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

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

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

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

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

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

MB: mmm...

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

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

AB: Yeah I means I still like a lot of what she plays with is what it looks like to be in radical collaboration uh... and I think that that when I think about a lot of the work that I’ve read afrofuturist work coming from a than the capitalistic democratic you know start that we have here in the US the main thing that I pick up on is this radical collaborative energy how communities work is with each rather than competing against each other and uh... I think that that's you know there's a lot of dynamism there's a lot of really distinct ways that people are making their lives on the continent but when it comes to the writing and the like social norms that have been put out there there's so much more togetherness and collaboration in it and so I feel like so much of Octavia's role and work uplifts that in practice so what does it actually look like for humans to uh... literally live and work together day in day out and make children together and make food together and actually look like and I think her work offers a serious critique of what was happening in the US during the time that she was writing and longing for other approaches other approaches for how we live our lives and I think no the places that she was looking to uh... to find those answers were places that went to living collaboratively living in community which is deep because she spent so much of her time alone, creating alone and you know self-described recluse hermit which I think is also powerful but maybe gets to different question different set of thoughts but I feel like she I also think that she uh... she sparked uh... conversation in the US you know that I think now we are starting to see the fruits of some of that there are so many women coming up through the work and black women coming up and writing science-fiction but I also something I’m really curious about and want to do more study on is what is how much she's inspired people in other places because it's something that I actually don't know that much about like I know for me she was really like the entryway but I wonder if the same thing is true for writers who are coming up in and claiming afrofuturism across the country, across the continent across other places. that's a major way she sparked their work you know uh... there's this gathering that's coming up next week that I wish I could be at it's Something I'm curious about how many of those writers really started their work or entered science fiction through her work so

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

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

MB: right.

AB: uh... but some of the stuff I wrestle with one is just you know the end of the parables sees folks going off in a ship called Christopher Columbus to colonize new worlds and I think that so much of my politics has been rooted in the ideas that you know anti colonization you know starting you know nonmoving beyond the impacts of colonialism and I don't think there's ever been a time as an adult in my analysis where I could be like "oh colonization that can be a good thing." you know? And yet she calls the question for it right? cuz at what point uh... you know if you're a group of people who are not able to survive in the way of your society is taking things at what point do you have to go off and find some other place to be and what it is there any respectful way to do that or do you just say it will just die rather than doing that right and then I think she starts to answer that a little bit with Lilith's Brood and the Xeogensis series where you get to interact with for all intents and purposes a benevolent colonizer and what does it feel like to actually be getting integrated into someone else's genetic existence and you know and I feel like it for me is like it's a deeply uncomfortable place you know I feel like each time I read it I'm like "I don't like this" you know and I don't like that she makes them so erotically compelling that they literally feel that they smell good and they make us physically healthier and you know that she makes it a benefit like such an add uh... and yet I think that what she's saying there is that there is not an easy answer to this question of how we survive long term and so if we want to have the right to survive then we have to be willing to ask ourselves the hard question of what we do on all these circumstances instead of developing these hard lines uh... and that there's no circumstances in her books in which a hardline leads to survival and I feel like that has been really instructive for me many times in my life uh... you know where I was for instance stepping into a position of leadership and I'm an anti-hierarchal person and you know holding that staunchly and then I'm stepping into a position of leadership where there's it's not clear that there is anyone else who can share the leadership with me at that point in a way that's going to actually work for the situation uh... so instead of just being, "well I'm anti hierarchal so I'm going to screw this up by partnering with people who are not ready for partnership it's like I have to go do the hard work of... making sure that the folks are getting developed to a point where they can actually share leadership right and it just means that generally things have to be more complex more complex and that we have to take more responsibility. in terms of the sexual consent uh... pieces of it you know I feel like it's is really interesting one of the things I think she gets at that I don't think I’ve read in any other work that
didn't feel totally creepy to me uh... is how early on we are actually sexual creatures and physical creatures and feeling our bodies and its been such an interesting thing for me to have three kids in my life now my sister's children you know just noticing ah you know especially I don't know if I remember this part of my life per se but just noticing how early on they're really aware of their bodies and of their... you know my nephew is like "my penis is amazing" he loves it and he just wants to spend all of his time playing with it and you know it's but the because there's so few spaces I feel like in which children can just safely be their whole selves without that being taken advantage of or with so much of it is like what is the mental age if you have, you know my nephew doesn't have the mental capacity to tell someone anything about that necessarily you having and all we can do as the adults around him is protect him and make sure he doesn't learn to feel shame around that so I feel like one of the things that she speaks to a lot is like you know eleven-year-olds are feeling a lot of feelings in their bodies and that's possible and so are fifteen year olds are eighteen-year-olds and so on and so forth and much older you know she also goes on the other side of it you know that people being in their sixties, seventies, and eighties this doesn't turn off any of their erotic potential right uh... so then I think she starts to get to the question of what really makes consent real and so you know you have this in the fledgling book which I wish was a series you know you got someone who looks like you know I think eleven-year-old is how she describes her uh... who has a whole field of lovers but you know her real age is hundreds of years old and she has the capacity to make decisions about what happens to her body and from a powerful position because she's actually got she's has the most lived experience of any of the people that she's interacting with uh and you know I don't know it makes me uncomfortable and it also makes me feel like yes at this point in my life I have much more personal power than I did at thirteen and fifteen when I was sexually assaulted to make decisions about my body and it's not necessarily anything that's changed to my body Because I was already starting I mean everything was awakening in me in that period of my life and then that was taking advantage of and so just being able to say it's so much of it is mental versus physical and I feel like she opens up the door for that conversation

MB: absolutely

MB: Absolutely

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

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

MB: Right.

MB: No Thank you. I mean I'm glad that we've moved into the conversation about the strategic reader and how that itself is a model of a collaborative process and an emergent strategy for dealing with the world, creating the world that we want. Can you talk a bit about how you decided to create the reader how the collaborative process of creating the reader emerged?

AB: That's great plan well I'll say a couple of things on this. one is I'm trying to think if I even really fully remember the process itself but the thing I think it's important to know is collaboration does not come easy to me uh... it's actually it's one of my more challenging areas, one of my places where I'm constantly trying to learn and I don't you know I’m a Virgo I'm the first born and have always been a little bit of an over achiever uh... and I've been positioned into leadership early on in my life uh... and regularly so collaboration is something that I started to
become aware was necessary and important but still wasn't quite sure how to do right? And I feel like the Allied Media process like being a part of Allied Media Conference and the Allied Media Projects Community gave me one of my first spaces to be able to say oh like this is what collaboration can actually look like, like we can have principles that we share with each other and we can share the creative process and develop ideas with each and it's not like I'll go off and have my great idea and then come pitch it to you and if you like it we'll do it you know We can actually let stuff be more emergent so that was the fertile ground in which the reader came out of we had Octavia Butler symposium I think four years ago now and that was basically just a geek out you know I offered some thoughts on you know Octavia and then we had a fishbowl conversation and Some of the key folks who've been throughout the whole process are uh... Leah Lakshmi uh... Alexis Gumbs and other folks were in that room… you were in that room right?

MB: Yes I was in that room.

AB: Sitting in that room having a conversation with each other and I think there's just something magical really entered the room in the process of the conversation and it was like how we gather all this magical energy into something that we can share with others and what was coming out and I don't think I’d ever seen in something like this strategic leader necessarily but I definitely knew that at the end of a lot of books they'll have sets of questions for readers to use so what would it will it look like if we have you know if we just generated sets of questions we have on all of Octavia's books and then pull that together and so that's what that room did so after the larger conversation which was really titillating and magical then folks broke into small groups and each group just generated really themes and like major questions they have about her work uh... we focused mostly on the Parables, Lilith's Brood some on the Patternist series uh... which is actually one of my favorites and the first one she wrote uh... and then we had a small group that was looking at short stories and Fledgling all together and maybe Kindred too it wasn't people weren't as familiar with those pieces of work so we didn't have as much content there and I’m hoping we can return to it you know we just gathered the question and pulled them into the reader uh... after the session I reached out to Alexis because in my mind Alexis is like one of our bright shining lights of thinking no uh... and really understands how to do more academic texts writing looking at things that are like this is a more formal you know publishing something and putting something out so I asked her to need to read through what we gathered uh... and no we read through it and without too much shift off you know we arranged the questions but didn't do too much else to it cuz you know the allied media community is really brilliant and able to say what they mean so it was published so it came out the next year right so we had it together and then we brought it to the next Allied Media conference a year later and shared it out with people and folks went kind of crazy about it was really good uh... and the following year we did a transformative justice science-fiction reader which I would say is in my dream I want to combine the two of them because they're both really powerful and the transformative justice science fiction reader was a much more collaborative process in terms of all five people no four people took on writing different pieces to help frame science-fiction work and putting those together into reader and that reader has incredibly strong pieces and Octavia Butler has incredibly strong questions and so I think I always send them out to people together at this point and looks like
we have more readers coming and it looks like we're going to develop one on parenting in science fiction and parenting in science fiction, as science fiction uh...we're still trying to figure out the angle for it there's a bunch of parents who are like you know science-fiction is shaping how I parent so I want to write about that and think about that and there might be one on spirituality Or the sacred in science fiction

MB: mmm

AB: But it's becoming a ... I've been traveling around the country for other work and doing this Octavia Butler and emergent strategy sessions almost everywhere I've landed for the past month and it's been uh... incredible that one of the things I’m seeing is we've just begun something like there are so many other angles and conversations and questions and people have so I'm also it's even the collaborative process is not done yet you know I mean we are trying to figure out how to take it to the next level integrate more questions integrate more pieces do next iterations of the reader and that's all still out there and happening which is just really exciting

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

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

MB: mm hmmm
AB: and this is this is one of the reasons why I feel like I chose facilitation early on in my life as opposed to becoming a teacher I think teaching work is super important and I don't think that's the skill set that I have uh... is being able to come in and can give people content uh... I’m really interested in coming in and figuring out what is the content of the room that will grow everyone and you're out and I think it other major piece of my facilitation stuff that I'm learning is to stay in a process so if something changes you know so this idea Octavia Butler talks about god is change and the only lasting truth is change everything you've touched you changes everything you change changes you what that looks like in facilitation is that at any given moment know there's how many people in the room and that's how many processes going on and what we each know as humans is that within our own selves at any given moment we have you know literally millions of processes happening right? you know what's happening in our bodies and minds our hearts of spirits so having all that in a room is an opportunity for us to tune in and pay attention to that stuff attention to that staff and say oh we're supposed to go to collaborative small group moment right now that someone just opened up something that was very emotional for the large group we need to stay together here for another second to really receive what just got offered and then we can move on you know but I think so much facilitation gets stopped because people are trying to press on and not tuning into like, wait what changes are happening and what is that make possible now and I can't tell you the number of times that as a facilitator taking three deep breaths myself before moving on has allowed like the space for something massive emotional and heartful and really transformative to happen that wouldn't happen if I decided to be like welp, that's not on plan we don't have time to do that we got to keep moving and that requires trusting people so growing just keep continuously growing your capacity to trust the group to attend to itself

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

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

MB: Yes

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

MB: yes

AB: I think about that related to this like once you've had the experience of emergent strategy where everything that's happening is just data that is flowing in and being processed to make them next best thing move the most elegant possible move once you have any experience then it's hard to go back to being a part of lock-step plans that don't adapt for the circumstances or being a part of competitive work environments or being a part of even self-sacrificing environments where you are doing something you don't want to do. I find it nearly impossible to something I don't 100% want to do at this point in my life and I think that's emergent strategy for me in practice right so much of it is you just need a little taste and the rest of it takes care of itself

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

AB: that's great. So uh let's see… uh many people in the social justice realm, I have spent a lot of time in my head thinking about what is wrong with the world and what needs to be done about it and what tends to happen is that I get completely overwhelmed by what is wrong with the world and I can't imagine ever having any solutions that will actually work so uh... to me the process of having embodied organizing, being an embodied organism, is being able to actually expand from my brain to the other parts of myself that are feeling and connecting and in contact with the earth so that what's happening what I'm feeling has more space to land in but also that I can connect with other people who give me a different truth which is the things that I can't figure out with my brain I can feel when I'm in a room so I've had multiple experiences of being in rooms where I suddenly knew that it was going to be okay uh...or I knew that you know being with my nephew and my niece that it's okay that they are alive in this really terrifying age and that my, in my body I know what to do to take care of them and I've heard a lot of parents speak about that so there's one level is if it is that at I’ve been taking courses with this group called Generative Somatics that studies the process of healing and trauma in the body uh... and what happens and you know how stuff gets stored in our bodies and how to release it answer think then it also starts to say what are we doing with our bodies like how are we feeding ourselves how are we spending our time together uh... that piece on ableism is really fascinating like there's a whole conversation that's been happening around disability justice in the somatics work that I’ve been doing and it's also come up several times in the Octavia Butler conversations you know what does it mean in the future if you can't you know run away from and the aliens or run away from someone who's being violent on the road and how do we actually maintain and care for and see the power of all of the people without discarding any uh... so I feel like it to me embodied organism why do I want to say organism right now? Uh...
I'm sure there's some good reason but, embodied organizing to me looks like being able to embrace the full body of the people who are in the room or in the group or in the community and figure out what is the best way to apply that towards justice and towards what's needed uh... in terms of class the main thing that I've been noticing lately is the privilege to walk away from things and to step away or move away from things and to be to say like I believe in this oh and now I believe in that yeah it's okay to make that shift and you know I've done that many times in my life because I have the privilege of being a good facilitator and knowing that people will continue to hire me to come facilitate for them oh so I can leave a job behind and the people want me to facilitate in different places so that means I get to travel and you know it's just different options that have been there for me uh... to continue to change what I'm thinking and what I’m doing that a lot of the organizers I speak to don't feel like they have options they feel like whoever brought them into the political process and what they were told is the right way to move forward you know that they have to stick with that uh... and a lot of that is because these folks are coming from you know working-class backgrounds where they don't necessarily have a lot of financial options for making different you know having different choices that they their sense of community is the people that are directly around them because they are not necessarily taking off and traveling and going seeking other places and stuff, right? and I think that to me one of the things that’s been very interesting is to figure out how do we give every single person no matter where they are on the class spectrum the experience of getting to choose what they believe in and getting to choose what they're going to do about that and make it so there's not just a privilege is getting to travel are having resources but rather it’s a privilege of how we share information with each other uh... and how we can do you know if we are traveling so when I travel I’m not going to stay in like five-star hotels far away from everyone right? Iike how do I go and make sure that I’m spending time in people's homes and that I see part of my work as being a borrower you know coming and saying here’s a story from the last place that I was that feels relevant to this place or here, let me connect you with this. For instance I was just in New Orleans and they have this parents organizing guide it looks at all the schools in the city and really rates them like how good are they and what parents need to know about them and it’s like every city should have that uh... but they're not necessarily promoting themselves to every city as a model for what other cities should have so something I can do you know is go to you know parents in another city who don't have the financial or time resource to travel as much as I do you and make sure they know about it and put them in touch they can say we could do this to so to me that’s all of that is a part of it and I think about this and I think that and challenged by a lot because I think one of the things I hear that is happening in our work that makes me really sad is people claiming or using the Oppression Olympics like I am the poorest I am the most oppressed and you know I have uh... I have the least access and starting to use that as something to be proud about and you know I think that doesn't feel like the right path to me. I feel like rather instead being able to say like whoever I am and however I am, I'm exactly that and my experience is relevant and so whatever background you come from and not privileging one background over another or one experience over another but then being able to say when we're looking at a specific issue And I think Octavia, this is one of the major lessons that comes out of her work those who have survived and experienced a certain thing, they're the experts on that thing and so they're going to know the most about it to apply forward and to me that means like doing embodied organizing in the context of class means that people who've actually experienced poverty are the ones who need to be generating the solutions around like what what actually resolves that and you know if you talk to really rich people they're like well we need to
just you know need to get rid of poverty if you talk to people who are poor they're like we need to get rid of wealth, right? like the problem is not that you know it's not like there's no monolithic viewpoint but you know a lot of folks have the analysis that if there weren't people hording, there wouldn't be this lack right it's just different, it's like who has the solutions I think that's it

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

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

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

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

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

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

MB: YAY!