren's neighbourhood often result in the deaths of residents from the burgled houses.

Butler's portrayal of an apocalypse defined by interlocking local, national and global environmental instability is reflective of Black environmentalism's concern with environment as a subjective embodiment of space. Naomi Thompkins distinguishes between white environmentalism, which focuses on preserving areas of wilderness, wildlife, natural resources and population control, and Black environmentalism, which seeks to address intersections of race and environment. Whilst white environmentalists argue for animal rights, Thompkins argues 'Black Americans are still struggling to get human rights.'[161] Through this perspective, environment represents 'the conditions of where we live and our connection to that space.'[162] Where more mainstream renderings of apocalypse portray a universally felt catastrophe, Butler's apocalypticism refuses a white-washed, universal approach and is attentive to how marginalised individuals and communities experience apocalypse as a culmination of intersecting geological, social and economic inequalities. Setting Lauren's neighbourhood in a poor, underfunded town centres the needs of the marginalised communities Black environmentalists argue white environmentalism fails to consider. Viewing apocalypse through this lens, whilst the signs of

[160] Butler, p. 54.
[161] Naomi Thompkins, 'Black Environmentalism,' *Confluence* (2020), <https://confluence.gallatin.nyu.edu/sections/research/black-environmentalism> [Accessed 26 September 2022].
[162] Thompkins.

apocalypse might be present in every community across the globe, apocalypse will ultimately be felt more acutely where infrastructures, geography and economies are more vulnerable.[163]

Intersecting with Black environmentalism, Butler's apocalypticism is intimately concerned with the legacies of modernity in creating and constituting apocalypse in Black American history. Black studies scholar Aliosha Pittaka Bielenberg locates apocalypse in 'the genocidal onset of modernity.'[164] Of European colonisation of the Americas and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, she writes that 'the creation and discovery of a new world spelled an end to many old ones.'[165] As modernity has grown, developed and strengthened its hold on the global economy and socio-political spheres, so the apocalypticism of colonialism and imperialism have been elongated. Bielenberg's apocalypticism is not constituted by a single event or by universal affect. It is felt primarily through the generational trauma of enslavement and forced displacement. Butler's apocalypse closely traces the legacies of African American history throughout the novel: in the destruction of Lauren's neighbourhood and her experience of displacement and homelessness; in her journey north, which echoes the great migration of African Americans who travelled north after the abolition of slavery; and in the search for new ways of nurturing kinship between marginalised identities, in particular racial identities. Butler also explores the legacy of slavery in modern international corporations. A fictional energy company, KSF, buys up an entire coastal town called Olivar with plans to transform the town into a mass distributer of energy, water and other basic human needs. In return for accepting smaller salaries than they are accustomed to, KSF will provide the people of Olivar with 'security, a guaranteed food supply, jobs,' and support against soil erosion.[166] The perceived security is enticing to some members of Lauren's walled community; however, Lauren and her father quickly conclude that submitting themselves to Olivar would mean loss of freedom and debt slavery. To them, Olivar sounds 'half antebellum revival and half science fiction.'[167] Butler's apocalypticism is characterised by the continuation, reproduction and resurfacing of racist, classist power structures, construing apocalypse's temporality as cyclical and

[163] For example, we might compare effects of the economic and environmental instability brought about by coinciding conflict in Ukraine and global warming experienced in 2022 (time of writing). Whilst Britain experienced inflation at 10.1% July 2022, in September 2022 in Pakistan, up to 100,000 people were displaced by flooding, and in Somalia, drought displaced an estimated one million people with 22 million people being 'at risk of sever hunger.'
Ed. by Nathan Williams, *Cost of food and drink pushes UK inflation to 10.1%* (2022) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/business-62566828> [accessed 6 September 2022]; *Pakistan floods: Officials struggle to stop biggest lake overflowing* (2022) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-62764224> [accessed 6 September 2022]; Joice Etutu, *Famine knocking on Somalia's door, UN warns* (2022) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-africa-62444312> [accessed 6 September 2022].
[164] Aliosha Pittaka Bielenberg, 'Black Studies and Geological Thinking,' <alioshabielenberg.com/black-studies-and-geological-thinking/> [26 Apr 2022].
[165] Bielenberg.
[166] Butler, p. 119.
[167] Butler, p. 122.

without a clear ending. Built on the back of slavery, Butler portrays a modernity in crisis returning to the structures of oppression that formed and sustain it.

Understanding apocalypse through an intersecting Black environmentalist and Black studies lens troubles contemporary critical interpretations of how apocalypse and post-apocalypse interact. De Cristofaro positions the post-apocalypse and the notion of an "afterwards" as the that which disrupts, queers, subverts and deviates from the original function of apocalypse. Apocalypse, as conceived in the 'traditional apocalyptic paradigm,' functions as a utopian ending to history and time, in which Earth is destroyed and New Jerusalem is revealed.[168] In this narrative, the apocalypse brings order and meaning to human history. The twenty-first century post-apocalyptic novel disrupts this ordered view of history by imagining that apocalypse does not in fact mean the total or complete destruction of Earth. Instead, the post-apocalyptic novel invites the reader 'to reconceive [their] understanding of narrative and history beyond the apocalyptic sense of an ending.'[169] Such an argument might be true of a text such as McCarthy's *The Road*, in which the nature of the apocalyptic event remains ambiguous and the protagonists' purpose in surviving the post-apocalyptic world is frequently undermined. Butler, on the other hand, locates apocalypse as extending throughout the material past and present and, in doing so, refuses to distinguish between an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic temporality. Instead of one apocalyptic 'explosion,' a 'big crash,' or 'sudden chaos,' Butler portrays a slow 'unraveling' of things gradually getting worse.[170] In refusing to follow mainstream understandings of how apocalypse arrives, indeed, by refusing to arrive all together, I argue that a different critical framework is required to examine the temporality of Butler's apocalypse, one through which the apocalypse itself can be a site of disruption, subversiveness and deviance.

Framing apocalypse as a vision of survival that extends through and beyond immediate events has implications for how other noteworthy themes of apocalyptic fiction emerge in the text. Hicks's primary argument in *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century* is that survivors of apocalypse must choose whether to 'move beyond salvaging mere scraps of modernity and rebuild dimensions of it in earnest or […] concede that modernity is beyond salvage and attempt to devise something that transcends its historical forms.'[171] In Hicks' interpretation, modernity is something apocalypse poses a threat to and that survivors have the ability to control and manipulate. From a Black studies perspective, and in my interpretation of Butler, modernity is what constitutes apocalypse and is something which creates the environments in which marginalised people are forced to survive in the first place. Whilst Hicks's critique of post-apocalyptic fiction focuses on twenty-first century

[168] De Cristofaro, p. 3.
[169] De Cristofaro, p. 19.
[170] Butler, p. 123.
[171] Hicks, p. 3.

fiction and Butler's *Parable* was written in the early nineteen-nineties, Solomon portrays a very similar, if not identical, interpretation of apocalypse and modernity in *Ghosts*. Hence, Hicks's criticism may not be focused on novels such as *Parable*, but, I argue, the similarities between Butler and Solomon highlight a gap in Hicks's analysis which is relevant to both pre-twenty-first century and twenty-first century apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature. As I will explore later in this chapter, navigating apocalyptic landscapes in *Parable* as a Black, neurodivergent, woman necessitates that Lauren disorientate away from institutions and infrastructures built and sustained by modernity. Salvaging modernity as a method of survival only ensures survival for those who benefit from modernity in the first place, and as long as institutions of power continue to salvage modernity, alternative ways of surviving must be achieved by working through and with the apocalypse.

To further explore the implications of an apocalypse which is temporally and spatially indistinct and begin claiming such an apocalypse as neuroqueer, I am turning to a piece of philosophical work by Edward S. Casey on the ontological functions of edges in landscape and space. Casey uses the work of Merleau-Ponty on edge and landscape to argue that human ontology is grounded in our ability to perceive edges. He argues that edges, such as beginnings and endings, order the world. They are our means of orientation and 'without them, we would be quite lost.'[172] Apocalypses are often imagined through the ways in which spaces (and the edges within) are altered or destroyed by apocalyptic events. We might think back to *The Road* and McCarthy's attempt to narrate the strangeness of navigating an apocalyptic world through evoking autism as one example of how authors present apocalyptic space as disorientating. Whilst my primary interest in Casey's work on edges is the presence or absence of edges in space, it is also worth noting at this point the traditional function of apocalypse in the Book of Revelation as an event which gives temporal edges to history. Colonial narratives of progression and survival thrive where time and space has been divided up into beginnings and endings. Casey's claims about human reliance on edges as a means of orientation, read in the context of neuroqueer theory, reveals there is neuroqueer potential in rejecting the strict demarcation of spatial and temporal edges.

Butler's apocalypse, which denies an ending and upsets linear notions of historical and economic progression, is both temporally and spatially disordered and edgeless. On the freeway, Butler depicts the journeying of migrants and refugees as directionless. The roads provide 'the most direct routes between cities and parts of cities,' but it is unclear whether the walkers are moving '[to] something or just away from here.'[173] In this moment, the apocalyptic environment is characterised by an unorientation, a moving away from as opposed to a moving towards. If edges, beginnings and endings

[172] Edward Casey, 'The Edge(s) of Landscape: A Study in Liminology', *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Cambridge & Mass: MIT, 2011) pp. 91-109, pp. 92-93.
[173] Butler, p. 176.

are what give meaning to peoples' actions, the road's directness is of no consequence to a people whose only goal is to be somewhere else. A traditional reading of apocalypse might interpret the lack of direction as a pathological symbol of the collapse of symbolism and meaning and, consequently, of the fabric upon which society and civilisation has been built. Such a reading might go on to argue that Lauren forms her Earthseed community by transcending the limitations of her environment and assigning meaning upon the directionless road through her religious beliefs. Instead, I understand Butler's apocalypse's spatio-temporal dis-orientation as a neuroqueer opening through which the potential for Lauren's Earthseed community arises.

As conveyed in my introduction to Chapter Two, Yergeau frames neurologically queer embodiment as a dis- or un-orientation, as relations to people, places and things which are fragmentary and residual. In perceiving and understanding neuroqueer embodiment, Yergeau 'demands temporal landscapes that diverge from traditional relationships with time.'[174] Butler's road, and the apocalyptic landscape more broadly, functions as a between spatio-temporality, always shifting and changing yet never arriving at an apocalyptic climax. It is apocalypse's refusal to arrive that inspires my neuroqueer reading of Butler's apocalypse. As argued in Chapter One, Lauren's neighbourhood is structured and upheld by unreliable infrastructures which in turn rely on normative models of sociality and community organisation. Half-way through the novel, the neighbourhood is destroyed and, whilst the event is traumatic, the destruction of the neighbourhood opens up the possibility for Lauren to build her first Earthseed community, something that would never have been possible in the neighbourhood. As Butler writes in an Earthseed verse, 'In order to rise/ From its own ashes/ A phoenix/ First/ Must/ Burn.'[175] From the collapse of established structures of community and the accompanying collapse in normative systems of symbolism and meaning, the opportunity to forge communities through alternative systems of meaning-making arises.

Reading Butler's apocalypse through an intersecting neuroqueer and Black studies lens highlights the effectiveness of Lauren's Black, neurologically queer perspective at adapting to an apocalyptic space which is inherently edgeless, fluctuating and changing. Through Lauren, Butler argues for an approach to apocalypse which is autonomous and community focused, an approach which lies in stark contrast to institutionalised approaches to navigating apocalyptic space and time. In attempting to salvage modernity, institutions such as Olivar enforce binaries, edges, and borders onto the apocalyptic landscape, repressing apocalypse's neuroqueer potentiality. Institutions such as Olivar, the Nassau (*Edge of Gone*), the Matilda (*Ghosts*), and even Lauren's neighbourhood are structurally designed to salvage aspects of modernity and preserve normative assumptions about civilisation and

[174] Yergeau, p. 188.
[175] Butler, p. 153.

sociality therein. The appeal of Olivar lies in the institution's offer of safety and normative routes to adulthood and productivity. It has a 'real school' children can attend and jobs when they grow up, as opposed to the neighbourhood, where the options are to stay within the neighbourhood's walls or go 'outside.'[176] Thinking back to Chapter One, enforcing borders emerges as an extension of institutionalised control and surveillance practised under big picture survival ideologies, creating binaries between here and there, inside and outside, them and us. Just as big picture survival narratives repress alternative, marginalised stories and methods of surviving, so enforcing borders, restricting movement and policing territories allows individuals to continue living a familiar lifestyle, even if that lifestyle denies them agency. A comparison with how Duyvis frames Denise's perception of the Nassau reveals that the perception of safety is created by encouraging passengers to perceive the apocalypse as existing somewhere else, and therefore escaping any changes the apocalypse had the potential to create. After Denise has been given a place on the Nassau, she reflects that 'none of this will matter,' referring to the chaotic unfamiliarity of apocalyptic landscape outside the Nassau.[177] Soon, Denise will be 'gone, too, safe among the stars.'[178] Within a binary understanding of space, safety is situated as the opposite of apocalypse, closing off all opportunity to view the apocalypse a site of potential. The apocalypse destroys all that is familiar, and, in the framework institutions such as Olivar and the Nassau provide, safety can only be reached in recreating familiarity, effectively undoing apocalypse's undoings.

In *Parable*, this approach to apocalypse is most clearly symbolised by the wall. Lauren's neighbourhood uses the wall to create a façade of separation and safety. Before it is invaded and burned down, the wall works as an edge in landscape which orientates Lauren and the neighbourhood residents towards perceiving their small community as a 'fortress,' standing in defiance against 'the scarcity and the violence outside.'[179] During a sermon, Lauren preaches from Luke, chapter eighteen, using the parable of the importunate widow as a comparative story about persistence. She tells the residents that they have their 'island community, fragile' yet strong.[180] In the context of the novel, Lauren's sermon serves as moment of unity in the wake of Lauren's father's disappearance. However, when viewed as a means of spatio-temporal orientation, Lauren's sermon addresses and reinforces the perceived need to persist and continue to survive through established, normative avenues. Through creating a "here" and "there," Lauren's neighbourhood create a heroic image of themselves as immovable, refusing to imagine alternative ways of surviving because it is their ability to continue

[176] Butler, p. 121.
[177] Duyvis, p. 166.
[178] Duyvis, p. 166.
[179] Butler, pp. 135 & 134.
[180] Butler, p. 135.

surviving as they have always done that is their source of unity and strength. Maintaining an ordered community structure through socio-political homogeneity mirrors how Duyvis and Solomon portray the construction and maintenance of their generation ships' dominant cultures. Just as the Nassau and Matilda have established codes of social etiquette which are storied as directly correlating with humanity's survival, so Butler's Robledo neighbourhood perceive their survival as resting on their ability to remain constant in a world that is changing.

Lauren's Black, neurologically queer perspective is the vessel through which Butler resists normative approaches to apocalypse and realises apocalypse's potentiality, effectively understanding apocalypse as a part of Change. Change has no spatial or temporal edges, beginnings or endings: it is inevitable, yet 'infinitely malleable' to those who are perceptive and forethinking.[181] As a model for navigating apocalypse, events such as robberies, earthquakes and fires are symptoms of underlying fluctuations and changes in landscape and space. Through 'learning adaption' and through 'forethought and planning' it is possible to 'shape' Change and, therefore, apocalypse.[182] Unlike her neighbours, Lauren foresees the collapse of her neighbourhood. In Lauren's mind, 'a big gang of those hungry, desperate, crazy people outside' are going to break down the neighbourhood gate and destroy everything.[183] The same has happened to bigger, stronger walled communities and if the people of the neighbourhood are going to survive and be in a position to 'make a life afterwards' then Butler argues that individuals and communities need to prepare in advance.[184] Being able to confront the inevitability of Change frames apocalyptic events as things to prepare for and work with, subverting popular representations of apocalypse as a series of events which the protagonist has no time to prepare for and must survive with whatever he can salvage. Lauren not only takes steps to prepare for her neighbourhood's collapse but uses Change as a guiding ethos with which to understand and perceive the potential opportunities if she survives. Butler draws on the bubonic plague in medieval Europe to exemplify how despite much suffering and death, 'things changed [for the better] for the survivors,' as a smaller workforce meant workers were encouraged to migrate and employers had to compete with better wages and working conditions to attract those workers.[185] Importantly, it 'took a plague to make some of the people realize that things *could* change.'[186] The bubonic plague disrupted the societal structures which underpinned established, restrictive models of employment. The apocalypse, Butler argues, destroys, and within this destruction lies the opportunity for marginalised people to demand changes to political and economic structures.

[181] Butler, p. 220.
[182] Butler, p. 31.
[183] Butler, p. 55.
[184] Butler, p. 55.
[185] Butler, p. 56.
[186] Butler, p. 57. Original italics.

Apocalyptic events do not signify an ending, nor do they represent a fixed point in time and space at which protagonists must choose between predetermined paths of action. The apocalypse is a catalyst for change.

Neuroqueerly dis-orientating from normative understandings of apocalyptic landscape reveals how Lauren's use of space neuroqueers reliance on edges, beginnings and endings in striving towards individual and group safety. As an individual, Lauren moves through space with the goal of remaining unobserved. She hides in the garage of a 'burned out, unwalled house.'[187] The structure has 'enough rubble […] to conceal' Lauren from anyone wandering the streets and provides a quick getaway in case of discovery.[188] Lauren takes advantage of the physical structures of the landscape and the darkness of the night to create as safe an environment as possible. Thinking back to Yergeau, I argue Lauren's awareness of space positions her in the metaphorical and literal 'crevices,' or between spaces, neurotypical people ignore and neuroqueer people occupy.[189] In the aftermath of the apocalypse of the neighbourhood, of the destruction of the wall and the merging of inside and outside space, Lauren embraces her Black, neuroqueer edgelessness, literally becoming a 'figure of darker darkness.'[190] Building on Chapter One, I argue Lauren's neuroqueer embodiment of landscape is an extension of her Black wisdom. Butler's representation of Lauren's approach to space keeps her safe because of how easily she is able to adapt to the landscape she finds herself in, a skill that becomes essential to how Lauren continues to survive in Butler's apocalyptic America as part of a group.

On the road, Lauren, Zahra and Harry are drawn to structures in space which can provide shelter and safety. The group are 'always […] looking' for hills and ruined walls 'to shield [them],' reflecting a residual desire for the structured order of the neighbourhood wall.[191] Butler questions whether these walls really provide the safety the group are after. On the one hand, they could be 'trapped' against a wall by a stronger group, but on the other, in the open they are 'vulnerable on every side.'[192] I read Butler's portrayal of Lauren's uncertain relationship with physical structures in landscape as an ephemeral relation to walls as meaning-making functions, as they were back in the neighbourhood. The walls, both literal and metaphorical, that Lauren, Zahra and Harry gravitate towards are symbolic of a residual attachment to familiar structures which, in the neighbourhood's flawed system of symbolism and meaning, represented safety, strength and togetherness. Out on the road, Lauren's Black, neurodivergent experiences of these structures make plain how ideas of safety are constructed within subjective environments and are not inherent to any physical space. I read this approach to

[187] Butler, p. 156.
[188] Butler, p. 157.
[189] Yergeau, p. 177.
[190] Butler, p. 155.
[191] Butler, p. 205.
[192] Butler, p. 205.

apocalypse as a neuroqueer dis-/un-orientation to normative social symbolisms. Yergeau argues that 'autism's queerity is often storied by means of disorientation,' as an impairment which renders the subject perpetually 'unoriented toward all that is normative and proper.'[193] Reclaiming autism's disorientation, Yergeau argues for understanding autistic rhetorics as demi, as an identity which 'rejects binaries' and embraces relations between self and others as 'fragmentary and oscillating.'[194] Lauren's awareness of the multiple ways in which she, Zahra and Harry relate to and interact with spatial structures and of how those relations are subject to changes in the wider landscape emerges as a disorientation from relying on binary perceptions of space, safety and embodiment. It is from this rejection of binary pairings of inside/outside, walls/open landscapes, safety/danger, that the potential for alternative ways of navigating apocalypse and creating safe environments emerges.

Butler uses Lauren's rejection of binaries of inside/outside, safe/unsafe to distance Lauren's budding Earthseed community from conflicts which arise over constructed divisions in landscape and between different groups of people. An earthquake occurs whilst Lauren and her group are passing a farming community. The earthquake causes a fire to start in one of the farm's houses, which Butler presents as a catalyst for violence, as the 'weakness that gave scavengers permission to devastate the community.'[195] Zahra suggests the group should join the scavengers, however Lauren foresees that the people who own the house will 'fight back' over their walled community, just as Lauren, Zahra and Harry's neighbourhood once did.[196] Perceptions of strength, weakness and power are a running theme in *Parable*. Butler writes that 'All struggles/ Are essentially/ Power struggles.'[197] When 'apparent stability disintegrates,' without a unifying influence, individuals and groups 'struggle' for 'survival, position' and 'power.'[198] I argue that, though Zahra's interest in the farming community is driven by the potential for useful resources, the ensuing fight over the community represents a power struggle over the established institutional structures Butler rejects when Lauren's own neighbourhood is destroyed. Butler's arguments about survival and power map onto my arguments about limiting survival to binary ideas of landscape and safety. By avoiding this particular fight, Lauren and her community distance themselves from restrictive apocalyptic discourses which understand apocalyptic space and time through marked divisions as opposed to inevitable changes. By being receptive to how changes in environment shape them and the people around them, the choices the group make are not defined by pre-existing desires to assert power, freeing them to make decisions that actually keep them safe.

[193] Yergeau, p. 27.
[194] Yergeau, p. 186.
[195] Butler, p. 228.
[196] Butler, p. 227.
[197] Butler, p. 94.
[198] Butler, p. 103.

Duyvis: Neuroqueer Ephemera and Moving through Impulses

As with Butler's apocalypse, Duyvis's apocalypse emerges as a between space, as unfixed in both its material and temporal aspects. Building on my exploration of enforced binaries in landscape, institutionalised apocalyptic discourses, modernity as apocalypse and, most importantly, apocalypse's neuroqueer spatio-temporality, Duyvis uses Denise's autistic perspective to locate and navigate apocalypse in the resurfacing ephemera of the pre-apocalypse world. Yergeau takes their definition of ephemera from Muñoz, figuring ephemera as a 'queer kind of evidence, as that which is left behind by, or in the wake of, fact,' fact being what is 'visible, normative and hegemonic.'[199] They 'comprise the temporary, the dischargeable, the gestural, the residual, and at times the imperceptible.'[200] There is a 'collecting impulse' which attends neuroqueer ephemera.[201] Duyvis's apocalypse is located and navigated through the ephemeral and the residual. Through this lens, rejecting institutionalised models of navigating apocalypse opens up avenues of experience through which apocalypse's neuroqueer ephemerality can be confronted, examined and embraced.

As in *Parable*, Duyvis presents an institution, the Nassau, imposing binaries on an apocalyptic landscape characterised by ambiguities in spatial and temporal edges. Denise first experiences the apocalypse through the differences between the Nassau's artificial environment and the unfamiliar, discordant environment outside the ship's walls. Walking down the ramp from the Nassau to the ground is like walking into a 'different world.'[202] The ramp and the outside of the ship are lit up 'so people can work even in the dark of the impact dust blotting out the sky.'[203] The further Denise walks away from the ship the darker the world gets, until Denise 'can't tell where the ground ends and the sky begins.'[204] The Nassau imposes traditional temporal structures within its walls just as Lauren's neighbourhood imposes restrictive structures of community on its residents. Inside the Nassau, apocalypse exists "out there," creating binaries between inside and outside, here and there, safe and unsafe. These divisions in space serve the Nassau, just as Lauren's neighbourhood's wall served its residents, by validating and reifying perceived socio-political divisions between who deserve safety and those who do not. As I will go on to argue, these spatial divisions are more porous and fluid than the institutions creating them would like them to be.

As a Black, autistic character, Denise exists on the margins of the Nassau's society and is forced to traverse the inside/outside, safe/unsafe border between the Nassau and apocalyptic Amsterdam.

[199] Yergeau, p. 38; Yergeau, p. 38.
[200] Yergeau, p. 38.
[201] Yergeau, p. 38.
[202] Duyvis, p. 91.
[203] Duyvis, p. 91.
[204] Duyvis, p. 91.

Outside the Nassau, Denise experiences apocalypse as spatial and temporal displacement and disorientation, and as a landscape punctuated by a marring and obscuring of physical edges. Denise reflects that there 'should be' office buildings and other buildings 'in the distance' but her flashlight cannot reach far enough to confirm or deny their existence.[205] There is a 'vague silhouette' of 'what must be' a nearby concourse, but, again, a lack of distinguishable edges means Denise can only guess at what object the ambiguous silhouette is supposed to gesture towards. Narrating the apocalypse through an inability to perceive the world diverts from the traditional narration of apocalypse as a 'sense-making' function by which Western ideologies of history and time are seen as teleologically progressing.[206] The apocalypse, De Cristofaro observes, 'is essentially about a 'revelation'' of sense-making, an event which reveals, uncovers and explains.[207] The revelatory function of apocalypse requires there must be a narrator to witness what is revealed. In the traditional apocalyptic text, the narrator or protagonist fulfils this role, and it is through the vessel of the narrator or protagonist that the reader is able to learn the truths within the revelation. Denise's first time outside the Nassau is a moment of revelation for the reader, the point at which Duyvis reveals what her apocalyptic Earth looks like. Characterising her world through a concealment, muddying and obscuring the edges subverts this expectation, denying the reader the ability to make sense of the world. Recalling Casey's argument on edge in landscape, edges signify beginnings and endings, order the world, and prevent people from feeling lost.[208] Duyvis's apocalypse and Butler's apocalypse share the same edgeless apocalyptic landscape, establishing Duyvis' apocalypse as a between spatio-temporality in which the very objects within the landscape refuse identification.

As with Butler's portrayal of navigating an edgeless apocalyptic environment, Duyvis represents Denise disorientating from linear, progressive actions in space, resulting in the same kind of directionless motioning Butler uses to describe people walking on the road. Denise's goal throughout the novel, however, is to find Iris and get her family on board the Nassau. Having been banished from the Nassau and having no 'place to return to' this goal seems impossible.[209] In comparison with Butler, Denise's banishment functions in a similar way to the destruction of Lauren's neighbourhood. Both events leave the protagonists homeless and without clear direction of action. The only thing left for Denise to do is 'walk,' 'walk farther,' and walk 'farther still.'[210] I read Duyvis's description of Denise walking farther, neither to nor from any kind of starting point or end goal, as a representation of neuroqueer motioning. Kenneth Burke wrote in *Dramatism and Development* that 'things move' and

[205] Duyvis, p. 93.
[206] De Cristofaro, p. 3.
[207] De Cristofaro, p. 3.
[208] Casey, p. 93.
[209] Duyvis, p. 93.
[210] Duyvis, pp. 91, 92.

'persons act.'[211] Within this framework, action holds pro-social symbolism, whilst motions are 'nonsymbolic units,' movements which do not contain the intention, inference, or pro-social orientation of actions.[212] The apocalyptic landscapes in both *Parable* and *Edge of Gone*, along with the experience of homelessness protagonists are forced into as a result of environmental and social instability and unequal access to resources, do not support the structures needed for people to orient themselves or act with intention. Disorientating from normative means of moving through space allows both Lauren and Denise to transcend action and embrace motion as a way of navigating apocalypse's neuroqueer spatio-temporality.

Neuroqueerly moving through environments, as opposed to acting upon spaces or enforcing divisions, borders and boundaries in space and time, proves to be a useful technique for navigating apocalyptic environments and rejecting dominant narratives about safety and sanctuary. After Denise rescues the group of scavengers from the tsunami, she is accepted onto the Nassau as a passenger, however her goal to find Iris and get her family on board still needs fulfilling. The tsunami turns the world outside the Nassau into a sea, only accessible by waterborne vessels. Intent on going outside in order to visit her mother, who is sheltering in the nearby airport, Denise persuades her friend Max to print her a raft and paddle. On her way back from the airport Denise knows she should 'return' to ship, but instead she paddles 'straight past [it] anyway.'[213] Denise's impulse to paddle past the Nassau symbolises a break away from her previous longing to return to the generation ship as a place of safety and sanctuary. It mirrors Lauren's rejection of established institutions and community structures which rely on racist, ableist and classist legacies of modernity, and undermines the narrative of safety the Nassau weaves in order to maintain law and order on board. This decision is accompanied by what Duyvis presents as a strategic embrace of autistic embodiment. Denise intentionally 'dial[s her] mind to zero' so that '[n]o world exists beyond the area lit up by the raft's lightstrips.'[214] In Chapter One, I discussed the importance of the big picture to survival ideologies embodied by the Nassau and the Matilda and argued that the concept is used as an oppressive tool to dictated prescribed notions of what it means to survive. In this passage, Duyvis shuts out the big picture in favour of a world Denise can process without becoming overwhelmed, enabling her to experience the apocalyptic landscape in a way that enables her to pursue her goal of finding Iris.

Duyvis characterises Denise's method of moving through the watery landscape as 'push[ing] on.'[215] Duyvis uses this moment to explore how being a Black autistic girl has influenced how Denise navigates

[211] Kenneth Burke, *Dramatism and Development* (Barre, MA: Clark University Press, 1972), p. 21.
[212] Yergeau, p. 56.
[213] Duyvis, p. 173.
[214] Duyvis, p. 173.
[215] Duyvis, p. 173.

her environment. Duyvis writes that Denise paddles 'on […] because it's all [she] can do. [She's] always been good at pushing through pain.'[216] Duyvis's narration of Denise persisting through suffering brings to mind Yergeau's exploration of autistic striving. Yergeau defines striving as a neuroqueer motioning towards the future, a motioning which holds neuroqueer potential in its 'perseveration and persistence.'[217] As opposed to valuing motion and/or action by its fulfilment, Yergeau argues autistic motion holds meaning in its 'contained unfolding and being.'[218] Whilst Yergeau applies the idea of striving to autistic forms of expression and communication, Denise's perception of her own ability to push on through adversity contains the seeds of her resilience growing up as an autistic, Black girl from the Bijlmer, a real area in Amsterdam. Duyvis contrasts the present moment of pushing on with Denise's memories of the Bijlmer, of the class divide between the wealthy areas which receive funding for arts centres, hospitals and 'trendy parks,' and the underfunded areas in which Denise grew up, populated by people 'who can't afford [to live] anywhere else.'[219] Contextualising Denise's movement through apocalyptic Amsterdam with her memories of class and race divisions in pre-apocalyptic Amsterdam positions Denise's current striving as an extension of previous personal, community and generational struggles against classism and racism. In comparison with Butler's cyclical apocalypse, which centres legacies of colonialism and imperialism as the source of apocalypse in the modern world, Duyvis portrays Denise's ability to persevere through the apocalyptic landscape as being rooted in previous experience of surviving on the margins of society. It is Denise's lived experience of the legacies of colonialism, racism and modernity that build the foundations upon which Duyvis rejects the real and perceived safety of the Nassau and imagines alternative ways of navigating apocalypse.

Where, in *Parable*, Lauren neuroqueerly orientates herself on the road through being attentive to others' bodyminds, Denise neuroqueerly orientates herself out on the water through treating her immediate surroundings as a microcosmic space in which the remnants of apocalypse enter and exit. As Denise pushes on through the water, various objects drift in and out of the light of Denise's lightstrips:

'On.

A small, upside-down boat.

On.

Bikes trapped in the branches of floating trees.

On.

[216] Duyvis, p. 175.
[217] Yergeau, p. 75.
[218] Yergeau, p. 75.
[219] Duyvis, p. 177.

Between a cluster of buildings, crack and broken.

On.'[220]

Separating the movement from the observations reflects Denise's internal monologue and her processing of the world through segments. The boat, bikes, trees and buildings are noted by Denise as she passes them, but these objects do not form a big picture. Instead, they are self-contained in separate paragraphs and residual in their existence, existing momentarily within Denise's world before exiting into an unacknowledged void. Yergeau argues that a key characteristic of neuroqueerness is its residuality and ephemerality. Yergeau's neuroqueer ephemera is directly informed by Muñoz's definition of queer ephemera as a 'queer kind of evidence, as that which is left behind by, or in the wake of, fact,' fact being what is 'visible, normative and hegemonic.'[221] Building on this, neuroqueer ephemera 'comprise the temporary, the dischargeable, the gestural, the residual, and at times the imperceptible.'[222] I read the objects that float through Denise's world as the ephemera of apocalypse, as evidence of a queer landscape that lies beyond what is perceived. The objects have a temporary existence in Duyvis' narration, emerging into the light and disappearing as Denise moves on, gesturing towards the fact of the apocalypse but failing to hold any significance beyond being things which Denise must 'pass' or 'maneuver around.'[223]

Denise moves through an environment that evades the edges, beginnings and endings from which to begin or go back to. The between space of apocalyptic Amsterdam defies neuronormative assumptions which privilege action over motion and intent over impulse and traditional apocalyptic discourses which privilege endings as meaning-making functions. Foregoing the safety of the Nassau in order to pursue her own goals, Denise uses her autistic embodiment to navigate a space that cannot be navigated through normative means. Immersed in the outside world and distanced from the Nassau, the imposed binary of inside and outside stop being the primary perspective through which the apocalypse is perceived, making way for an embodiment of apocalypse which is defined by neuroqueer striving, and disorientation towards the residual and the ephemeral.

Solomon: Resurfacing Apocalyptic Potential

My analysis of apocalyptic spaces and temporalities in *Ghosts* develops my arguments on Butler and Duyvis by considering neuroqueer potential in the context of autism's destructiveness. Matilda is located in a between space, being storied by the Sovereign as on a journey to a Promised Land which will never be reached. Interpreted through Casey and Yergeau, this position should give way to

[220] Duyvis, p. 173.
[221] Yergeau, p. 38.
[222] Yergeau, p. 38.
[223] Duyvis, p. 173.

opportunities for characters to explore alternative ways of being in the world, as discussed in my analysis of Butler. However, the strict moral and social codes of the Sovereignty and physical borders that make up the Matilda's topography work to restrict and repress any neuroqueer potential. Navigating this world, Aster defies the borders of the Matilda, her neuroqueer ways of moving through space bringing repressed residues of apocalyptic potential to the surface. Defying these borders, Aster destroys and reimagines the space she occupies in resistant and subversive ways.

Throughout the diverse nations and cultures of the Matilda there are many interpretations and stories of Matilda's history and of the Earth that has been left behind. The most significant is Aint Melusine's stories, in which Solomon presents Matilda as one 'world' and locates the apocalypse in the 'world that existed before [Matilda].'[224] The cause of the apocalypse is left unknown, storied as a 'something' which 'came and took [the world] 'way.' [225] Solomon constructs the apocalypse through loss, the Matilda being a replacement for Earth as opposed to travelling or journeying away from Earth. The absence of the journey in Melusine's story reflects a wider theme in Solomon's representation of Tarlander cultural understandings of Matilda's purpose and position within the cosmos. The absence of the journey is directly correlated to the popular belief that 'there is no Promised Land.'[226] Solomon represents a cultural rejection of institutionalised narratives of apocalypse. Unlike the communities represented in *Parable* and *Edge of Gone*, the Tarland people have been born into and are trapped in the kind of institution Lauren manages to avoid and that the Nassau has the potential to become. They reject the supposed safety of the Matilda outright, teaching their children through myth and storytelling to perceive the lies the Sovereignty try to weave through their narratives about the Promised Land. The Matilda has been 'abandoned' and orphaned by the Heavens.[227] She is lost and has no direction or purpose, hence it is down to individuals and communities to find purpose and guidance from their ancestors in surviving on the generation ship.

Tarland stories about Matilda's apocalyptic history undermine the structured, teleological narrative constructed by the Sovereignty. Through Casey's understanding of edges, the Promised Land acts as an edge, a finishing point, that gives Matilda direction and purpose. Through the Sovereignty's big picture survival narrative, knowing that there is a Promised Land gives Matilda something to journey and strive towards and is therefore fundamental to maintaining the Sovereignty's religious and political power.[228] That Tarlander cultures reject the existence of the Promised Land removes the meaning-making end point of Matilda's journey, stripping the foundations from the Sovereignty's big

[224] Solomon, p. 69.
[225] Solomon, p. 69.
[226] Solomon, p. 22.
[227] Solomon, p. 254.
[228] Solomon, p. 299.

picture narrative of survival. As such, I argue that the generational and collective wisdom of the Tarlanders poses an epistemic threat to the Sovereignty's power, positioning Matilda as existing in a perpetual between space which queerly refuses arrival. Yergeau treats betweenness as a mode of being, existing between, beside and contrary to neurotypical structures of rhetoric and logic. As I noted at the start of this chapter, Yergeau argues for between spaces as sites of possibility, as 'crevices' which comprise the entirety of neuroqueer perception.[229] My application of Yergeau's understanding of neuroqueer betweenness is more literal than their focus on meaning making and neuroqueer rhetorics. I understand the Matilda to be located in a between space that defies the neurotypical, colonial systems of meaning and ways of thinking identified in Chapter One. The Sovereignty's system of symbolism and meaning, drawn from rigid ideas about what constitutes identity, social order and morality, requires a structured environment to support and enforce that ideology on those it does not benefit or appeal to. The Tarlander's own histories of Matilda render the ship as existing in a perpetual between space, undermining the teleological progression through space and time that the Sovereignty's survival narrative is so reliant on. As I will explore in Chapter Three, accepting and embracing this position results in a cultural focus on the past, ancestry and uncovering repressed truths as a means to survive the present. What I will turn to now is an examination of how the Sovereignty uses other types of edges to enforce a normatively conceived order and the ways Aster defies normative environmental structures through how she neuroqueerly navigates these borders and barriers.

As with *Parable* and *Edge of Gone*, Solomon locates apocalypse in both the past and present, sustained by an institution of survival which maintains divisions in space and restricts movement in and between space as an essential aspect of imperial control. Solomon narrates the history of Matilda as a colonial project, with Matilda being narrated as a victim of the Sovereignty's project as well as the vessel. 'They,' the ruling classes, came and 'hollowed her out and put stuff inside her,' co-opting her body to serve their vision for humanity.[230] Solomon portrays the interlocking colonial and ableist narratives at work in how institutions seek to enforces edges, binaries and borders upon apocalyptic time and space. The act of hollowing out resonates with Yergeau's critique of clinical rhetorics of recovery. Autistic children are positioned as once-neurotypical subjects who have been co-opted by autism and need to be rehabilitated back into mainstream society and education. Yergeau argues this rhetoric of recovery is explicitly colonial, referring to the archaeological and anthropological projects that accompany colonialism. To recover something is to suggest 'something or someone must be surfaced;' that there is a thing or person who is 'hidden from view' and 'intervention' is needed to

[229] Yergeau, p. 177.
[230] Solomon, p. 257.

recover them.[231] Similarly, Solomon's portrayal of Matilda is that she has been excavated in a process of recovery, her queer body straightened and formed into a vessel that can adequately perform its "proper" function within the Sovereignty's big picture. Just as the autistic subject is a site in need of constant intervention, so the Sovereignty believe the ship and its lowdeck inhabitants 'require maintenance' to preserve the order they've imposed on the ship.[232] Reflecting on the similarities between all three texts, salvaging modernity and imposing binaries that seek to preserve sites of normatively conceived civility and order within apocalyptic chaos are acts of colonial, clinical aggression which stifle neuroqueer apocalyptic potential.

One of the ways the Sovereignty maintains order on Matilda is through structuring the ship into segregated decks. Each deck is 'divided by metal, language, and armed guards.'[233] Like Butler's walled community in *Parable* and the Nassau's division of inside and outside space in *Edge of Gone*, the separation of the decks on Matilda functions as a border. Where the wall and gate of Lauren's neighbourhood maintain a distinction between them and us, the borders separating decks prevent freedom of movement; access to education, resources and knowledge; and cements cultural constructed hierarchies of class and race. The decks also function as a means of categorisation. Lune, Aster's mother, was from Y-deck. When she disappeared, Aster was sent to be brought up on Q-deck, because, according to the Guard in charge of homing her, 'the peculiarities of Aster's physiology' probably meant her other parent was a Tarlander.[234] The decks, then, are a physical system of identification and classification of lowdeck people, dictating and limiting how lowdeck people can be and are identified. Casey identifies borders as edges which are characterised as 'humanly constructed' and which function to 'distinguish' and 'keep apart.'[235] Not only are these borders physical, but they are symbolic, social and cultural – physical analogues of the normative constructs of society and identity which dominate the ship's big picture narrative.

The division of decks has significant implications for the kinds of spaces different characters have freedom of access to. Those spaces which function as nature reserves and conservation projects are exclusively enjoyed by those with access to the upper decks. The upper decks are home to sporting fields and meadows, woods, lakes, beaches and gaming fields.[236] These spaces are fuelled by the ship's

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[231] Yergeau, p. 117.

[232] Solomon, p. 299.
This is especially true given that the Sovereignty itself recognises the improbability of Matilda ever reaching the Promised Land. Sovereign Lieutenant tells Aster that the 'Sovereignty it forever because the Gulf of Sin is forever. We were yesterday, and we will be tomorrow.' (p. 299) Using the Promised Land to give meaning to Matilda's endless journey, Solomon presents a religious order which believes itself eternal.

[233] Solomon, p. 16.

[234] Solomon, p. 35.

[235] Casey, p. 94.

[236] Solomon, pp. 27-28.

power supply, Baby Sun, and are kept running even after energy to the lower decks has been completely cut-off, the reason supposedly being to conserve power. The significance of these spaces is expressed in a newspaper article published to the lower decks, which claims that '[*w*]e *must preserve the wildlife sanctuaries*.'[237] By describing them as sanctuaries, Solomon portrays the ruling class drawing on a policy of environmental conservation akin to contemporary eco-nationalist rhetoric. Morgan Margulies writes in their article on eco-nationalism that nationalist policies purport people from other cultures or nations are incapable of preserving important natural environments.[238] These beliefs often arise out of perceived scarcity of resources such as food and water combined with a nation's 'unique consumption and production habits' and results in an 'economic protectionism' which capitalises on the belief that the state exists to exclusively serve its citizens.[239] Matilda's decks, with their diversity of cultures, languages, dialects and customs, function as nations, and the upperdeck nations, with their monopoly on violence, resources and knowledge, are presented as practising eco-nationalism through the strict physical borders between decks. Behind the rhetorics of ecologism and necessity to preserve natural spaces is the desire to preserve the privileged ways of life upperdeck people are accustomed to, a desire that can be pursued because the physical structuring of the Matilda prevents lowdeck access to upperdeck space.

Solomon's portrayal of how Aster navigates the Matilda's decks queers and challenges the systems of eco-nationalism, enforced borders and colonialism, re-surfacing and re/queering Matilda's apocalyptic spaces. One of the spaces Aster and other Tarlanders interact with are the field decks. The field decks 'form[…] a massive sphere… each of them a different field, forest, or orchard.'[240] They rotate around Baby Sun, moving in every possible direction to form spherical layers and 'accommodate diverse plant needs.'[241] The intricacy of the field decks represents and relies on artificially induced climates and an artificial passage of time. Different crops need different intensities and quantities of artificial sun light at artificial times of the artificial day/year. Solomon presents working on these decks as requiring the worker to adjust to the specific environments of each field. During the field deck rotations characters must 'adjust' to the shifts in what is up and what is down, adapting to the environment so they can function as cogs in the intricate, inflexible machine of the field decks.[242]

[237] Solomon, p. 28.
[238] Morgan Margulies, 'Eco-Nationalism: A Historical Evaluation of Nationalist Praxes in Environmentalist and Ecologist Movements,' in *Consilience*, No. 23 (2021), pp. 22-29, p. 23.
[239] Margulies, p. 24.
[240] Solomon, p. 73.
[241] Solomon, p. 73.
[242] Solomon, p. 72.

So, when there is a power outage during rotation, Aster 'choos[es] to see the blackout for what it [is]: a blessing.'[243] The blackout disrupts the order of the field decks, 'forc[ing] [them] into complete stillness.'[244] In the chaos that ensues, Aster takes the opportunity to make her way out of the decks and pursue her search for her mother's ghost. She moves between decks, traversing the gaps between them using a make-shift rope. Read through Casey, Aster traverses the decks through transcending the borders of each deck, queering their ontology and the rigid order they are supposed to represent. Like the main decks of Matilda, the field decks are supposed to be entered at specific entry points, which are patrolled and monitored by the guards. The edge of each deck should be impassable; however, Solomon presents these edges as more boundaries and gaps when Aster is traversing them. Casey defines boundaries as inherently 'porous,' striking a chord with Yergeau's framing of autism as existing within the crevices neurotypical people can ignore.[245] Aster's movement through the field decks during the blackout queer the Sovereignty's rules and regulations as porous, creating opportunity for her to realise the repressed potentiality that lies in between the edges of the Sovereignty's order.

Read through Yergeau's theorisation of Muñoz, Baby Sun's blackouts emerge as apocalyptic ephemera resurfacing through the gaps in the Sovereignty's order. Just as small events in *Parable* both signify and constitute an impending apocalypse, so these blackouts signify and constitute an apocalypse that Matilda (read: the Sovereignty) has supposedly left behind but is still feeling the impact of. In this evocation of apocalypse, I am not referring to Matilda's apocalyptic origins on Earth, but to a mini apocalyptic event that occurred twenty-five years before the events of the novel are set. We learn early in the narrative that Matilda has been hit by an asteroid twenty-five years ago, an event which, as Aster discovers later in the novel, resulted in the deaths of many of Matilda's ruling elite.[246] The blackouts are the residual gestures left over from this "disaster." Within the framework of Solomon's apocalyptic world, the blackouts are remnants of an apocalyptic event which is itself folded in-between the crevices of Matilda's apocalyptic history. Solomon layers apocalypse, locating Aster and the inhabitants of Matilda in between the fabric of the post-apocalyptic world, unable to leave the apocalypse behind.

This is not the only instance of Solomon presenting the reader with ephemera of a disastrous event which itself is residual of Matilda's apocalyptic origins. In a decade known as the 'Wishing Time,' a 'great flood […] washed X Deck away.'[247] The deck has been 'abandoned' since that event, just as

[243] Solomon, p. 75.
[244] Solomon, p. 74.
[245] Casey, p. 95.
[246] Solomon, p. 156.
[247] Solomon, p. 68.

Matilda is storied as being abandoned by the Heavens.[248] Aster takes advantage of the abandoned spaces in X Deck to build and nurture a secret botanarium. The botanarium is Aster's 'sanctuary,' 'private garden' and 'laboratory,' facilitating her hobbies, personal interests and commitment to providing medical care across the Tarland decks.[249] Contrary to other spaces in the Matilda, the botanarium is outside of the Sovereignty's knowledge and influence, making it a 'safe' space for self-expression, personal growth and experimentation.[250] Like the Matilda herself, the botanarium has its origins in an apocalyptic event (the flooding of X deck), the difference being that the botanarium has emerged as a site of resistance against the colonisation of Matilda. The botanarium is a location in which the potential of Matilda's apocalyptic history and Aster's own neuroqueer potential are being realised. As a laboratory, the botanarium represents a space of invention and creativity, the same kind of creativity and invention which Aster draws on to move through and between the field decks during the blackout. As a sanctuary, it is a place of healing and recovery, a place Aster goes to hide from those who'd hurt her. The botanarium is a reminder that 'everything is connected, back to the very first thing that ever was, and to the last thing that ever would be.'[251] Aster's sanctuary exists beyond the history and teleological apocalyptic narrative of the Sovereignty and is the place from which Aster's resistance against the Sovereign, the Guards and the ruling order comes.

Endings: Post-/Apocalyptic Environments as Sites of Connectivity

Connection to people, places and things is a driving theme throughout all three of the novels explored in this thesis. Lauren, Aster and Denise all seek more-than-human connections with the communities, friends and spaces they occupy. I argue these connections provide fulfilment and validation to the characters. Lauren's sharing connects her emotionally and physically to other people. Sharing is also metaphorical for the role empathy plays in building fluid, adaptable communities. Aster's ancestral connections with her mother transcend the world of the living through the artifacts Lune leaves behind and through the physical remains of her skeleton. Denise's connection to her cats provides her with comfort and security where the apocalypse has destroyed all else that was familiar and safe. The many kinds of connections portrayed in these texts are catalysts for resisting the restrictions placed on protagonists in terms of how they are allowed to occupy and move through apocalyptic spaces. In turn, I argue these subversions allow for alternative possible futurities to arise.

Before I turn to Chapter Three and to the futurities Butler, Duyvis and Solomon portray, however, I turn here to the how each author ends their novels. Whilst they depict very different futures with

[248] Solomon, p. 25.
[249] Solomon, p. 25.
[250] Solomon, p. 27.
[251] Solomon, p. 251.

vastly different trajectories for the future of humanity, each futurity contains a utopian vision of the protagonists' relationship to Earth (both the planet and the soil). These relationships are defined by a more-than-human connection, which I am defining as a connection that is felt through 'thinking with non-human life' (Hall).[252] I have argued throughout this chapter that Butler, Duyvis and Solomon portray their Black, neurodivergent protagonists as understanding, navigating and working through the between space of apocalypse to subversive and deviant ends. Whilst my authors write from the perspective of human characters, I argue that the connections Denise, Aster and Lauren are portrayed as having with Earth transcend the kind of normative relations to environment identified in Black feminist critiques of mainstream environmental politics. In the context of apocalypse, the endings my authors provide offer up the seeds of new connections to Earth as a result of the neuroqueer ways in which Denise, Aster and Lauren embody their environments.

At the end of *Ghosts*, Aster escapes the Matilda on a shuttlecraft her mother was working on before her death and returns to Earth as a witness to a truly post-apocalyptic world. I do not understand post-apocalypse as Hicks, Gurr or De Cristofaro do, as the survival of civilisation as we know it, but as Aliosha Pittaka Bielenberg does in 'Black Studies and Geological Thinking,' as a geological era that is post-Anthropocene. As explored in Chapter Two, Bielenberg locates apocalypse at the onset of modernity, European colonisation of Native American land and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Modernity shares close ties with the concept of the Anthropocene, the ongoing geological era in which human activity is having a significant impact on Earth's climate and ecosystems, made worse by neoliberal fantasies of progression and growth. The continued negative impact of wealthy countries in the global north on Earth's climate and ecosystems and the continued apocalypse of modernity are inseparably intertwined. To reach a post-apocalyptic epoch would require the end or undoing of modernity and of the Anthropocene.[253] As I have argued, in *Ghosts* the Matilda functions to extend the structures of modernity and prevent a post-apocalyptic world, with its potential for alternative structures of survival, from being realised. By returning to Earth, Solomon releases Aster from the cycle of apocalypse and uses her to witness faer vision of what a post-apocalyptic, post-Anthropocene, post-modern Earth might be like.

Solomon imagines faer post-Anthropocene post-apocalypse as 'the Heavens' that the Sovereignty preached about: 'a perfect tangled mess of plant life.'[254] '[T]all grasses' and 'tawny shoots' reach up to Aster's arms and the 'largest trees' Aster has encountered stretching as far as her eyes can see.[255] I argue Solomon's future Earth is a macrocosm of Aster's botanarium, containing the same potential to

[252] Hall, p. 220.
[253] Bielenberg.
[254] Solomon, p. 347.
[255] Solomon, pp. 347 & 348.

provide entire landscapes and ecologies Aster can occupy without the threat of being interrupted or threatened. However, whilst the botanarium provides temporary sanctuary from the rest of Matilda and the Sovereignty, the Earth represents a sanctuary that is indefinite. A palpable, real Heaven mirrors how Butler writes about Heaven in *Parable*. Earthseed – the faith and the community – is meant to give people a 'unifying, purposeful life here on Earth' and hope for a 'real Heaven' for their children, 'not mythology or philosophy.'[256] The real Heaven cannot be reached through mere belief in a deity, or by living a sin-free life, it is something communities achieve through envisaging a better future and collaborating to achieve it. In *Ghosts*, the Sovereignty abuses their philosophy of Heaven to enforce a rigid society structure and order under the premise that their way of reaching the Heavenly Lands is the only way. Solomon, like Butler, proposes that a real Heaven, one that does not exist to support or replicate oppressive power structures but instead exists as an achievable reality, is built through more-than-human connections with environment.

Both Butler and Solomon establish intimate connections between their protagonists and the environments they embody at the ends of their novels through burying the bones of relatives and committing their memory to the 'black dirt.'[257] Coming at the end of their novels, Butler and Solomon use these burials to gesture to the new relationships and lives their characters are about to undertake, allowing the reader to feel that the connections being built exist beyond the limits of the text. Beginning with Butler's burial, the community bury the bones of Bankole's sister's family in a knitted shawl given to Bankole by Natividad. Bankole is at first reluctant to accept the shawl because such a beautiful item 'should serve the living.'[258] Natividad replies that '[Bankole is] living,' implying that the act of putting someone to rest serves the living through honouring the dead.[259] As well as burying the bones of Bankole's relatives, the group also plant acorns to represent the 'unburned, unburied dead' most people in the community had to 'walk away – or run – away from' in order to survive.'[260] Butler uses acorns as a way of 'life commemorating life' and symbolically names the Earthseed community Acorn as a part of committing to the land.[261] The symbol of the acorn calls to mind Yergeau's arguments about autistic rhetoric being entelechial through its drive and motion. Butler's Acorn both contains the potential for life and is the source of life. More than this, its people have survived the road through their drive for community and, it is implied, will continue to strive towards a futurity born from the memories, history, ancestry and kinship that inspired it.

[256] Butler, p. 261.
[257] Solomon, p. 349.
[258] Butler, p. 326.
[259] Butler, p. 326.
[260] Butler, p. 326.
[261] Butler, p. 326.

Solomon similarly inspires more-than-human connection through establishing the Earth as point of connection between Aster, Giselle and Lune. Solomon differs to Butler, however, in that Aster's burial also symbolises a healing process. Aster also wraps her mother's bones in a knitted blanket, before placing them in the basket in which Aster herself will have momentarily lain as a baby, just as Bankole's family's bones are wrapped in Natividad's shawl. The visual effect of Aster placing her mother in the earth seems symbolic of putting her mother's ghost to rest. As I will explore more in Chapter Three, on Matilda, Lune's presence is disruptive and subversive. Her ghost possesses Aster and drives her to physical violence and exhaustion. On Earth, Lune's presence is no longer possessive, but palpable. Her skeletal remains and clothes can be touched, but time has 'washed […] away' any scent the clothes once had so that 'no hint of her mother' remains.[262] Solomon uses Aster's interaction with Lune's skeleton to signify a new relationship between Aster and her mother, a relationship that is mirrored by Aster's relationship to Earth. Just as time washed away any scent of Lune from the clothes, time has also 'erased' any signs of the 'tragedy' that befell Earth one thousand years ago.[263] Whilst the scars of trauma will ultimately still lie beneath the surface and be carried both by the Earth and by Aster throughout their lives, the Earth's recovery symbolises that new life, new purpose and new connections can grow from old wounds.

Through Bielenberg's definition of modernity as apocalyptic, this tragedy may well refer to either or both a climactic apocalyptic event that made Earth uninhabitable or the scars of modernity itself. This would imply that time has erased the influence of human beings on the Earth's climate and eco-systems, has erased the physical history of modernity, the Anthropocene and the trauma these eras left on Earth's landscapes and environments. Aster putting her mother to rest is metaphorical for healing the generational trauma symbolised by Lune's possession of Aster's body being put to rest as well. The mirroring of Aster laying her trauma to rest within the dirt of the Earth's crust is metaphorical for her trauma being buried under and entwined with the substance from which new life grows. The abundance of life on Earth shows that despite the Earth's apocalyptic past, life has flourished. Despite Aster's history and the history of her people, she may also flourish now that she is no longer in the grasps of the Matilda's cyclical, unending apocalypse.

At the end of *Edge of Gone*, Denise leaves Earth on the Nassau, leaving Iris behind on Earth to help survivors. However, like Butler, Duyvis portrays hope for a lasting connection with Earth and, like Solomon, envisages the Nassau potentially returning to Earth in the not-too-distant future to help future survivors. Leaving the Earth behind, Denise mourns that she will not 'have the Earth beneath [her] feet,' but takes encouragement in that she will 'have borrowed patches of it in the park.'[264] The

[262] Solomon, p. 348.
[263] Solomon, p. 348.
[264] Duyvis, p. 456.

term borrowed has some important connotations here. What is borrowed is not owned and should be given back, imbuing the Nassau with a responsibility to return its borrowed resources to the planet, an idea I explore in more detail through Hall's queer crip feminist futurity in Chapter Three. The idea that the Nassau, a generation ship, has borrowed resources from Earth undercuts the colonial image of the generation ship. A post-colonial representation of a generation ship, such as Solomon's, focuses on what the ship has taken away from Earth, how the ship has removed people from the Earth forcibly, and how the ship has stolen, co-opted, appropriated, mimicked, and assimilated the environments, cultures and religious doctrines of Earth to imperial ends. Duyvis's representation of borrowed earth highlights the Nassau's historical and present reliance on the planet and uses this connection as a basis from which to argue for a future commitment.

To work towards sustainable, inclusive, neurocosmopolitan futurities, the destructive potential of apocalypse must be harnessed with the intention to deconstruct the harmful narratives of survival which dictate how individuals and groups are permitted to engage with apocalyptic spaces and temporalities. My texts highlight how these destructive, radical discourses and ways of being have and do already exist in the apocalyptic histories and climates of marginalised communities. The utopian ideal my authors build towards is rooted in the Black, queer and neuroqueer desire for a world in which Aster, Lauren and Denise feel accepted, safe and that they belong. Denise will have vines 'stringing the walkway railings guiding [her] to breakfast' and 'patterns in the walls [she] know[s] by heart.'[265] She will have her friends, a doctor helping her mum recover from addiction and a sister on Earth 'who's doing amazing things.'[266] Lauren will has Acorn, the name chosen for the land her Earthseed community settle on, and Aster has 'the black dirt' in which she, her mother and Giselle are 'sheathed.'[267] Each protagonist has a connection to the Earth that forms the basis for a futurity grounded in cosmopolitan and neuroqueer values.

The apocalypse is not a spatially or temporally fixed event in Earth's history. Throughout this chapter, I have instead argued that apocalypse constitutes the cumulative effects of increasing political, social, economic and environmental instability. In *Parable*, *Edge of Gone* and *Ghosts*, apocalyptic environments are portrayed through protagonists' embodiment of space and landscape, prioritising lived experience. In this context, the apocalypse is cyclical, ephemeral and residual, disrupting neoliberal notions of progression and refusing linear temporalities. Read through a Black feminist lens, authors' concerns with how their Black, neurodivergent protagonists occupy space and connect to the people and non-human life in those spaces draws attention to the importance of mobility and more-than-human connections. Connectedness is a motif which frames protagonists'

[265] Duyvis, p. 456.
[266] Duyvis, p. 456.
[267] Solomon, p. 349.

subversive use of space and characterises Black, neuroqueer relations to environment. Interdependency between people and environment challenges dominant narratives of colonisation and occupation so common to mainstream apocalyptic fiction. Understanding the connectedness of different environments also helps break down perceived binaries and boundaries between supposedly ordered civilised, safe environments provided by institutions of survival (such as generation ships and corporate towns) and unsafe, chaotic apocalyptic environments. For those who must or choose to occupy apocalyptic environments, neuroqueerly disorientating from neuronormative notions of purpose, directedness and intention grants a greater freedom of self-definition and adaptability. As I will explore in Chapter Three, moving through unstable, fluid, borderless landscapes therefore necessitates rejection of futurities which are themselves defined by arriving at a fixed point in space and time.

Chapter 3: Neuroqueer Futurities

In my final chapter, I turn to the futurities Solomon, Butler and Duyvis present in their novels and argue that motioning towards more inclusive worlds requires imagining neuroqueer, neurocosmopolitan futurities. In 'No Failure: Climate Change, Radical Hope, and Queer Crip Feminist Futures,' Kim K. Hall argues that 'queerness and disability are sites of imaginative alternatives, crucial to responding to […] climate change.'[268] For Hall, 'radical thinking about the meaning of the future and more liveable, sustainable worlds must strive to take into account and be accountable to the planet with which human lives and life in general is enmeshed.'[269] Through Hall's intersectional, queer crip futurity, relations to the planet upon which humanity lives/lived takes precedence in imagining alternative futurities to the established, institutionalised big picture narratives of survival portrayed by my authors. Incorporating Hall's queer crip centring of Earth into my Black feminist, neuroqueer understanding of human relations to environment, the alternative futurities represented in my texts emerge through protagonists' relationships with and ultimate reliance on the Earth as a source of life. As explored in Chapter Two, despite my authors envisaging vastly different endings to their novels, Earth, both the planet and the substance, is evoked as a point of connection. I interpret my authors' futurities as the methods by which their protagonists re/connect with Earth, either by travelling back to the planet, or through establishing new community connections through natural spaces. This interpretation follows on from the arguments I have made concerning apocalypse's neuroqueer in-betweenness. Muñoz argues that the 'future is queerness's domain,' that queerness is an identity 'that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future.'[270] I argue that my author's neuroqueer futurities exist in partnership with apocalypse's betweenity; that in working through and with the apocalypse, protagonists draw on their personal history and that of their ancestors to imagine alternative possibilities, so framing apocalypse by the past and future of those who exist in the present.

My authors imagine very different futurities around their apocalyptic settings, and I apply Hall and Muñoz to different ends in each text. Solomon's futurity reads as a synthesis of two main schools of thought: queer failure and radical hope. Building on my analysis in Chapter One of how queer failure characterises neuroqueer epistemes, I argue that the character of Giselle, Aster's childhood friend and companion, embodies a neuroqueer destructive potential. She envisages a future in which Matilda and everyone on board are destroyed, including herself. Giselle's neuroqueer death-drive is both

[268] Hall, p. 205.
[269] Hall, p. 207.
[270] Muñoz, p. 1.

antagonistic yet fundamentally influential to Aster's own relationship with the past and the future, which, I argue, embodies Hall's theorisation of queer radical hope. Hall distils their interpretation of radical hope from Muñoz's utopian hermeneutics, in which utopia exists as an ideal to strive towards, as opposed to a destination to be actually realised.[271] Hall argues that queer crip feminist theorists must imagine radically different ways of relating to and living in the world, beginning with the acknowledgment that the future of climate change 'will be queer and disabled in the sense that current norms for privileged human life, including mobility and the planet's climate, will not be in operation.'[272] Contemporary queer theory scholarship places the notion of queer failure and radical hope as polar opposites, however I argue that in *Ghosts* neuroqueer destructive potential and radical hope work together in propelling Aster towards the alternative, liveable world she discovers upon her return to Earth.

Butler's futurity is framed by the Destiny of Earthseed. Lauren envisages humanity leaving Earth and adapting to other habitable planets, placing Butler's futurity at odds with Duyvis's and Solomon's narratives of planetary colonisation as privileging patriarchal, cis-heteronormative, racist and ableist assumptions about survival. However, in striving towards this future, Butler, I argue, imagines a neurocosmopolitan community. Walker argues that neurocosmopolitanism, alongside neuroqueerness, is a key aspect of any futurity that has been informed and driven by the neurodiversity paradigm. Where the neuroqueer individual perceives the intricate ties between gender and neurological identities, the neurocosmopolitan individual embraces difference in neurological identity as a natural expression of human diversity. Just as the cosmopolitan individual 'is comfortable with the vast spectrum of cultural and ethnic differences among people and appreciates and welcomes those differences as sources of aesthetic, intellectual, cultural, and creative enrichment,' the neurocosmopolitan individual or community 'accepts and welcomes neurocognitive differences in experience, communication, and embodiment' in the same fashion.[273] Butler's Earthseed community is neurodiverse, and embracing the groups' neurodiversity is key to the future they aspire to build together.

Duyvis's futurity combines aspects of neurocosmopolitanism and queer radical hope to envisage the Nassau committing to Earth's uncertain future, regardless of what that future might hold. As in *Ghosts*, Duyvis portrays futurity through Denise's autistic perspective, except where Solomon uses Aster as the primary vessel through which alternative futurities are argued for, Duyvis uses Denise's sister, Iris, to advocate for the survivors who will be left on Earth. Through listening to Iris, Denise becomes more self-aware and critical of the restrictive assumptions she internalised about surviving,

[271] Muñoz, p. 3.
[272] Hall, p. 223.
[273] Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future…'.

vulnerability and necessity. Duyvis highlights the crucial fact that autistic perspectives are not inherently critical within and of themselves. Rather, a neuroqueer futurity is only envisaged through thinking through disability and neurodiversity queerly, as Iris does. I draw the threads of my three chapters together through finishing with *Edge of Gone* and Duyvis's argument for committing to Earth's uncertain future, in the context of Black environmental thought and neuroqueer possibility.

Solomon: Destructive potential and the past

In the Tarland cultures and in Solomon's locating of apocalypse, the past is present within the bodyminds of the living and in the ephemera of the apocalyptic events that make up Matilda's history. The past is present in the ghosts the novel is named for, especially in the form of Aster's mother, Lune, and in the diaries, notes and radiolabe Lune leaves behind after her mysterious disappearance.[274] I examine Aster's and Giselle's approaches towards the past and the future to reveal an interconnectedness between queer failure and radical hope in the pursuit of alternative futurities. The past inspires and moves beside and between the efforts of Aster and Giselle as a sentient presence within the text. I interpret the past as neuroqueering existing beliefs about the future, both those enforced by the Sovereignty and those passed down in Tarland cultures.

Solomon begins *Ghosts* with an exploration of the two accepted futurities open to Matilda and all who live on her: destruction or finding a habitable planet. Fae introduce these two concepts through a flashback to Aster and Giselle playing dolls together as children. Aster's doll is a scientist whose research has led to the discovery of a habitable planet, a home for the people of HSS Matilda. Giselle's doll is a professor who 'plans to set off a bomb' and 'blow everyone up,' destroying Matilda and killing all aboard her.[275] Aster and Giselle's approaches to the future both resonate with Muñoz's theorisation of queer futurities. Being concerned with past and future, Muñoz argues that queerness is a rejection of the 'here and now' (the present) and that queerness arises from the feeling that the world as it is, is not enough.[276] Solomon depicts an active rejection of the here and now in favour of make-believing a future beyond the confines of Matilda. In the following paragraphs, I will explore Aster's rejection of Matilda more closely. Before I discuss this, however, an analysis of Giselle's destructive rejection of Matilda is required. I read Giselle's approach to futurity as a representation of Afro-Pessimism. As described by Bielenberg, Afro-Pessimism argues 'the only end to anti-Blackness

[274] To avoid confusion, throughout my discussion of Solomon in Chapter Three, I will use "the past" to refer broadly to the neuroqueer, sentient presence of the past within the fabric of events. I will then refer to the presence of ephemera, apocalypse or ghosts adjacent to highlight the specific form and purpose the past takes.
[275] Solomon, p. 29.
[276] Muñoz, p. 1.

imaginable is the end of the world,' because the world is 'constitutively anti-Black.'[277] Bielenberg describes Afro-Pessimism as a kind of apocalypticism, drawing on historical, ontological and geological framings of the end of world. Giselle's futurity, enacted through her impulse to destroy, embraces an Afro-Pessimistic apocalypticism, and functions as an antagonising force to Aster's hope for an alternative world in which she is appreciated and accepted.

Giselle's destructive rejection of Matilda neuroqueerly resists the survival narrative and utopian futurity of Sovereignty. As explored in Chapter Two, the future of Matilda is precarious, with the likelihood of reaching a Promised Land seemingly non-existent. The Sovereignty deals with this precarity through imposing a strict moral order. Giselle's disorientation towards the future is instead characterised by embracing and taking advantage of precarity and disorder. She wants to 'be like fire,' to 'burn up and be burned and explode,' desiring to embody, be and enact destruction upon the entirety of Matilda.[278] I read Giselle's desire for all-encompassing destruction as resonating with Yergeau's theorisation of the *plastique* and neuroqueer potential. In medical discourses on autism, autistic children are often storied as having plastic, malleable brains, which can be trained and re-wired to function in a more neuronormative way. Reclaiming neuroqueer plasticity, Yergeau calls upon the *plastique*, a substance that can be used creatively, to mould and sculpture, and is also 'an explosive substance made of nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose, capable of causing violent explosions.'[279] Embracing the dually explosive and creative potential of neuroqueer beingness, I argue a neuroqueer futurity must incorporate the kind of self-destructive death-drive Solomon portrays in Giselle, for in Giselle's desire for self-destruction there exists the potential for creating oneself anew.

The failure to survive, or the desire to be destroyed and destroy everything, exists in polar opposition to the Sovereignty's big picture narrative of survival. Giselle understands death to be 'rebirth in disguise.'[280] Through her perspective, Solomon writes that it is not possible to destroy something, only remake it and Giselle chooses to 'exert control by burning [living things] away.'[281] At the end of novel, Giselle burns down Aster's botanarium and is sentenced to death by Lieutenant. Faced with execution, Giselle stabs herself as a way of taking control over her own death. Solomon describes Giselle as 'forever defiant.'[282] She does not let the guards 'take her, not when she [can] so easily take herself.'[283] Giselle takes control over her fate and chooses self-destruction as this source of control. I read Giselle's act of defiance as an example of interlocking queer failure and Afro-pessimism.

[277] Bielenberg.
[278] Solomon, p. 30.
[279] Yergeau, p. 133.
[280] Solomon, p. 63.
[281] Solomon, p. 63.
[282] Solomon, p. 334.
[283] Solomon, p. 334.

Yergeau argues that failure is integral to neuroqueering and speaks of failure through the same kind of total embodiment as Solomon. There's 'queer potentiality' in failure, 'in awkwardly embarking upon that which results in unintended effects.'[284] Queer failure is a means of defying the linear models of success that position autistic and neurodivergent people as lacking in all things human: autistics 'displace and are displaced.'[285] The power to displace and to end others rests in embracing and channelling one's own displacement and ending, hence the significant synonymity of destroying Matilda and destroying self. The Afro-pessimistic implications of Solomon's portrayal of Giselle is the radical argument that the goal of surviving should come second to subverting and destroying those institutions of survival which seek to re-establish or prolong discriminatory, unequal futurities. In the face of potentially no alternative to the Matilda and to the Sovereignty's regime, destruction holds meaning when it ends suffering.

Solomon portrays Giselle's method of queer failure as an essential, but not exclusive, aspect of how Aster resists the Sovereignty and the brutality of the guards. Aster embraces Giselle's death-drive as a blueprint for avenging Giselle after she is raped by one of the guards. Helping Aster access the coronation, her friend and supporter Theo disguises her as a man. The physical transformation affects Aster's inner confidence and character. Her new haircut especially makes her feel 'unlatched and freed.'[286] She feels she could 'cut [someone] open with her partial and frontal bones.'[287] She 'wanted to be the knife' and 'to be knived.'[288] The phrasing of destructive intent mirrors Giselle's desire to be like fire, to burn and be burned. Aster adopts Giselle's destructive way of being by combining it with her own episteme of halves and halving. An extension of her obsession with detail and betweenness, Aster is 'obsessed with bifurcation,' the division of a thing into parts, and she would readily use her new-found sharpness to break apart Matilda's 'tiny universe.'[289] Being directed by neuroqueer explosivity and Afro-pessimism creates momentum for resistance and change, a momentum without which striving towards alternative futurities would not be possible.

If queer failure is the mode through which Aster and Giselle challenge the Sovereignty, radical queer hope is the method Solomon employs to imagine palpable, achievable futures beyond the Sovereignty and Matilda. Throughout the novel, Aster's search for Lune's ghost resurfaces discoveries Lune made about Matilda's history which both Aster and Giselle use to imagine towards a future beyond the Sovereignty's grasp. In Part Two of the novel, Giselle and Aster discover Matilda's Shuttle Bay. It has been long abandoned and is filled with more of Lune's notes, except these notes,

[284] Yergeau, p. 182.
[285] Yergeau, p. 183.
[286] Solomon, p. 212.
[287] Solomon, p. 212.
[288] Solomon, p. 213.
[289] Solomon, p. 213.

mathematical workings and diagrams are not in code. In them is a chart of the stars drawn using molecules. The star chart reveals a habitable planet, leading Aster and Giselle to conclude that Lune 'found a way out.'[290] The resurfacing of this knowledge encourages the friends to imagine and commit to a potential alternative future other than the Matilda or death. The queer nature of this future is located in what Hall identifies as a commitment to 'alternative ways of life' in the 'context of uncertainty.'[291] Hall's model of queer crip feminist eco-futures acknowledges the uncertain nature of how human beings will interact with future environments and eco-systems, indeed if humans will still exist in the future at all. Giselle and Aster do not know what the nature of the Lune's discovered world is, but that it exists and that Lune 'knew how to get there' gives Giselle and Aster hope for something other.[292] Committing themselves to a world that has the potential to be 'better' exemplifies the kind of radical hope Hall argues is necessary to move towards more sustainable, liveable worlds, positioning this aspect of Solomon's futurity within the ideological framework of radical hope. Uncovering the past motions towards a future that holds the potential for realising alternative worlds and ways of being.

Solomon endows the past with a complex presence and motion which fae introduce through Tarlander understandings of past, ancestry and history. The past has symbolic and lived significance in Tarlander cultures. Solomon writes that '[a] part of each person lay in their past, in their parentage and grandparentage,' conveying an interconnectedness and fluidity between past and present arising through cultural understandings of identity.[293] History 'wanted to be remembered. Evidence hated having to live in dark, hidden places and devoted itself to resurfacing.'[294] In Chapter Two, I argued that apocalypse's neuroqueer potential to reveal alternative ways of being is repressed by the Sovereignty in favour of imposing and perpetuating repressive structures of modernity. Expanding on that analysis, I understand Solomon's portrayal of the past as a sentient entity desiring to resurface as symbolic of the apocalypse striving to be fully realised, and the evidence of that past as the ephemera of apocalypse – of Change – of ghosts 'refusing to be forgot.'[295]

As explored in Chapter One, Aster has a neuroqueer system of meaning-making and validating knowledge. Her neuroqueer episteme has implications for how she relates to the world around her, including how she relates to the past and the future. Early on in the novel, Solomon recollects a memory from Aster's childhood. When she was seven, Melusine introduced her to an obscura that had been passed down through the generations of Melusine's family. Each generation took one photo,

[290] Solomon, p. 151.
[291] Hall, p. 224.
[292] Solomon, p. 151.
[293] Solomon, p. 23.
[294] Solomon, p. 59.
[295] Solomon, p. 59.

all the way back to before the Matilda, as a way of 'memorating' the history of their ancestors.[296] To Melusine, the significance of the obscura lies in how it contributes to a wider cultural practice of documenting one's memories for future generations. These photos are a source of knowledge. They are created with the expectation that they will be used by future generations to remember their past. The obscura represents the history that has been and the history that is yet to be made. Aster, on the other hand, enjoys the 'level of detail' rendered on paper form.[297] She steals the obscura from Melusine's trunk and accidentally takes a photo of her foot as she examines it. The photo appears 'immediately, nothing at first, then metamorphosing' into a 'document of her foot.'[298] Using Melusine's language of documenting to narrate Aster's wonder at possessing this image of herself shows how Aster's interpretation of the significance of remembering is far more objective. She takes pleasure in creating symmetry and in examining details. She is interested in them not because they reflect an important historical or cultural moment, but because they are objectively interesting.

At the beginning of the novel, Aster's relationship with the past follows her object-orientated perspective. In searching for her mother's ghost, Aster 'decod[es] the past,' just as she decodes 'the physical world.'[299] Solomon's portrayal of decoding the present speaks to autistic and wider neurodivergent experiences of navigating institutions, social structures and cultural organisations which are exclusive to neurotypical bodyminds. Autistics often describe navigating social interactions with neurotypical people as having to decode facial expressions, body language and gestures. Aster's relationship to her mother and to the past more broadly is moulded by Aster's experiences of unpicking lucid rhetorical gestures and nonsensical institutionalised rules. Solomon describes Aster as a 'precisionist.'[300] Reflecting on how other people speak about the past, Aster argues that stories 'offer summary and conclusion where there [is] none.'[301] People will say there was a definitive moment or year when 'everything changed,' but to Aster these claims are reductionist.[302] She desires to know the 'precise unfolding of events' that led to the perceived change and whether the change existed as a specific moment or whether it emerged through multiple large events 'with 1,018 tiny indications in the in-between.'[303] Aster's attentiveness to the between spaces these traditional stories gloss over speaks to Yergeau's claims that to be autistic is to 'live and lie in a between space,' or, in this example, to be aware of the past as something(s) beyond claims of objective certainty.[304] Similar to how Butler

[296] Solomon, p. 69.
[297] Solomon, p. 69.
[298] Solomon, p. 70.
[299] Solomon, p. 147.
[300] Solomon, p. 48.
[301] Solomon, p. 48.
[302] Solomon, p. 48.
[303] Solomon, p. 49.
[304] Yergeau, p. 176.

embraces inevitable Change and uncertainty as a way of opening up possibilities for how to think about the future in *Parable*, Solomon's neuroqueer perspective on the past holds the same potentiality in attentiveness to detail in *Ghosts*.

Aster's neuroqueer relationship with the past moulds Solomon's narration of how the past resurfaces in the present. Just as Duyvis uses Denise's autistic perspective to describe the ephemerality of objects moving in the waters of apocalyptic Amsterdam, Solomon portrays the past resurfacing in the form of residual entelechies. Aster owns a radiolabe which used to belong to Lune. Lune built the radiolabe to detect a substance called siluminium. Until coming into contact with siluminium herself, Aster believes the radiolabe to be broken because it will not detect any other kind of radiation. Aster did everything she could as a child to get the machine working, even tried using the device 'to sense' the types of radiation not of 'the natural world,' ghosts.[305] Aster's childhood instinct that the device detects ghosts is symbolically true. When Aster comes across siluminium the radiolabe starts beeping. Solomon presents the beeping as Lune speaking to Aster; her presence is 'everywhere' in the room.[306] I read the ticks and clicks of the radiolabe as neuroqueer entelechies, as rhetorical gestures of Lune's ghost motioning towards truths about Matilda's history that have been repressed, arising unexpectedly. Yergeau explains that where entelechies are traditionally interpreted as both 'cause and final outcome,' therefore representing something that is completed in its 'contained unfolding,' neuroqueer entelechies are defined by their directedness and motioning.[307] In striving to succeed, the neuroqueer leaves behind residues of their movements and within these residues, as explored in Chapter Two, lie the potential for alternative means of surviving, living and thriving through the world. The beeps are a form of communication which disrupts the linear passage of time, merging the past and present into an experience of closeness reflected by Aster's repetition of 'Mother, oh Mother, oh Mother.'[308] Through Aster's neuroqueer perspective, the past neuroqueers the present, giving purpose to things that were deemed purposeless and unearthing discoveries that existing knowledge cannot explain.

In making Aster's project the uncovering of Lune's past and Matilda's past, Solomon intertwines Aster's search for her mother with the resurfacing motion of the past. The focus on memory and remembering even those things which have been lost merges the distinction between remembering and re-discovering/resurfacing, so that Aster functions as a vessel for the past's apocalyptic strivings towards alternative possible futures. When a guard drunkenly beats two of Aster's friends and then attempts to strike Aster she resists him, grabbing hold of his wrist and throwing him out of the cabin.

[305] Solomon, p. 26.
[306] Solomon, p. 138.
[307] Yergeau, p. 75.
[308] Solomon, p. 138.

Solomon's narration reflects the emboldening feeling Aster experiences from this act of defiance. She feels she is proving her 'commitment to rebellion' against Matilda's ruling order through standing up to this 'foolish,' 'weak' guard.[309] Solomon suggests that it is the 'ghost of [Aster's] mother… possessing her' which makes her feel so brave, interweaving Aster's resistance in this present moment with the struggle of the past resurfacing and making itself known.[310] The act of remembering, and the form of communication the past uses here, is physical and embodied. This is not the only time Aster feels the presence of Lune working through her bodymind. Solomon presents Lune's ghosts working through Aster when she leaves Flick's amputated limb for the new Sovereign (Lieutenant). As Aster places the box with Flick's foot in it with the other presents Aster has 'the distinct feeling she [is] committing an act of self-immolation.'[311] Aster wonders if 'the ghost of her mother had inspired her' to commit this act, just as Lune inspired her to stand up to the guard that was beating her bunkmates.[312] These moments of possession and resistance are the catalysts for the plot developments which lead Aster and Giselle to discover the Shuttle Bay and to pursue an alternative future to a life trapped on Matilda. The past's destructive force leads to moments of hope for something else in the future.

As Aster discovers more about the history of Matilda and about her mother, so the path to realising an alternative futurity becomes clearer. This futurity does not take the form a clear-cut, teleological big picture narrative of survival, but as a puzzle which must be pieced together. These pieces comprise Lune's life and work: of her discovery that Matilda was hit by an asteroid, of how she figured out how to over-ride Matilda's navigation systems, traverse a blackhole and send Matilda back to the Great Lighthouse (Earth). 'Aster loved to read Lune's true voice rather than the deliberately obscure personality she'd come to know in the other journals,' however Lune's obscure personality is just as important as her real voice, because within Lune's coded work is found the information Aster needs to realise the future Lune wanted for her.[313] The final clue is the password to the shuttle Aster uses to escape Matilda at the end of the novel. To solve the puzzle, Aster needs to '[t]hink like a ghost.'[314] Thinking like a ghost could mean thinking like Lune or thinking as an ephemeral being. Hall writes that 'how one becomes what one is requires thinking with non-human life.'[315] In the context of Hall's article, non-human life refers to glaciers, or mountains, however, in applying this statement to Solomon's portrayal of the relationship between Aster, the past and Lune, I argue that queerly drawing

[309] Solomon, p. 53.
[310] Solomon, p. 54.
[311] Solomon, p. 222.
[312] Solomon, p. 222.
[313] Solomon, p. 157.
[314] Solomon, p. 346.
[315] Hall, p. 220.

upon the past to imagine and strive towards the future involves embracing more-than-human embodiments of the past and present.

To achieve this more-than-human embodiment, Solomon portrays Aster transitioning over the course of the novel from being orientated towards the past as a source of answers, to disorientating towards the future and embracing the past as a method of striving. The plot of *Ghosts* begins with Aster committing herself to discovering the truth of Lune's disappearance and is driven by her desire to know her 'creator' so she can 'peer into herself and see more than what Matilda had made her.'[316] Aster looks to the past for answers throughout the novel, uncovering the secrets of Lune's notes and tracking down the people who knew Lune for information about her. However, Aster's orientation towards the past is in direct conflict with the past's Afrofuturist, Black, neuroqueer orientation towards the future, a conflict that climaxes in Chapter Twenty-Two, in which Aster journeys to Matilda's Bowels to talk to Seamus Ludnecki, the engineer who helped Lune in the shuttle bay twenty-five years ago. Aster's goal is to retrieve the books Seamus took out of the library before Lune's death and to learn more about who Lune was as a person. However, instead Aster's experience is defined by the panic, pain and vulnerability she feels in reaction to taunts from the lowdeck workers. Solomon describes Aster feeling 'repulsed' by the thought of herself, the memories of childhood abuse and of having her experiences consistently unvalidated wrapping a 'rope around her neck.'[317] In self-defence Aster breaks the leg of a man who tries to beat her. As with other moments of resistance, the past is present, 'swooping in' as 'an unkindness of ghosts.'[318] Calling upon the book's title, Solomon centres the past to Aster's actions and reflection. The past comes forth as memories which cannot be 'unmemoried,' that possess and strengthen Aster in the moment, but that ultimately '[use] her up.'[319] Acknowledging the negative impact of how the past is influencing her, Aster realises that there is no stability or concrete sense of identity that she can find from giving herself to the past – if she gives herself to the past, she will be worn out.

The chapter finishes with Aster reflecting that as an 'orphan' she doesn't 'deserve a name.'[320] In Chapter Two of this thesis, I argued that by referring to the Matilda as an orphan Solomon portrayed Matilda as directionless and therefore imbued with a freedom of indirection that resonates with Muñoz's, Hall's and Yergeau's theorisation of queer potential. Positioning Aster within the same, unlocatable position, Solomon portrays Aster as using the absence of her past to re-imagine herself. She is 'boundless' and can 'metamorphose;' she can be 'a shiny, magnificent version of herself.'[321] Like

[316] Solomon, p. 272.
[317] Solomon, p. 273; Solomon, p. 274.
[318] Solomon, p. 279.
[319] Solomon, p. 279.
[320] Solomon, p. 282.
[321] Solomon, p. 283.

Matilda, Aster is imbued with the queer potential of being temporally unfixed and undefinable. Similar to Butler's representation of Lauren freeing herself from the present in *Parable*, Solomon presents a reorientation from treating the past as a source of answers to the present to accepting the lucid nature of the past and looking forward into the future. In this shift of orientation, Aster becomes more aligned with the past's neuroqueer striving than ever before, having massive implications for how apocalypse and survival are enacted through her. In the context of Solomon's representation of the past as striving to work through the bodyminds of living, Aster's openness towards fluidity of self means the past can now work with Aster, instead of merely through her.

Solomon's exploration of the past as striving to resurface, of Aster's neuroqueer navigation of the past and future, and of Giselle's commitment to destruction culminates in the final part of *Ghosts* with the destruction of Aster's botanarium, a mutiny led by Aster and Theo, and Aster escaping Matilda. The destruction of the botanarium removes the final obstacle that keeps Aster tied to the present. The sanctuary, as explored in Chapter Two, is located in a cycle of apocalypses, in the flooding of X Deck, in the wider apocalyptic history and circumstances of the lowdeck nations and of Matilda more broadly. It is an inherently unstable space, but as a sanctuary it offers stability and the ability for Aster to assert her own order within a space outside of the Sovereignty's control. As in *Parable* and Lauren's neighbourhood sanctuary, the botanarium ties Aster to the present in ways that are counterproductive to the pursuit of an alternative, sustainable future. To pursue the cause of radical queer hope and to depart from the here and now, queer failure must step in. Giselle perceives herself and Aster to have no history, no connection to their ancestors or to the 'One True Mother,' positioning Giselle as having understood for years what Aster is only just beginning to come to terms with.[322] Giselle channels this knowledge and anger into destructive acts. Being a 'physical' person, she likes to 'tear things apart;' so when left alone in the botanarium, she tears apart Aster's sanctuary.[323] Giselle is methodical in her burning, beginning with the plants Aster was cultivating, before moving to Aster's charts, notes and folders, taking 'special care to get ethanol alcohol on her mother's papers.'[324] In the pursuit of being like fire, of burning things and being burned, Giselle destroys the botanarium in an attempt to commit suicide. The suicide attempt does not work, but botanarium is destroyed, the past apocalypses resurfacing through Giselle's actions. The burning of botanarium upsets Aster greatly, because to 'end [the leftover belongings of a person] was to end their history, their present, their future.'[325] However, Solomon disproves this belief by leading Aster to real, physical remains of her mother's body in the shuttle Aster uses to escape Matilda. Lune's ghost is given a future through

[322] Solomon, p. 319.
[323] Solomon, p. 319.
[324] Solomon, p. 320.
[325] Solomon, p. 327.

Aster's pursuit of the very thing Lune was guiding Matilda and Aster back to. Lune lives through Aster because of this. Giselle and Aster's different approaches to the past emerge as two sides of the same *plastique* coin: one creates as the other destroys, and therein lies the intertwined relationship between radical hope and queer failure within a neuroqueer futurity.

Butler: Neurocosmopolitan Communities

Where, in *Ghosts*, Solomon spends almost the entire novel working towards a release from the present so that an alternative future can be pursued, the entire latter half of *Parable* is dedicated to working towards a futurity that is grounded in neurocosmopolitan communities. As explored in Chapters One and Two, *Parable* is deeply concerned with the legacies of colonialism, slavery and segregation; using the past to inform how characters think about the future is both a queer and Black approach to futurity. I trace how Butler develops her Black, neurocosmopolitan futurity from the destruction of the neighbourhood to the foundation of the first Earthseed settlement. Butler uses the collapse of the neighbourhood to generate shifts in Lauren's attitudes towards sharing, hyperempathy, knowledge and community. Building her Earthseed community alongside developing Earthseed itself, I argue that it is in the diversity of the community, their conversations with each other and the sharing of Earthseed verses that mould futurity in *Parable*.

Nick Walker argues that a future that 'has embraced and been transformed by the neurodiversity paradigm […] would be neurocosmopolitan and it would be neuroqueer.'[326] A neuroqueer individual is one who perceives their gender and sexuality to be intricately intertwined with their neurology. They work to dismantle normative assumptions about gender and neurology and grow awareness of how the two are intertwined in popular cultural, clinical and academic discourses. The neurocosmopolitan individual or community 'accepts and welcomes neurocognitive differences in experience, communication, and embodiment' in the same way that a cosmopolitan individual embraces and celebrates cultural and ethnic differences.[327] Neurocosmopolitanism and neuroqueerness work together, mutually advocating for interconnectivity between neurology and other embodied identities, and between different neurotypes. I argue that the Earthseed community Butler builds over the course of the novel is a neurocosmopolitan community in which sharers like Lauren are valued and are able to support each other with the strains and stresses of being a sharer in an apocalyptic world. Nearing the end of the novel, Lauren realises that two of the adults of her Earthseed community and their two children are sharers, like she is. Being able to meet and talk to other sharers unlocks a shared dialect between the characters. On the road, the group are attacked

[326] Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future…'.
[327] Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future…'.

and are forced to kill their attackers in self-defence. Afterwards, Mora, one of the adult sharers, asks Lauren '[h]ow many times [she died]' with the attackers around her and Lauren casually responds that she died at least three times, 'as though [discussing how many times she died] were a sane conversation.'[328] Talking about her experiences as a sharer without having to labour over explaining the psychological, physical and emotional aspects of sharing is revelatory and validating. It is as if Lauren is 'speaking a language [she] hadn't realized [she] knew.'[329] Read through a neurodiversity studies perspective, the discovery of a shared language born from shared experiences opens up the possibility of a shared culture and shared identity from which, I argue, can emerge a shared, neurocosmopolitan futurity.

Even before Lauren's neighbourhood is destroyed, one of her future goals is to find 'other people' who are sharers and 'live among them.'[330] On the road, Lauren manages to draw other sharers to her by creating a community in which sharing is understood and valued. I understand the neurocosmopolitan nature of Butler's Earthseed community as extending directly from the racial and ethnic diversity of the group. One of the defining futures of *Parable* is Butler's attention to the racial and ethnic diversity of the people who join the travelling community. Mora, Emery and their children are 'racially mixed' as well as sharers.[331] As explored in Chapter One, sharing works as an extension of racial and ethnic diversity, metaphorical for the historic and contemporary cultural significance of sharing, inter-dependency and community in African American and other racial minority cultures in America. Embracing racial diversity in a racially divided landscape nurtures security, especially for those who are mixed race and are unlikely to receive protection from either or any of their respective communities. Earthseed's focus on embracing diversity as a means to unification and survival in an apocalyptic environment helps create the foundations for an alternative way of being in the world. What this translates to on the road is a group in which neurodivergent identities exist in addition to and parallel to racial diversity, just as Walker argues neurocosmopolitanism exists in addition to and parallel to cosmopolitanism.

Being racially diverse and neurodiverse, Butler's Earthseed community is characterised by complex relations between characters of different neurological, gendered and racial identities. Discussing their experience as sharers, Lauren comments that Mora 'look[s] well enough' after having just been in a fight, a dig at the fact that he did not participate in defending the group from their attackers, as Lauren did.[332] The comment has gendered undertones, and Lauren reads into Mora's reaction plain

[328] Butler, p. 300.
[329] Butler, p. 300.
[330] Butler, p. 115.
[331] Butler, p. 287.
[332] Butler, p. 300.

discomfort at the idea that he, a 'man' and 'fellow sharer,' did not fight alongside the women of the group.[333] Read neuroqueerly, Butler seems to suggest that Mora is unable to fulfil the traditional, masculine role of the protector because of what he perceives as his 'terrible vulnerability.'[334] Mora's self-perceived weakness complicates how he relates to potential power dynamics in the group. Mora is acutely nervous about Harry, a white, neurotypical man, being in the group. In his experience, and in the context of Butler's dystopian America and America's history, it is white men who enslave sharers and people of colour. Emery informs Harry that he would be able to earn money as a 'driver.'[335] Harry, in his ignorance, thinks Emery is talking about driving a vehicle and Emery has to explain that she means 'driving people. Making them work.'[336] Mora and Emery's perceptions of Harry highlight how he stands to benefit from socio-political structures of privilege and oppression. As the socio-economic structures of slavery re-emerge out of America's past, often the only jobs available are 'slave or slave driver.'[337] Harry's privilege means he does not rely on the group's diversity for security and may well do better leaving the group behind and earning money through taking advantage of that privilege. His presence therefore raises questions about the power structures within Lauren's community, power structures that are influenced not only by gender and race, but also neurodiversity. In response to Mora's concerns about Harry's presence in the group, Lauren uses the principle of sharing to offer Mora security in the knowledge that, in this particular community, the group remain 'strong' by 'help[ing] each other.'[338] The group may contain traces of broader socio-political power structures, but through centring the needs of the most vulnerable, no one person is permitted to dominate and no one need measure themself by normative expectations.

Navigating the different power relations within the group in ways that sustain neurocosmopolitan values requires empathy between its members. I argue Butler's Earthseed verses function as a neurocosmopolitan meeting place, as defined by Ralph Savarese. The neurocosmopolitan meeting place is a space in which neurodivergent and neurotypical forms of symbolic and patterned communication can co-exist and inform each other. 'Poetry,' for example, 'constitutes a linguistic meeting place: one that, however hospitable, requires adjustment and accommodation on both sides of the neurological divide.'[339] Whilst I strongly disagree with Savarese that there is a binary "neurological divide" between the neurotypical and the neurodivergent, Butler's Earthseed verses

[333] Butler, p. 300.
[334] Butler, p. 324.
[335] Butler, p. 323.
[336] Butler, p. 323.
[337] Butler, p. 323.
[338] Butler, p. 302.
[339] Ralph Savarese, 'From Neurodiversity to Neurocosmopolitanism: Beyond Mere Acceptance and Inclusion', in *Ethics and Neurodiversity*, ed. by Alexandra Perry, Anthony Yankowski & Chris Herrera (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 191 - 205, p. 200.

function as linguistic meeting places that, in their poetic form, invite individuals to interpret, question and empathise.

A clear example of Lauren's neurocosmopolitan attitude at work is in the conversation where she comes out as a sharer to Zahra and Harry. Lauren takes the lead disclosing her identity to her friends, dictating the conversation and encouraging Zahra and Harry to question their own assumptions about what it is like to be disabled. Whilst Zahra, who has experience living in the world, accepts and embraces Lauren as a sharer and valued member of the group, Harry tells Lauren that he feels he has been lied to and demands Lauren show him something that is a 'real' reflection of herself.[340] In Chapter One, I explored the ableist assumptions and racist legacies underpinning Harry's reaction to Lauren disclosing her neurodivergence. Lauren responds to Harry's request by sharing the Earthseed verse that summarise her belief system about Change.[341] As well as testifying to Lauren's neuroqueer episteme, Lauren's disclosure serves as a gateway to sharing her identity, her worldview and her Earthseed verses with Harry and Zahra. In this moment, sharing, both the neurological sharing and sharing her verses, emerges as a neuroqueer act that can affect all the bodyminds involved regardless of individual styles of neurocognitive functioning. The verse Lauren chooses to show Harry summarises Lauren's God-is-Change belief system through illustrating the interconnectedness of all existing things and act as a way for Lauren to share her lived experiences to Harry and Zahra. They gesture to the motion that is created by an individual within an environment, teaching self-awareness and awareness of others, all of which are neurocosmopolitan values. Sharing emerges as a neurocosmopolitan ideal, alongside a Black feminist philosophy, and as a method of opening oneself up to others, as a motioning towards a way of being in the world in which people take responsibility for each other and question their assumptions about how the world should be. I argue that Butler's Earthseed verses function in a similar way to Lune's journals and diaries in *Ghosts*, providing the inspiration for alternative ways of being in the world. Reflecting back on Solomon, Lune's encrypted journals have the same neurocosmopolitan function as Butler's Earthseed poetry, for it is only when Aster and Giselle work together to decode the diary that Lune's alternative futurity can be realised. Neuroqueer, Black futurities can only be reached through neurocosmopolitan, Black feminist means of collective thought and action.

Further comparing Butler's futurity to Solomon's, the destruction of Lauren's neighbourhood forces her to reorientate herself towards possible alternative futures in much the same way as the destruction of Aster's botanarium strips Aster of her place of refuge. Butler frames Lauren's re-orientation towards the future through the theme of home. Lauren '[has] to go home' to the

[340] Butler, p. 195.
[341] Please see Chapter One for the quoted verse.

neighbourhood to retrieve any belongings and resources that may still be left unburned, unclaimed or unfound.[342] Even writing the word home has 'taken [Lauren] a long time.'[343] I interpret Lauren's struggle with the word home as being a part of understanding her homelessness. Whilst the remains of buildings still stand, the neighbourhood it is no longer the walled sanctuary it used to be – that version of neighbourhood is now in the past, a memory. The belongings Lauren scavenges from her not-a-home are both resources she will use to survive apocalyptic America and objects which hold the memories of the past. Compared with *Ghosts*, Lune's radiolabe, journals and diaries have the same functions, connecting Aster to her mother and enabling her to discover Matilda's hidden secrets. The destruction of the botanarium and the neighbourhood serve as the catalysts for re-imaging home. They are failed sanctuaries which can be learned from in order to build something better.

Hall writes that in order to create future worlds which are sustainable, we need to be 'accountable to the planet with which human lives are entwined.'[344] Butler's Earthseed philosophy is inspired by Lauren's communion with nature, by her observations of the natural world and a desire for human beings to emulate non-human life. Earthseed's name comes from Butler's observation that plants 'have no ability at all to travel great distances under their power, and yet, they do travel.'[345] Hall argues that imagining sustainable futures requires 'thinking with non-human life.'[346] Applied to Earthseed, Butler's futurity is grounded in learning from and relating to seeds and plant life, observing nature as an apprentice would their instructor. Earthseed stands as an alternative relationship between human and non-human life and as an alternative solution to surviving unstable climates and environments. In *Parable*, reimagining the future through non-human life is intimately connected with imagining alternative modes of social organisation. On the subject of survival, Butler argues that whilst living or surviving is 'all anybody can do right now,' living to survive 'doesn't go far enough.'[347] Through an Earthseed reading, individuals must shape God and shape the change that happens around them, seeking to do 'more' to imagine 'a better destiny' that communities 'can shape. Another place. Another way.'[348] Butler's reflections on Lauren's desire to have agency over her future speaks clearly to Muñoz's definitions of queer futurity and queer utopianism. Muñoz writes, '[q]ueerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.'[349] The notion of a Destiny is Butler's answer to Lauren's need for an alternative future. Earthseed provides a framework for conceiving a destiny. Just as plants' seeds travel across Earth, so the 'Destiny of

[342] Butler, p. 157.
[343] Butler, p. 157.
[344] Hall, p. 207.
[345] Butler, p. 78.
[346] Hall, p. 220.
[347] Butler, p. 76.
[348] Butler, p. 76.
[349] Muñoz, p. 1.

Earthseed/ Is to take root among the stars.'[350] This destiny is grounded in potentiality. In the future era depicted in *Parable*, space stations on the moon have been discovering new worlds with the potential to hold life for decades, and whilst the nature of this life is debated, Lauren believes that '[l]ife alone is enough.'[351] Hall argues for reimagining the future in the context of a 'resistant commitment to generating alternative communities and modes of being.'[352] Butler's vision of interplanetary colonisation contains such resistant commitment. It may be 'easier,' Butler argues, for humans to 'adapt' to living on another world than relying on the limited resources left on Earth.[353] The destiny of Earthseed is to aspire to achieve this future.

Butler offers more explicit descriptions of how Earthseed influences the community's values through conversations between Lauren and the members of her Earthseed community. To be a good member of an Earthseed Community, one must 'learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work,' 'educate and benefit their community,' and 'contribute to the fulfilment of the Destiny.'[354] To be a part of Earthseed is to think forward into the future. Butler argues that people should invest in this specific futurity because it would lead to a 'unifying, purposeful life here on Earth' and the 'hope' of a 'real' heaven for their children that will be 'theirs to shape.'[355] Butler's vision is utopic. Muñoz writes that utopia is not 'prescriptive' but instead 'renders the blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of potential.'[356] Whilst none of my authors or theorists argue for a prescriptive or definite futurity, the need for a blueprint is something Muñoz, Yergeau and Walker all share. In her interview with David Gray-Hammond on neuroqueer futures, Walker states that to work towards a neurocosmopolitan future, there needs to be 'a positive vision to work toward,' that we need to 'start generating individual and collective visions of neurocosmopolitan futures that inspire us.'[357] Lauren's vision of a future community that looks after one another, which seeks to nurture collective, unifying visions of an alternative possible future strongly resonates with Muñoz and Walker's neuro/queer futurities. The influence of Black feminism in Walker's neurocosmopolitan futurity is clear in her emphasis on individual and group visions of the future, just as it is also present in *Parable*. There is a complex interplay between queerness, Black feminism and neurocosmopolitanism in Butler's futurity, through which a blueprint for an alternative future emerges. If then, the trajectories proposed by Muñoz and Walker are to be strived towards, a neuroqueer, neurocosmopolitan future must be built on Black feminist foundations.

[350] Butler, p. 84.
[351] Butler, p. 83.
[352] Hall, p. 221.
[353] Butler, p. 83.
[354] Butler, p. 261.
[355] Butler, p. 261.
[356] Muñoz, p. 97.
[357] Gray-Hammond, 'Neuroqueering the future…'.

Comparing Butler's portrayal of interplanetary colonisation to those of Duyvis and Solomon, Lauren's idealisation of planetary colonisation comes across as naïve. Lauren believes that anyone who travelled to these worlds would 'be on their own – far from politicians and business people, failing economies and tortured ecologies,' however it is businessmen and people in positions of authority that drive and dictate the narrative of the generation ships in *Edge of Gone* and *Ghosts*.[358] In *Edge of Gone* and *Ghosts*, the protagonists are faced with predetermined, already existing social, cultural systems of planetary colonisation, creating a narrative trajectory in which those characters reject the ascribed narrative in favour of the possibility of returning to Earth in the near future (in Denise's case) or actually returning to Earth by the end of the novel (in Aster's case). In *Parable*, however, Butler's future America has withdrawn funding for its space programmes and the future of space travel is positioned as an unachievable goal in the face of the country's environmental, economic and social climates. Crucially, Butler presents Earthseed's destiny as something that can only be fulfilled once the work has been put in on Earth. Butler writes that there is 'always a lot to do before you can get to go to heaven,' positioning humanity's destiny to take root among the stars as a post-apocalyptic destiny and not as the escape from Earth portrayed by Duyvis and Solomon.[359] The ability to go to the stars, in Lauren's vision of the future, is an extension of nurturing sustainable relationships with Earth and furthering of queer striving towards a queer crip future.

Duyvis: Valuing Uncertain Futurities

In 'No Failure,' Hall argues that the 'future of climate change will be queer and disabled in the sense that current norms for privileged human life, including mobility and the planet's climate, will not be in operation.'[360] Throughout this thesis, I have argued that apocalypse constitutes a lived embodiment of uncertainty, an uncertainty that is best navigated through neuroqueer epistemes, temporalities and motions. 'Radical hope for queer crip feminist eco-futures,' Hall argues, 'must desire and commit to alternative ways of life and relationships in a context of uncertainty,' uncertainty being understood as 'a site of possibility for being and living otherwise.'[361] Building on Solomon's and Butler's commitment to imagining Black, neurocosmopolitan futurities, I find that Duyvis's futurity combines aspects of radical hope and neurocosmopolitanism to reimagine the Nassau and Earth as interlocking apocalyptic environments, whose futures are ultimately inseparable from each other. Through Iris's queer politics, the lives of people left in temporary shelters on Earth, and Denise's neuroqueer desires for safety and security, Duyvis breaks with mainstream colonial narratives of the generation ship and foresees a

[358] Butler, p. 83.
[359] Butler, p. 85.
[360] Hall, p. 223.
[361] Hall, p. 224.

relationship with Earth that embraces the crip, queer uncertainty as an essential aspect of kinship and connectedness.

Throughout the novel, Denise's vision of the future is greatly influenced by popular opinion that staying on Earth will mean death. The novel begins with Denise recalling the first time she learns about the existence of the comet that hits Earth as the 'first time [her] future vanished.'[362] Within the notion of Denise's future vanishing Duyvis expresses the hopelessness and powerlessness Denise feels when confronted with changes in her life that she cannot control. Having researched the impact the comet will have on the global environment, Denise assumes that the comet, the acid rain, wildfires, toxic air, the destruction of the ozone layer and years of ultraviolet radiation will make survival on Earth impossible.[363] From this perspective, Denise assumes the Nassau is her only chance of a future and discussions about futurity, for the majority of novel, revolve around this limited viewpoint. As discussed in Chapter One, Denise readily accepts the Nassau's rules and regulations, and masks her neurodivergences in attempting to assimilate into the Nassau's culture of productivity. She judges her worthiness of a place on the Nassau and, therefore, of having a future based on her ability to comply and assimilate, preventing her from considering alternative perspectives to the assumption that Earth means death or imagining futures other than successfully integrating into the ship's work force and society. The Nassau is 'the only future' Denise has, and she must find a way to make it work.[364]

Iris is Duyvis's vessel for presenting an alternative futurity to Denise's restricted beliefs. Like Denise, Iris would never be accepted as a valued passenger on the Nassau. Iris, being neurotypical, can utilise anti-assimilationist and subversive strategies that aren't accessible to Denise. Through her queer politics and outlook on survival, Iris sees a way for herself to survive on Earth alongside people who value her for who she is. She argues that '[p]eople survive a lot,' that the generation ships make surviving 'more comfortable' and 'easier,' especially when starting afresh will be the job of future generations, but a lot of people on Earth will live, as well.[365] I argue that Duyvis's observations on survival cut to the core of the Nassau's classist principles: those who have privilege always have it easier and those who have less privilege have it harder, but this does not mean they do not survive. Whilst the ship functions to protect passengers from the outside world, preserving all the structures of modernity so that humans can continue to live as they did pre-apocalypse, Iris belongs to a group of people who are living through the environmental changes that the apocalypse has brought on. They have survived the comet impact and are constructing plans to help survivors trapped in temporary

[362] Duyvis, p. 1.
[363] Duyvis, p. 359.
[364] Duyvis, p. 235.
[365] Duyvis, p. 358.

shelters. As Iris argues, this is not the end of *the* world, but the end of 'one world.'[366] Butler makes a similar argument in *Parable*. Lauren's father asks Lauren if she thinks the world is ending and Lauren reflects that it is not *the* world that is ending but the adults' worlds and '[them] with it.'[367] In Chapter Two, I argued that it is by working through and with apocalypse, by embracing apocalypse's neuroqueer betweenness, that alternative relationships with apocalyptic landscapes can be forged. Applied to Duyvis, Denise's futurity fails to imagine living through apocalyptic change and therefore she disassociates the outside world from any kind of possible future. Iris's lived experience of the outside disrupts this assumption, highlighting that there are always more ways to survive and more futurities that could emerge from those different ways.

Iris's conversations with Denise mark Duyvis's first steps to deconstructing the desirability and necessity of the Nassau in Denise's vision of her future. Denise travels to one of the temporary shelters Iris and her friends are in contact with and takes some video footage, which she shows to Iris. Iris reflects that there are 'more melanin, wrinkles, and wheelchairs in the one room than on the entire Nassau.'[368] Like Butler's Earthseed community, this temporary shelter is cosmopolitan. They are disabled, neurodivergent, Black and Brown, immigrants, and elderly, those deemed unworthy of a place on a generation ship, worthless because of their socio-economic status. Denise expects the survivors at the shelter to look like 'what [she's] seen on TV,' – like 'zombie movies' or like the 'battered' people from comet refugee camps pre-apocalypse.[369] She expects them to behave as a 'desperate mob.'[370] Instead, one of the community leaders, Heleen, tells Denise that this community 'are getting by.'[371] Duyvis's critique of popular representations of apocalypses and refugee crises, along with Duyvis and Butler's visions of alternative, cosmopolitan and neurocosmopolitan community structures, maps onto a broader argument presented in all three of my texts that the seeds for alternative ways of surviving exist in contemporary marginalised and multiply-marginalised communities. Thinking back to Chapter One, the neuroqueer, Black epistemes and wisdom my authors cultivate through their neurodivergent, Black protagonists are enmeshed with imagining inclusive, sustainable futurities. If such futures are to become achievable, palpable realities, multiply marginalised community structures and epistemes have to be centralised, and the futuristic visions of institutions of survival decentred.

[366] Duyvis, p. 359.
[367] Butler, p. 62.
[368] Duyvis, p. 357.
[369] Duyvis, p. 337.
[370] Duyvis, p. 344.
[371] Duyvis, p. 349.

Preparation is something that creates possibility for alternative futurities in both *Edge of Gone* and *Parable*. Duyvis argues that humans are 'smart,' knew what was coming and 'prepare[d].'[372] The reference to preparation echoes Butler's focus on preparing for apocalypse as a means to open up new possibilities of surviving through and with apocalyptic in-between spatio-temporalities. This conversation is the first in *Edge of Gone* to put forward a futurity in which survival does not necessitates leaving Earth behind, but as something that everyone participates in regardless of how easy it will be. As Iris argues, there have been a lot of 'ends of the world.'[373] Black studies scholars such as Bielenberg associate apocalypse with the advent of modernity, the creation of the Middle Passage, the decimation of Indigenous communities by white colonists; queer scholars locate apocalypse in the AIDS crisis and in the destruction of LGBTQ+ history, culture and institutions in Nazi Germany. Instead of despairing, 'hope' will serve the people left on Earth better.[374] Duyvis's argument for hope is similar to the argument I make about radical hope in *Ghosts*. Whilst it is unclear what the future will bring if Aster, Giselle, Iris or Denise choose to forego the sanctuaries of their generation ships, there is a consensus in both texts that hoping for something better is essential if cosmopolitan futurities are to be realised. I read Muñoz's queer striving into Duyvis's portrayal of radical hope, using the cyclicality of apocalypse and the ways in which multiply marginalised groups have persisted in the past to imagine how communities on Earth will survive this apocalypse. Where Solomon pursues radical hope in rejecting the Matilda and the Sovereignty, Duyvis embarks on a reform of the Nassau's cultural and environmental structures, using radical hope to build towards the kind of neurocosmopolitan community Butler portrays in *Parable*.

Envisaging a neurocosmopolitan futurity requires imagining through neuroqueer modes of communication and relation. As with Butler's futurity, Duyvis imagines an alternative futurity using Denise's past safe spaces on Earth as blueprints. Before the apocalypse, Denise volunteered at a cat sanctuary and enjoyed the connections she was able to build with the cats. I argue that their relationships are built through what Ralph Savarese calls the 'language of silence.'[375] Conversing with silent subjects such as trees and animals requires 'the words of living together in a world where everything need[s] everything else.'[376] In a flashback Duyvis narrates Denise communicating with one of the newer cats at the sanctuary. He has 'finally' approached Denise's lap and, not wanting to scare him off, she has remained at the sanctuary thirty minutes after she planned to leave.[377] She 'gently'

[372] Duyvis, p. 358.
[373] Duyvis, p. 359.
[374] Duyvis, p. 362.
[375] Savarese, p. 198.
[376] Savarese, p. 198.
[377] Duyvis, p. 1.

strokes the cat's fur, and the cat responds with a 'hesitant purr.'[378] Their relationship is built through Denise giving the cat space and time to trust her and through a mode of communication based on a language both Denise and the cat can participate in: touch. Touch is an important aspect of autistic beingness. In the final chapter of *Ghosts*, touch provides a similar method of connectivity and exploration, and conveys the palpability of Aster's Heavenly Land. Aster experiences a 'desire to touch' Lune's skeleton, even though the sight of it is 'grotesque.'[379] Touch is used to experience closeness, but it is only a mode of communication that Denise and Aster can pursue when they are in an environment which supports that kind of intimate, vulnerable interaction.

Duyvis writes, 'whether someone is useful only matters if you value people by their use,' and this argument is central to building a neurocosmopolitan futurity which values all aspects of human diversity.[380] Through Iris, Duyvis argues that humans 'can't survive by giving up all the reasons [they] want to survive.'[381] Denise only perceived the Nassau to be desirable because it was a vessel that would enable her to survive. Other than that, the Nassau is not a desirable, inclusive or supportive environment, failing to fulfil Denise's need for safety and security. Thinking back through the arguments I have made in this thesis, envisaging an inclusive model of surviving means valuing everyone's reasons for surviving. Denise's interests and passions do not map onto the Nassau's policies of usefulness. As much as she tries to be useful, all she wants is the Way Station and the cats back. She is 'not built for the end of the world. [She] tried to be strong, and work hard, forget the cats,' but she could not, as this makes her useless, which means she doesn't belong on the Nassau.[382] As Duyvis reflects, vulnerability is not something traditionally associated with survival in an apocalypse. A few months before the comet strikes Earth, the cats at the sanctuary are put down. It is believed the cats will 'have nowhere to go' in a world where humans are too concerned with their own survival to keep pets.[383] The assumptions underpinning this logic expects that cats can only be pets and need humans to provide for them. Duyvis uses the perceived vulnerability of the cats as an allegory for Denise's own perspective on weakness. Denise tells herself throughout the novel that apocalypse is 'no time for weakness,' yet, as Duyvis argues through Iris, desiring a world in which being vulnerable does not result in being made into an outcast is essential for building a more inclusive world.[384] Iris challenges the way in which Denise perceives the Nassau, arguing that it is an institution that can accommodate her as opposed to an institution she has to prove herself worthy of.

[378] Duyvis, p. 1.
[379] Solomon, p. 348.
[380] Duyvis, p. 447.
[381] Duyvis, p. 447.
[382] Duyvis, p. 447.
[383] Duyvis, p. 361.
[384] Duyvis, p. 361.

The Nassau has the potential to become a neurocosmopolitan space. Where Butler uses poetry as a medium through which to build a neurocosmopolitan community, Duyvis uses the past neurocosmopolitan spaces from Denise's life to imagine how the Nassau might be transformed into a neurocosmopolitan environment. The park on the Nassau functions as a substitute and potential replacement for the cat sanctuary. Sitting on a bench in the 'would-be park' Denise feels a 'calm' come over her, 'like a cat curling on [her] lap.'[385] Duyvis's description of this moment focuses on the transtemporal impact of Denise's sensory experiences. The shadows of the trees and the 'chatter' of the brook act as a replacement for the sensory experience of stroking a cat, an interaction which Denise then mimics by stroking her hand along her thigh. The space allows Denise to remember and feel connected to the neurocosmopolitan, non-human aspects of her life that are no longer accessible, challenging the perceived separation between the man-made inside space the Nassau has created and the supposedly lost pre-apocalyptic environments, instead positioning this space as a link between the Nassau and Earth's past environments. Read in the context of my analysis of Aster's relationship with the past in *Ghosts*, both Solomon and Duyvis portray the past as being central to how their autistic protagonists relate to the present and the future. Recalling Hall's argument for a futurity imagined through 'thinking with non-human life,' Solomon represents Aster's relation to the past as temporally transcendental, as a vessel through which the past announces itself in the present and strives towards the future.[386] I read Denise's longing for the cat sanctuary and her mimicking motions of remembering as a neuroqueer striving towards a possible alternative world embedded in the Nassau's environment, to serve as a 'blueprint' for how she might mould the spaces around her.[387] The Nassau has the potential to make Denise feel at home, to build bridges between a home that no longer exists and also be an environment that enables diverse modes of communication and embodiment.

To work towards a neuroqueer, neurocosmopolitan future requires unified solidarity, resistance against normative narratives of survival and the future, and organised protest against, or rejection of the institutions which uphold those normative narratives. Drawing to the conclusion of the novel, Duyvis disassembles the Nassau's hierarchy of epistemic authority, breaks down the binaries between inside/outside landscapes and establishes a new socio-political structure on the Nassau. Duyvis's first point of resistance comes in the form of confronting the Nassau's passengers with the misinformation and assumptions that they have been encouraged to internalise in the name of the big picture. Max, a friend of Denise with access to the Nassau's communication and navigation systems, disrupts the Nassau's countdown to take-off. He livestreams himself through all of the Nassau's available screens and reveals the ship's management has been lying about the situation of those who are being left on

[385] Duyvis, p. 61.
[386] Hall, p. 220.
[387] Muñoz, p. 97.

Earth. Passengers are told that there are helicopters coming from the east to take survivors to dry land, however this is a lie: 'someone wanted to give [the passengers] hope that people in the shelters will be OK,' in order to keep them focused on the Nassau's big picture.[388] Max's revelation highlights an important distinction between a falsely constructed hope which alleviates any responsibility of care for the world and those who are still there from the individual or community and Hall's radical hope, which encourages 'radical thinking about the meaning of the future […]' that takes 'into account and [is] accountable to the planet with which human lives and life in general is enmeshed.'[389] Max confesses on screen, he 'thought [he] could push [the death of his sister] away until [the passengers on the Nassau] were flying, and then grieve. [He] thought [he] could do the same with the planet.'[390] He and his sister followed the Nassau's rules and told themselves they had made 'the necessary choices.'[391] However, Duyvis argues through Max that the passengers on the Nassau 'do have a choice,' that it is not 'fair to wait until it is [too late] and then feel bad about it.'[392] Max's call to action subverts the narrative of necessity and, in doing so, disrupts the perceived authority of those in charge of the Nassau's law and order. The Nassau's culture of productivity is exposed as a distraction and the culturally constructed Othering of those outside the Nassau is dismantled. It is this moment that makes way for Denise and Iris to challenge Captain Van Zand's epistemic authority and start demanding that the Nassau embrace a multitude of different possible futures.

Denise starts to treat the Nassau as she treated the cat sanctuary, navigating her uncertain future through prioritising closeness. Duyvis portrays Denise and the other passengers 'welcom[ing] [their] future, whatever it may be.'[393] The openness to possibility contrasts the rigid thinking Denise internalises in the first half of the novel and reflects a 'commit[ment] to alternative ways of life and relationships in a context of uncertainty.'[394] Denise allows herself to feel that the Nassau and its current relationship to the Earth 'is not enough' and begins to realise that there is 'concrete possibility for another world' to exist on Earth with the right support.[395] In fighting for the Nassau to commit to the Earth's future Denise tries to persuade Van Zand that the 'people on [Earth] are part of [the] future' of the Nassau.[396] Framing the Earth and the Nassau as interconnected challenges the perceived division between the Nassau's inside safe haven and the outside world of the apocalypse. The Nassau's decision on whether or not to provide resources and supplies to people on Earth will have a marked

[388] Duyvis, p. 431.
[389] Hall, p. 207.
[390] Duyvis, p. 432.
[391] Duyvis, p. 432.
[392] Duyvis, p. 432.
[393] Duyvis, p. 456.
[394] Hall, p. 224.
[395] Muñoz, p. 1.
[396] Duyvis, p. 436.

impact on how people on Earth are able to survive. Armed with this insight, Denise argues that passengers should have a vote on the Nassau's future, on whether the Nassau will travel with the rest of the generation ships to new habitable planets, or whether to stay, orbit the Earth for a year or more, and then return to 'help rebuild,' to 'try.'[397] As argued in my analysis of Solomon's futurity and in Chapter Two, human lives are connected to Earth through the living past, through memory and through the residual ephemera of the past resurfacing, neuroqueerly, towards the future. I argue that building a more inclusive, sustainable futurity necessitates committing to uncertain futures, both because these futures are environmentally uncertain and because committing to the future of Earth automatically prioritises those most vulnerable, marginalised and affected by environmental change. It is a futurity which centres multiply marginalised people and communities without dictating how those communities should be permitted to survive.

Duyvis portrays this perspective as neuroqueerly challenging Van Zand's big picture narrative of survival. Van Zand argues that he must remain 'objective' in the decisions he makes on board the Nassau, using the big picture narrative of survival to disregard Denise's argument on the grounds that she is thinking about survival from a 'personal' perspective.[398] As argued in Chapter One, building a futurity on normative values which privilege the future of humanity over the lives of individual people results in the oppression and marginalisation of Black, queer, neurodiverse and disabled people. Denise, now perceiving the injustice of this narrative, also perceives the irony of Van Zand's claim to objectivity, claiming that refusing to give that help on the grounds of necessity is 'the easy way out.'[399] Duyvis argues that Van Zand prioritises the ship because he too believes that the Nassau is the only thing which will ensure his survival, and as someone who has been granted socio-political privilege and authority through his investment in and command of the Nassau, he has the security of knowing he will never be forced to leave his own ship. Through a Black, neuroqueer lens, being 'close' and 'personal' to the people outside does not make Denise 'any less right,' in fact, Duyvis argues, 'closeness lets you see something for what it really is, and see the damage it does.'[400] As Butler claims in *Parable*, where most characters consider sharing a vulnerability, if 'hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do […] things' such as 'cause anyone unnecessary pain.'[401] Building on Butler's neurocosmopolitan community, both Butler and Duyvis build towards alternative futurities through empathy and closeness. Practising closeness, or sharing, emerges as a way to navigate uncertainty and pursue sustainable futures.

[397] Duyvis, p. 451.
[398] Duyvis, p. 437.
[399] Duyvis, p. 436.
[400] Duyvis, p. 438.
[401] Butler, p. 115.

Imagining alternative futurities in which multiply marginalised people are able to thrive is empowering. As Gurr acknowledges, whilst contemporary mainstream apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic works of fiction frequently fail to imagine alternative embodiments of gender, sexuality and race (and disability and neurodiversity), there is huge potential within the genre for alternative futurities to be imagined. The apocalypse threatens to destroy the foundations upon which normative, linear narratives of humanity's future rest. Where mainstream apocalyptic fiction uses the genre to reproduce and re-assert normative power hierarchies, the futurities represented in *Ghosts*, *Parable* and *Edge of Gone* dismantle those hierarchies and neuroqueerly strive towards more inclusive worlds. Imagined through the narrative lens of Black, neurodivergent, female protagonists, these futurities are radical in their centring of marginalised experiences, individual needs, inter-personal points of connection and community-building. In a contemporary context of autistiphobic cultures in which autism is storied as needing to be prevented or corrected, to portray autistic and neurodivergent people as not just being a part of these futures but driving these futures into existence is radical. Using neuroqueer theory and neurodivergent narrative perspectives to critique normative futurities and imagine alternative ones has the potential to build on existing queer, crip, Black feminist scholarship on apocalypse and the future. By thinking neuroqueerly about futurity and apocalypse, the significance of apocalyptic destructive potential becomes clear. Butler, Duyvis and Solomon all argue that to imagine sustainable, liveable worlds, we must learn from the past, form connections across identities, cultures and geographies, and commit to uncertain futures. Before the radical queer crip utopias Muñoz and Hall envisage can be realised, the neuronormative logics upon which cis-heteronormative, racist, ableist futurities rest must be dismantled first.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Apocalypse

The apocalypse is autistic, and autism is apocalyptic. In the introduction to this thesis, I established how these notions are originally born from and sustain discriminatory pathologies about autism and autistic people. In concluding this thesis, I queerly reclaim and embrace this narrative as an empowering testament to autism's norm-destroying, convention-defying neuroqueer potentiality.

The work of Nick Walker, Remi Yergeau and other neuroqueer scholars has been vital to this project. I have applied neuroqueer theory to the representations of neurodiversity in my three texts to transformative ends, celebrating my authors' empowering portrayals of neurodivergent agency, thought and embodiment, and highlighting the alternative ways in which apocalypse can be interpreted and navigated through neurodivergent experiences. Through a neuroqueer lens, rhetoricity, epistemology and symbolism are foregrounded as central concerns within apocalyptic discourses. Combined with a Black feminist perspective on power structures, modernity and the legacies of colonialism, I have called attention to privileged systems of meaning-making and restrictive definitions of epistemic authority that often characterise dominant narratives of survival, necessity and desirability in apocalyptic literature. My authors' Black, female, neurodivergent protagonists are vessels for queering, subverting and challenging these dominant narratives. Their perspectives, ways of moving through space and of imagining alternative, better futures for themselves and their communities disrupt conventional binaries in privileged symbolic systems and power structures. Through their neurodivergent characters, my authors prioritise different kinds of relationships with people, places and things, disorientating away from institutionalised moral orders and normative socialities which are deemed necessary for survival but that result in the repression of marginalised peoples. Apocalypse, whilst portraying a collapse of social order and societally maintained infrastructures, is intricately moulded by how neuronormative socialities are sought after and imposed by those who would seek to salvage the remnants of modernity from apocalypse. It is through a neuroqueer reading of apocalypse, and through the centring of neurodivergent characters in apocalyptic fiction, that I have argued for an apocalyptic sociality that is grounded in deconstructing oppressive power structures and forging neuroqueer relations with environment and community.

Locating apocalypse as a discourse and temporality through which alternative ways of being in the world can be imagined and strived towards builds on the works of queer crip theorists on the topic of futurity. Apocalypse is a genre almost explicitly obsessed with futurity, with futures in which the world ends, or almost ends. Neuroqueering the apocalyptic futurities represented in my texts, I have explored these authors' representations of institutionalised, teleological, colonial futurities and the alternative futurities they advocate for through their neurodivergent, queer, transgender and Black

characters. Throughout each text, dominant narratives of the future which prioritise the Child (the heterofuturity) are dismantled and shunned in favour of futurities which centre the needs of those who are alive in the present, arguing for the relevance of the past and present in striving towards more inclusive, sustainable future worlds. Autistic people have a place in imagining those future worlds. In reclaiming narrates that frame the apocalypse as autistic, and autism as apocalyptic, I argue that autism's destructive potential is crucial to this imaginative process. Yergeau argues that 'autism destroys – and norms need destroying.'[402] Whether they be restrictive cultural assumptions or entire institutions, dismantling hegemonic, normative, discriminatory power structures is the first step in striving to build more cosmopolitan and neurocosmopolitan societies. Embracing the apocalyptic nature of autistic beingness is strategic to my authors' representation of futurity, especially to Duyvis's and Solomon's.

More broadly, this thesis has proposed a radically different way of defining apocalypse. Conventional scholarly definitions trace apocalypse back to its biblical origins as the utopian end to history and time, as a meaning-making function. In these frameworks, it emerges as a totalising, universally experienced event which affects every living thing on the planet. However, such an interpretation of apocalypse frequently fails to consider how apocalypse is evoked in contemporary western cultures or that many civilisations and marginalised communities have experienced events which have resulted in the suffering, destruction and deaths which apocalypse is usually associated with. Drawing on Black studies' location of apocalypse in the onset of modernity, alongside a neuroqueer reading of apocalypse as a between spatio-temporality, I have defined apocalypse as the lived experience of intersecting environmental, social and political instability, locating apocalypse in the realm of the everyday. Through this definition, I aim to contribute to decolonising apocalyptic discourses and to highlight the unequal experiences of apocalypse: of oppression, incarceration, famine, displacement and slavery to name a few. I argue for the separation of what constitutes the apocalypse from how established institutions respond to times of crises. Locating apocalypse within institutionalised unequal power structures renders apocalypse a repressive force which must be overcome and prevents the possibility to view apocalypse as my authors do: as vessels of change which, when prepared for, can be worked with and through to strive towards a better world.

Taking the research, arguments and ideas I have present in this thesis further, it will be important to revisit key arguments relating to neuroqueer embodiments, motions and futurities as neuroqueer theory and neuroqueer identities grow and develop over the next few decades. Being in its infancy, the scholarship I have been able to draw on to theorise a neuroqueer apocalypse has been limited, and as the scholarship develops, so any claims pertaining to the neuroqueerness of any particular

[402] Yergeau, p. 78.

concept or construct should be revisited. It is my hope that discourses in autism studies and apocalypse respectively may broaden their scopes: that scholars of autism studies should go beyond critiquing representations of autism and explore the critical potential of autistic viewpoints, and that apocalyptic discourses should be more attentive to popular cultural perceptions of what constitutes apocalypse and what is deemed apocalyptic. Circling back to my short analysis of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in this thesis' introduction, a neuroqueer analysis of pathologizing representations of autism in post-/apocalyptic literature and speculative fiction more broadly might look to expand on negatively framed associations between autism and apocalypse with the aim of drawing greater attention to how these representations have moulded dominant public perceptions of autism in contemporary western cultures. As stated in my introduction, autistic people and autistic communities suffer a huge amount of discrimination and work on the representation of autistic people in literature and the media should always seek to further the neurodiversity movement, advocate for autistic people and celebrate autistic culture.

My thesis contributes to the neurodiversity movement through arguing that autistic and other neurodivergent people have a place in imagining and moulding Earth's future. In reclaiming a neuroqueer association between apocalypse and autism, I have provided several ways in which autistic people might reclaim apocalypse from autistiphobic representations in literature and media. Dominant narratives of apocalypse are underpinned by neuronormative, colonial, cis-heteronormative assumptions about civilisation, survival and humanness. These narratives are used to story autistic and other marginalised identities as in need of intervention and correction, a technique I have argued exists both in the fictional worlds of my texts and in the real-life clinical practices of autistic conversion therapies. By valuing autistic perspectives, and by encouraging autistic people to value their own lived experience, normative assumptions about what constitutes apocalypse and about what is necessary to survive apocalypse are exposed, creating opportunities for autistic people to challenge the societally constructed values by which they are deemed less than human. This method of empowerment and resistance closely follows the social model of disability, locating autistiphobic perceptions of autism's destructive apocalypticism in the failure of neuronormative constructs of sociality, politics and culture to acknowledge or appreciate autistic ways of being in the world. The apocalypse is evoked where perceived stability and normativity is threatened and is not inherent to autistic people or autism itself. By reclaiming apocalyptic narratives of autism, autistic people can take control of those narratives that authority figures use to oppress, exclude and ostracise them.

Through reclaiming the apocalypse as a narrative of autistic self-expression, autistics can also take control of imagining how autistic, neurodivergent and neuroqueer people survive apocalyptic events,

both in the modern world and in speculative fiction. Two of the authors I have explored in this thesis, Corinne Duyvis and Rivers Solomon, are openly autistic writers who have reshaped the apocalyptic novel in order to imagine autistic ways of surviving and thriving through and after apocalypse. The struggles their autistic, Black protagonists face are inspired by real-life struggles of autistic, Black people in America, the UK and other western nations. These texts, as well as Butler's portrayal of sharing, provide an alternative to texts such as *Oryx and Crake* and *The Road*, in which autism and autistic people are treated as mere aesthetics and accessories of apocalypse, and to texts such as *Underdogs*, which is limited by the lack of intersectional representation. Surviving apocalypse as an autistic person is presented as an extension of surviving contemporary educational, judicial and social institutions, conveyed through the complex trauma of internalised ableism and masking, and through being forced to prove desirability and worthiness to a system which actively discriminates against neurodivergent people. Perhaps the most important message to come from these texts is the recognition that established institutions will never value you for who you are, and it will never be possible to value yourself by their neuronormative, ableist standards. The texts I have discussed in this thesis offer the alternative of building a value system which validates lived experiences, which speaks the truths only multiply marginalised people can see. The apocalyptic discourses evoked in popular uses of the term and used to dehumanise autistic people are founded in colonial narratives of white supremacy, neuro-, hetero- and cisnormativity and ableism. In the literature and criticism which draws on these discourses, Black, Brown, queer, trans, neurodivergent, disabled people – their identities, cultures and epistemes – will not be valued. By creating and centring existing alternative apocalyptic discourses founded in intersectional methodologies and multiply marginalised experiences, apocalypse can be and is reclaimed as a site of potential through which hegemonic norms are destroyed, and neurocosmopolitan, inclusive, accessible, sustainable futurities are born.

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