Chapter 7

Structures of desire

Postanarchist kink in the speculative fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany

Lewis Call

It's a beautiful universe ... wondrous and the more exciting because no one has written plays and poems and built sculptures to indicate the structure of desire I negotiate every day as I move about in it.

—Samuel Delany, Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand

The problem of power is one of the major philosophical and political preoccupations of the modern West. It is a problem which has drawn the attention of some of the greatest minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. I have argued elsewhere that the philosophies of power articulated by Nietzsche and Foucault stand as prototypes of an innovative form of anarchist theory, one which finds liberatory potential in the disintegration of the modern self and its liberal humanist politics (Call 2002: chs 1 and 2). Lately this kind of theory has become known as *postanarchism*. For me, postanarchism refers to a form of contemporary anarchist theory which draws extensively upon postmodern and poststructuralist philosophy in order to push anarchism beyond its traditional boundaries. Postanarchism tries to do this by adding important new ideas to anarchism's traditional critiques of statism and capitalism. Two of these ideas are especially significant for the present essay: the Foucauldian philosophy of power, which sees power as omnipresent but allows us to distinguish between power's various forms, and the Lacanian concept of subjectivity, which understands the self to be constituted by and through its desire.

Postanarchism implies and includes a crucial sexual anarchism. Indeed, the disruption of conventional forms of sexual identity is one of the most powerful moves available to the postanarchist. When postanarchism's anti-essentialist critique is applied to sexuality, the result is queer. When that critique is applied to power, the result is kinky. Postanarchism enables a system of erotic ethics suitable for an age beyond humanism. That system endorses radical relations of erotic power up to and including consensual play-slavery. This dramatic form of erotic power exchange mimics the structure of slavery, but in a way which produces radically different subjective meaning for the participants: unlike slavery, play-slavery can be ethical and erotic. Postanarchism

suggests that ethical structures of erotic power (including those of play-slavery) may actually sap the authority of their non-consensual Doppelgängers. I have used the term ‘kink theory’ to describe the body of work which explores the ethical possibilities of consensual erotic power exchange (Call 2007). I now wish to argue that when kink theory encounters postanarchism, the result is something new and interesting: an ethical position and a strategy for political action, which I propose to call postanarchist kink.

This essay examines elements of postanarchist kink in the speculative fiction of two African American authors, Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany. The work of Butler and Delany is centrally concerned with the political and ethical problems of slavery. These two authors provide what amounts to a traditional anarchist critique of the historical American slave system. However, their work also endorses erotic power exchange, including forms which seem to replicate the structures of slavery. Their remarkable novels suggest that an erotic play-slavery based upon consent and mutual desire may help us overcome the crippling legacy of chattel slavery. In their most radical moments, Butler and Delany demonstrate that erotic power exchange can facilitate a breakdown of the traditional political subject; furthermore, they show that this breakdown is potentially liberating. As Sherryl Vint has recently observed, Butler and Delany are ‘authors whose critical engagement with questions of sexuality and power pushes the boundaries of the current social configuration’ (Vint 2009: 402). The novels of Butler and Delany suggest, counterintuitively but convincingly, that one way out of capitalist political economy may lead through the S/M dungeon: a kinky postanarchism.

The body of theory which I call postanarchist kink was born in the 1980s, alongside queer theory. In 1984, The Advocate published a groundbreaking interview with Michel Foucault entitled ‘Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity’. Foucault emphasised the anarchist aspects of queer politics: ‘being homosexuals, we are in a struggle with the government, and the government is in a struggle with us’ (Foucault 1984: 167). This bold, oppositional stance would become one of the defining features of queer theory, and Foucault’s crucial contributions to that body of theory are well known. Yet Foucault’s work supports more than one radical theory about sexuality. Even as he helped to create queer theory, he simultaneously contributed to a related critical discourse, which I have been calling kink theory. The latter discourse studies the set of practices known collectively as BDSM: bondage/discipline (B/D), dominance/submission (D/S) and sadomasochism (S/M). Through its study of these practices, kink theory attempts to theorise the consensual exchange of erotic power. Kink theory interprets such power exchange as a viable ethical alternative to the non-consensual power structures which permeate the modern world. ‘What strikes me with regard to S&M’, said Foucault, ‘is how it differs from social power’ (ibid.: 169). Foucault argued that social power ‘is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions’, while S&M ‘is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid’ (ibid.).

For Foucault, kink was important because it showed that even in a world where power is omnipresent, some of that power flows in accordance with an ethics of freedom. Anarchists should be very interested in the possibility that this ethical, erotic power might be deployed as a symbolic challenge to the forms of social, economic and political power against which they struggle.

Certainly the modern liberal state has taken a strong interest in kink. Foucault’s fellow kink theorist Gayle Rubin noted that the state goes to great lengths to delegitimise S/M in particular, largely by asserting that those who practice S/M are ‘legally incapable of consenting’ to such practices (Rubin 1984: 305). So the state tries to contest S/M on precisely the same theoretical terrain where anarchism attacks the legitimacy of that state: the terrain surrounding the concept of consent. This struggle over the meaning of consent suggests that consent means one thing to the state and something very different to anarchists and kinksters. Wendy Brown has argued compellingly that within liberalism consent marks the presence of a power to which one submits (Brown 1995: 162–3). Thus the liberal form of consent actually ‘marks the subordinate status of the consenting party’ (ibid.: 163). Clearly, liberal consent could not provide the basis for ethical power relations, since this kind of consent requires and presumes radical inequalities between the parties. In the liberal model, an immensely powerful entity (the state) seeks consent from those who possess little if any power (political subjects, or citizens). Thus, as Brown argues, liberal consent is ‘a response to power – it adds or withdraws legitimacy – but is not a mode of enacting or sharing in power’ (ibid.).

Here we may draw a sharp line between liberal consent and the kind of consent which enables relations of erotic power exchange. The structures of erotic consent are deeply informed by desire, particularly embodied desire. This is rarely, if ever, the case with the structures of political consent which enable modern liberal states, or with the forms of economic consent which underwrite modern capitalism. The consent of the liberal political subject or the capitalist economic subject can be grudging, indifferent or apathetic. Relations of erotic power, by the same token, require desire. Mutual desire guarantees the ethical content of erotic power exchange, for desire ensures that the needs and wishes of the ‘subordinate party’ will be taken fully into account. In Lacan’s famous general formulation, ‘man’s desire is the desire of the Other’ (Lacan 1981: 38). Kinky relations provide a particularly striking example of this. In a typical BDSM relationship, the dominant desires the desire of the submissive. The submissive’s desire frequently structures negotiations and determines the shape and extent of the scene. By endorsing and emphasising the desire of the submissive, BDSM promotes a high level of equality between the participants. This equality may sometimes lie hidden behind the apparent inequality generated by the BDSM roles themselves, and confusion around this issue may motivate many moral critiques of kink (Highleyman 1997: para. 10). A form of consent which promotes such equality, and which fully respects the desires of all parties involved, could be compatible with anarchism, while the liberal form of consent cannot.
perhaps the practices of kinksters, and the concept of desiring consent which stands behind those practices, represent a real challenge to the modern state and its political theories. Some anarchists have already begun to recognise this possibility. A 2002 issue of *Organisef*, the magazine of Britain’s Anarchist Federation, called for ‘safe, free, diverse and consensual’ sex. The magazine ran an ‘Interview with an Anarchist Dominatrix’, one Mistress Venus. Mistress Venus clearly understands how to wield symbolic power against the dominant order. She defines the domination session as an ‘escape from reality’ (Anarchist Federation 2002: 8). But this does not appear to be a nihilistic ‘escape’ into non-reality. Rather, it looks very much like an attempt to critique the symbolic order of modern capitalism. Mistress Venus does this by developing an alternative symbolic order, one in which symbols of power are redeployed in subversive ways. If this strategy is successful, these redeployed symbols may challenge or undermine the authority of the conventional symbolic order. Mistress Venus suggests that

the roles we play mirror the power-based capitalistic society we live in today, a society of greed, oppression and subversion, a society of force, silence and pain. This is in no way representative of the lifestyle I choose to live in as an anarchist, a society based on equality, respect and self-government. Domination is a game, the adult’s version of what children call ‘playing’. (Anarchist Federation 2002: 8)

Here Mistress Venus acknowledges the crucial contribution which kink can make to anarchism. As she points out, kink reflects the non-consensual, real world power relations which anarchists universally condemn. Yet this reflection is always consensual, desired and playful. Kink performs real world power relationships in a way which simultaneously critiques those relations and offers a vital ethical alternative. As Liz Highleyman argues, S/M role-playing can be used ‘to challenge illegitimate authority. Most SM players believe that such play is a parody of real world authority rather than an imitation of it’ (Highleyman 1997: para. 24). The strategy here is to reproduce the structure of real world power relations, but to do so in a way that will radically alter the subjective significance of those relations. The idea, in Highleyman’s wonderful formulation, is to ‘subvert, pervert, and make overt the erotic subtext of power and authority’ (ibid.: para. 27). This has the potential to reduce the psychological power of real world authority, and surely that is a step in the direction of anarchist liberation.

If it is to realise this potential, however, postanarchist kink must be careful not to slip back into a liberal humanist philosophy or politics. Judy Greenway has argued that

even when sexual transgression seems to be about creating new versions of sexuality, the language of the true inner self recurs ... Sometimes, for instance in the debates around the limits of consensual sado-masochism, its defenders use the traditional rhetoric of civil liberties, maintaining the public/private distinction.

(Greenway 1997: 8)

Indeed, this does represent a serious potential problem for postanarchist kink theory. The risk here is that kinky desire might inadvertently produce a problematic kind of identity politics. This politics would depend for its very existence upon the liberal humanist subject and the liberal state, both of which postanarchism seeks to subvert. Wendy Brown has formulated this problem quite effectively. Her analysis convincingly suggests that identity politics cannot possibly be deployed against the modern state. Brown argues eloquently that ‘politicized identities generated out of liberal, disciplinary societies, insofar as they are premised on exclusion from a universal ideal, require that ideal, as well as their exclusion from it, for their own continuing existence as identities’ (Brown 1995: 65). If Brown is right about this, then a kinky identity politics will be of little use to anarchism.

The source of this problem is desire; more specifically, it is the troubling way in which identity politics seem to channel desire within a liberal order. Thus Brown speaks of ‘politicized identity’s desire within liberal-bureaucratic regimes, its foreclosure of its own freedom’ (ibid.: 66). For Brown this is a reactionary desire, one which grows out of a kind of Nietzschean ressentiment. Brown emphasises the ‘structure of desire’ (also used by Delany) provides the key that may unlock kink’s radical potential. Specifically, I suggest that we must strive to distinguish the reactionary structure of desire which Brown has ably identified from a very different structure of desire. The structure I have in mind would describe the desire of postmodern subjects: deeply embodied, without fixed or stable identities. The identities of these subjects would fluctuate too rapidly and too dramatically for identity politics to emerge. This would also be a structure of kinky desire. As Jamie Heckert has observed, the ‘poststructuralist argument on the potential fluidity of the self’ suggests that S/M could be used to ‘redefine the meaning of power play’, though Heckert rightly warns us that this project may not be for everyone, and that it should only be pursued with great care and caution (Heckert 2005: 208–9). The concept of fluidity is crucial here: kink has the potential to add flexible, fluid power relations to the fluid identity structures which post-structuralism has identified. ‘SM roles are so fluid’, observes Highleyman; ‘[a]n SM role is not predetermined on the basis of one’s occupation, gender, sexual orientation, race, or class, and each partner may take on the role(s) that meet their individual or collective desires’ (Highleyman 1997: para. 25). Similarly, Foucault points out that in S/M there are roles, but these can be reversed; even when the roles are stabilised, they are clearly part of a game (Foucault 1984: 169).
Certainly many kinksters identify with particular positions within the structure of erotic power relations. Many claim specific identities for themselves, often introducing themselves as tops or bottoms, dominants or submissives, masters or slaves. But many also switch (at least in my experience). Here desire takes priority over specific roles or identities. Within such a structure of desire, identities and power relations are in a constant state of flux. Because the stable subject required by liberal humanism cannot emerge from this structure of desire, I call it postanarchist.

Postanarchist kink sees power not as a problem but as a possibility. Foucault showed us that the attempt to eliminate power is absurd. Rather than attacking power, we might draw careful distinctions between different kinds of power. We should entertain the hypothesis that it is, after all, possible to exercise power in an ethically responsible way. Indeed, as Highleyman astutely observes, ‘the idea that we can use SM to learn to use power in an ethical way remains, along with consent, the crux of the moral defense of erotic dominance and submission’ (Highleyman 1997: para. 38). The key to this ethical possibility is to be found in the philosophy of consent and desire embodied in the practices of erotic power exchange. According to this philosophy, the exchange of power is ethically legitimate if and only if all persons involved consent to that exchange and desire it. These criteria permit erotic power exchange to stand as a dramatic ethical alternative to non-consensual, undesired power.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the crucial differences between these two forms of power, I will examine a body of literature which addresses both forms: the speculative fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany. These two African American authors are deeply aware of the massive historical traumas which have resulted from the exercise of non-consensual political and economic power, particularly in the American South prior to the Civil War. (As a white male American, I experience these traumas much less directly and in a very different way. As a postanarchist historian, I believe that we can learn from these traumas.) Butler and Delany are especially aware of the problems of sexual exploitation endemic in the American slave system, an awareness they share with other well-known African American authors like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.\(^4\) But Butler and Delany go further than many of their peers, for they not only provide a compelling critique of the political and sexual economies of slavery, they also provide an alternative. For Butler and Delany, erotic power exchange and play-slavery provide an antidote to the ethically bankrupt institution of slavery. These two authors thus offer us a way to begin healing the wounds which chattel slavery has left upon our culture and its philosophy of ethics.

**Becoming a kind of master: postanarchist kink in Octavia Butler’s Patternist books**

As an African American woman who writes science fiction, Octavia Butler speaks from a triply marginalised subject position. She is a woman writing in a field which is dominated by male authors. She is an African American writing in a field dominated by white authors. And by choosing to write science fiction, she has elected to participate in a field which is itself marginal to literature—a ‘paraliterary’ field, to use Delany’s terminology. Since this last marginalisation, at least, represents a choice on Butler’s part, we must consider the possibility that she wants to speak from the margins. Indeed, it is possible that Butler has things to say which can be said only at the margins. Butler’s work deals with themes of power and slavery—hardly unusual concerns for an African American writer. But by choosing to write science fiction, Butler gives herself the opportunity to approach these themes in a way which is radically different from the approaches of mainstream literature. Certainly we find in Butler a compelling and elegant critique of socio-economic slavery, and of the forms of power which sustain that system. But there is also another kind of power at work in Butler’s writing. Lauren J. Lacey argues quite convincingly that ‘Butler’s last three novels [Parable of the Sower, Parable of the Talents and Fledgling] work through the complexities of power in ways that offer possibilities for contemporary feminists—and others—to cope with and even to profit from the power formations that surround us’ (Lacey 2008: 380).

While Lacey is right to say that Butler’s later novels show us the positive political possibilities of power, this theme is not a new one for Butler. It can also be found in her earliest published work, the Patternist series. Butler quite rightly rejects the sort of power which produced master-slave relations in the antebellum American South. In her Patternist series, she describes these relations in terms which will make sense to a largely white science fiction audience who may not be entirely familiar with the political economy of slavery. Butler accomplishes this by locating her slave society in a future world which is ruled by a group of powerful telepaths. These telepaths share access to a grid of mental energy known as the Pattern. The Pattern is strictly hierarchical. This hierarchical structure makes the Pattern a tempting target for anarchist critique, which Butler deploys without naming it as such. The strongest telepath within the Pattern is known as the Patternmaster, and this individual has the ability to exercise non-consensual telepathic control over the other Patternists. The Patternmaster delegates power to Housemasters, who also use their power in a non-consensual way. Butler describes a Housemaster called Coransee as someone who ‘radiated power in the way of a man not only confident but arrogant’ (Butler 1976: 15).

The parallels between these Housemasters and nineteenth-century American plantation owners are unmistakable. Housemasters are in general very competitive, yet they ‘had a tradition of returning one another’s runaways’ (ibid.: 75). Like their real world counterparts, Housemasters recognise that they share a common interest in maintaining the slave system. The Housemasters also reproduce the reprehensible gender relations of the plantation economy. It was, of course, common practice in the American South for slavemasters to rape their female slaves, in order to ensure the reproduction of the slave...
population. Similarly, Housemaster Coransee knows that 'no woman of his House had the right to refuse him' (ibid.: 158). For women Patternists especially, non-consensual, undesired power is the very essence of the Pattern. And yet these Patternist women yearn for precisely the same kind of power which has traditionally been used against them. 'I want the same thing you want', says a Patternist woman named Amber; 'My House. Mine' (ibid.: 134). One of the most painful truths about non-consensual power is that those who are victimised by such power often respond by dreaming not of a liberated and egalitarian society, but of a world in which that power flows through their hands instead of the hands of their masters. This psychological aspect of the slave system makes it fairly simple to divide the slave population and turn the slaves against one another. Distinctions are drawn in Butler's Houses between the more prestigious household slaves and the lower-ranking 'outsiders'. This closely parallels the distinction between house and field slaves in the antebellum American South. Starved of power, the outsiders often abuse the only people who are below them in the Patternist social hierarchy: those who lack telepathic powers altogether, the 'mutes'. For example, 'there was an outsider who had researched ancient methods of torture and made a hobby of trying them on mutes' (ibid.: 68).

The mutes are clearly an important part of the slave system which the Patternist series describes. In the profoundly hierarchical structure of the Pattern, they are the lowest of all groups. Their inequality is largely based upon their lack of telepathic power (which stands in Butler's work as a surrogate for unequal levels of economic power in the American South). But the most honest of Butler's characters understand that this inequality is also linguistic in origin. Consider this conversation between the immortal shape-shifting woman Emma (also known as Anyanwu) and Doro, patriarchal progenitor of the Pattern:

'Mutes!'
He looked annoyed, probably with himself. 'It's a convenient term. People without telepathic voices. Ordinary people.'
'I know what it means, Doro. I knew the first time I heard Mary use it. It means nigger!' (Butler 1977: 161)

Although the Pattern is the result of an extended breeding programme carried out by the immortal Doro, he is, ironically, a mute. However, Doro does have the ability to transfer his mind into another person's body. In doing so, he permanently extinguishes that person's consciousness. Doro has lived for millennia in this way, hopping from one body to another, 'consuming' the minds which inhabit these bodies. Not surprisingly, Doro emerges in Butler's narrative as the ultimate slavemaster. He can kill at will, but he cannot be killed. His power is absolute and unquestionable. He is also completely unconcerned about the pain of others. 'It was rare for another person's pain to disturb Doro. If the girl seemed to be dying, he would be concerned that good seed was about to be lost. But if she were merely in agony, it did not matter' (Butler 1980: 184). Indeed, Doro derives sadistic pleasure from the act of killing, especially when his victim is mentally or telepathically sensitive. Doro explains that he is able to recognise 'the kinds of people that I would get the most pleasure from if I took them. I guess you could say, the kinds of people who tasted best' (Butler 1977: 97). Thus Doro is not merely a sadist; he is a kind of psychic cannibal who enjoys consuming the mental energy of his victims.

But there is also another motivation for Doro's cruelty: 'Doro wanted an empire. He didn't call it that, but that was what he meant ... He needed tools, because an empire of ordinary people wasn't quite what he had in mind' (ibid.: 92–3). Doro's slaves are his tools. He uses them to enhance and increase his political power. Yet there is another form of power which is even more important to Doro. Foucault called it 'bio-power', that which 'brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations' (Foucault 1978: 143). Just as a nineteenth-century American slave owner would always be concerned about the size of his 'herd', Doro is obsessed with his breeding programme. 'Had human life ever mattered to Doro beyond his interest in human husbandry?' (Butler 1977: 55). In this context, Doro's power is largely biological in origin, since he controls the breeding programme. But again, Butler reminds us that power is always partly linguistic. 'Breed didn't sound like the kind of word that should be applied to people. The minute he said it, though, I realized it was the right word for what he was doing' (ibid.: 96). Doro's breeding programme is partly enabled by language's reluctance to name it as such. So Butler combines a radical critique of bio-power with an almost structuralist critique of linguistic power: her project has clear Foucauldian affinities.

Like any slavemaster, Doro regards the children born to his 'breeders' not as people but as his property. 'The daughter had been his from the moment of her conception – his property as surely as though his brand were burned into her flesh. She even thought of herself as his property' (Butler 1980: 150). Doro's dehumanising breeding project thus exhibits all the worst features of nineteenth-century American slavery.

But, as Foucault reminds us, 'there are no relations of power without resistances' (Foucault 1980: 142). The nineteenth century was a time not only of slavery but of slave revolts. In the Patternist books, these revolts arrive in the person of Mary, the protagonist of Mind of My Mind. Mary is the end result of Doro's breeding programme. It is her telepathic power that establishes the Pattern itself. Her relationship with Doro ranges from tense to antagonistic, and much of this antagonism stems from Mary's resentment of Doro's power:

'What am I for, Doro? What are you progressing toward?'
'You know the answer to that.'
'Your race, your empire, yes, but what place is there in it for me?' (Butler 1977: 101)
As Mary joins with other telepaths to form the Pattern, her power increases dramatically. One of the first to notice this change is Mary's husband Karl, a strong telepath who had once dominated Mary:

'You're changing. I've been watching you change, wondering how far you would go.'

'Changing how?'

'Growing up perhaps. I can remember when it was easier to intimidate you.'

(Butler 1977: 188)

Gradually Doro, too, comes to realise that he can no longer control Mary as he once did. Indeed, as a mute, Doro remains shut out of the Pattern. 'Together, the "Patternists" were growing into something that he could observe, hamper, or destroy but not something he could join' (ibid.: 155). Naturally, this necessitates a war between Doro and Mary. Doro is immensely powerful, but Mary is more powerful still, for she has the strength of her Patternists to draw upon. Mary does not merely have power, 'she was power, strength concentrated as Doro had never felt it before – the strength of dozens, perhaps hundreds of Patternists' (ibid.: 217, emphasis added). In the end, even Doro can't stand against such strength. At the conclusion of *Mind of My Mind*, Doro is himself enslaved, then extinguished: 'He was a member of the Pattern. A Patternist. Property. Mary's property ... She consumed him slowly, drinking in his terror and his life, drawing out her own pleasure, and laughing through his soundless screams' (ibid.: 220). This is a dramatic, ironic reversal of fortune for a man who has been enslaving and consuming others for millennia.

As satisfying as it surely is to see the tables turned on Doro, however, we cannot assume that Mary will be able to escape the temptations of non-consensual power. She may be destined to become a female Doro. The tendency among feminist critics, however, has been to argue otherwise. Marlene Barr maintains that Mary 'uses her power to create a new community, a new body of men and women' (Barr 1987: 77). Similarly, Robin Roberts suggests that Mary is a kind of nurturing 'queen bee' whose community-centred values make her preferable to the patriarchal Doro (Roberts 1993: 107). Unfortunately, we don't really know for certain how Mary's regime will compare to that of Doro. Her rule is established at the very end of *Mind of My Mind*, and develops within the narrative gap which exists between that book and *Clay's Ark*. But we may reasonably imagine that Mary – a former slave herself – at least has the potential to feel sympathy for those she dominates, as Doro could not. And Butler does show us enough of Mary's relationship with the Patternists in *Mind of My Mind* to convince us that Mary does genuinely care for her telepaths, that she sees them not as breeding stock but as members of a vibrant organic community. Still, we cannot ignore the fact that while Mary's regime may be more nurturing and more organic than Doro's, it remains a non-consensual slave system nonetheless. Members of the Pattern have no choice but to participate, and all are forced to acknowledge Mary's absolute power.

It is only in the final volume of the *Patternist* series, *Wild Seed*, that Butler shows us an egalitarian relationship based upon the exchange of erotic power. Though *Wild Seed* was one of the last books to appear in the *Patternist* series, it represents the beginning of the narrative which runs through that series. (The tension between these two sequences – publication and narrative – is one way in which Butler's work refuses the too-convenient comforts of linear narrative.) *Wild Seed* tells us of Doro's origins, and of his centuries-spanning power struggle with the immortal shape-shifting woman called Anyanwu. That this is a political struggle is clear; Stacy Alaimo has described it as 'a battle between two modes of knowing and being: the tyrannical force of an egotistical, disembodied mind and the transformative powers of an utterly embodied woman' (Alaimo 1998: 126). In one sense, then, this is the story of the postmodern body's revenge upon the Enlightenment's mythology of human subjectivity. But *Wild Seed* is much more than that. It is also an account of the ways in which power and desire flow between Doro and Anyanwu. It is, in short, a sadomasochistic love story.

Like any dominant, Doro finds that what he wants more than anything else is Anyanwu's submission. Lacan might say Doro desires the desire of the Other. The problem is that Anyanwu is 'wild seed'. She is a genetic aberration, and not the product of Doro's selective breeding programme. She is thus quite difficult to control, but Doro hopes that, 'like no other wild seed, Anyanwu would learn to fear him and bend herself to his will' (Butler 1980: 90). He will settle for nothing less than total obedience. Anyanwu must even learn to define ethics in Doro's terms. 'She would learn that right and wrong were what he said they were' (ibid.: 92). Yet, time and time again, Doro is frustrated in his quest to gain power over Anyanwu. She remains untameable.

'What will I have to do next to teach you to obey?' Doro laments (ibid.: 176).

When Anyanwu finally does begin to submit, it is only because her instincts of self-preservation are strong. She knows that Doro could kill her; to protect herself, she submits. This is not (yet) an ethical or erotic submission: she submits out of necessity, without desire. Thus 'Doro had reshaped her. She had submitted and submitted and submitted to keep him from killing her ... she had formed the habit of submission' (ibid.: 196). But that is not all she develops. Anyanwu comes to enjoy Doro's attentions: 'Ayanwu enjoyed his touches even now when she thought they were more imprisoning than caressing' (ibid.: 94). In short, she learns to eroticise the power relations which exist between her and Doro. By doing so, she alters the basic nature of their relationship.

The erotic power which begins to flow between Anyanwu and Doro becomes entirely distinct from the ethically problematic forms of power which
Butler described in the previous *Patternist* books. One crucial difference is that these power relations are based upon reciprocal desire. Another important difference is that they are reversible. Here the joke, as always, is on Doro. From the very moment that Doro attains erotic mastery over Anyanwu, he begins to develop what Hegel called a ‘dependent consciousness’. Doro is enslaved by his desire for Anyanwu, by his all-consuming need to dominate the one woman who could possibly be his equal. It takes Doro several centuries and an entire novel to realise that this is happening to him. Anyanwu, however, articulates her strategy on page 9 of *Wild Seed*: ‘She knew some people were masters and some were slaves. That was the way it had always been … She had become a kind of master herself. “Sometimes, one must become a master to avoid becoming a slave,” she said softly’ (ibid.: 9). This, then, is the dance which these two immortals perform through the centuries: ‘mastering’ and ‘enslaving’ one another in a permanent spiral of mutual desire.

The culmination of the erotic relationship between Anyanwu and Doro occurs near the end of the novel. In a scene which is deeply charged with erotic energy, Doro feeds upon Anyanwu’s life essence, taking her as close to death as he can without killing her. The scene reveals the depths of Doro’s desires, and the extent to which he is controlled by those desires:

‘I had to know you that way at least once,’ he said. ‘I had to touch you that way.’

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘Because it’s the closest I’ll ever come to you.’

(Butler 1980: 259)

This remarkable kinky love scene highlights the importance of mutual, consensual desire. Doro ‘wondered what she would say if he told her no one had ever before enjoyed such contact with him. No one in nearly four thousand years … But Anyanwu had participated, had enjoyed, had even taken the initiative for a while, greatly intensifying his pleasure’ (ibid.: 260). For millennia, Doro has been a psychic rapist, consuming people’s consciousness against their will. Now he is astonished to discover that what he really wants and needs is not an unwilling victim but a partner, someone who genuinely enjoys the exchange of power and can participate in that exchange as an equal. Here is the supreme irony: Anyanwu has made the ultimate submission to Doro. She has offered him her life. And yet by doing so, she has gained total power over him. Through the reciprocal, consensual exchange of power and desire, Anyanwu has accomplished something truly remarkable. She has reappropriated slavery, and transformed it from an ethical abomination into something beautiful. She has discovered a kind of erotic play-slavery. *Wild Seed* presents this play-slavery as an effective strategic and symbolic challenge to Doro’s ugly, empire-building slavery. A text would have to be kinky and postanarchist to achieve something like that.

---

**A land of wholly inverted values: postanarchist kink in Samuel Delany’s *Neveryon* books**

Like Butler, Samuel Delany speaks from the literary and erotic margins. Indeed, many of his most interesting ideas can be articulated only from a position which is marginal to mainstream literature and sexuality. Those interpretations of Delany’s work which fail to recognise this are doomed to remain incomplete. In her frequently cited essay on ‘Recent Feminist Utopias’, for example, Joanna Russ makes the rather astonishing claim that Delany writes from an ‘implicit level of freedom’ simply because he is male (Russ 1981: 83). Russ chooses to disregard the ways in which Delany, a gay African American who writes S/F about S/M, is automatically relegated to the margin of the margins. As science fiction, Delany’s texts are marginal to literature. There is a subtle but persistent concern for race in Delany’s work, and this is certainly enough to make his project marginal to that of white literature. His elaborate articulation of gay themes makes his writing marginal to heterosexual literature. And his frequent discussions of S/M make his work marginal to vanilla literature. By focusing only on Delany’s gender, Russ disregards these important margins. Damien Broderick gets a bit closer; he recognises that, as a gay black man, Delany does write about marginal experience (Broderick 1995: 120). And yet Broderick still does not give us a complete picture of Delany’s work. He ends up suggesting, rather implausibly, that Delany’s ‘fiction is articulated about a semiotic programme which seems, at its limit, to merge with humanist, albeit highly relativist, liberal pluralism’ (ibid.: 138). This misconception stems from the fact that Broderick acknowledges some of the margins which Delany occupies (gay/black) but disregards another (kinky).

This is an essential omission, for it is precisely Delany’s commitment to the principles of erotic power exchange that makes his work incompatible with the tradition of liberal humanism. Humanism has amply demonstrated that it has room for a great many different identities, including those of ethnic minority groups and possibly even homosexuals. But it has not, so far, shown that it has any room for kink, and the one thing it has not yet learned to tolerate is frank discussions of power. Delany’s work points us not towards any liberal humanism (however pluralist), but rather towards a kinky postanarchism.

Delany is a deeply political thinker, with a strong sense of ethics. Nowhere is this more clear than in his philosophy of kink. The cornerstone of Delany’s system of erotic ethics is a principle of consent informed by desire, which is something that his system has in common with many anarchist ethical philosophies. In a number of ways, in a variety of different texts, Delany makes this fundamental point: desired and consensual forms of power exchange are ethically acceptable and potentially erotic; undesired, non-consensual forms of power are intrinsically unethical and non-erotic. Delany is especially careful to articulate the vital distinction between erotic and political power: ‘To assume a session of “sexual torture” between two consenting adults requires only
minimal reorganization of what goes on in an actual session of political torture — and in any way manifests the same "power relations" — signs only gross ignorance of the context and the substance of both situations! (Delany 1994: 140). It is ethics, of course, which separates the two situations. In *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*, Delany highlights and sharpens this ethical point by describing a world in which 'all sadomasochism was hunted out and punished with barbaric singlemindedness; especially if concert [sic] was written out or clearly specified by verbal contract, which their authorities considered the ultimate disease' (Delany 1984: 215). Reading this passage, one experiences a remarkable ethical vertigo: why should consensual S/M be repressed in particular? What is it about such practices that the state might find so troubling? Perhaps it is the fact that consensual erotic power exchange threatens the state's jealously guarded (and non-consensual) power monopoly. That would be a very anarchist interpretation.

Like Butler, Delany provides extensive meditations on slavery. And like Butler, Delany understands that 'slavery' can refer either to a non-consensual set of socio-economic relations or to the consensual eroticisation of such relations. (This eroticisation represents a particular form of the more general practice of erotic power exchange.) Indeed, 'slavery' is a slippery signifier which can sometimes slide back and forth between the two meanings. Delany's Gorgik is a character who has experienced both real slavery and play-slavery; he seems to feel that one can lead to another: 'Fire, slavery, cloth, coin, and stone — these are the basis of civilized life. Sometimes it happens that one or another of them gets hopelessly involved in the most basic appetites of a woman or a man' (Delany 1979: 143). But Delany also recognises that the eroticisation of class relations represents a potentially potent threat to the dominant social order: 'The easier it is to name, survey, and pathologize the eroticization of any particular set of class relations, then the more dangerous that set of relations — and their eroticization — is to patriarchal status quo phallocentric society' (Delany 1994: 136). S/M eroticises the class relations which are such a fundamental part of chattel slavery; by this logic, S/M must be one of the most dangerous forces ever unleashed against the patriarchy. For no erotic practice has been more thoroughly catalogued, more ruthlessly medicalised. From Krafft-Ebing's vast nineteenth-century inventory of perversions to today's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, erotic power exchange has remained one of psychology's great obsessions. It's no wonder that the patriarchy has done everything within its considerable power to control the discourse surrounding S/M, for as long as S/M remains trapped within the psychiatric discourse, the threat which it represents is contained.

Clearly, Delany is fascinated by the politics of kink, and he has devoted considerable paraliterary effort to the exploration of these politics. Erotic power relations are at the thematic core of the multi-volume sword and sorcery epic which Delany initiated in 1979 with *Tales of Nevèrÿon*. Delany tells us that it was in these stories that he 'turned to examine some of the real (i.e., again, I mean political) problems that the idea of S/M brings up' (Delany 1999: 118). And it's clear that this exploration has a deep personal significance for him. 'Should you really want to know what this weird Delany guy is all about, these are the books to wrestle with', Delany assures us (ibid.: 119). But why did Delany choose the much-maligned genre of sword and sorcery fantasy as the forum in which to speak about ideas which are clearly so important to him? He recognises that sword and sorcery is 'SF's despised younger cousin' (Delany 1994: 46). Indeed, he goes out of his way to emphasise that sword and sorcery represents 'the margin of the margin' (ibid.: 71). Perhaps, then, Delany chose sword and sorcery precisely because it is marginal — indeed, because it exists on the margins of an already marginal paraliterary genre called science fiction. After all, such a doubly marginal genre is perfect for a discussion of that most marginal of sexual strategies, erotic power exchange. By choosing sword and sorcery, Delany is not merely accepting marginal status. He is insisting upon it.

Like almost all of Delany's books, the *Nevèrÿon* stories draw very clear lines between non-consensual socio-economic power and consensual, desired erotic power. Delany is especially careful to distinguish slavery from play-slavery. Nevèrÿon is a slave society, and Nevèrÿon's slave system reproduces the power relations of the antebellum American South, down to the last detail. Delany is careful to emphasise, for example, the special status of the favoured administrative ('house') slaves, who in Nevèrÿon wear ornate covers over their iron slave collars as a sign of relative rank. Of course, these elite slaves must contend with the inevitable feelings of guilt and complicity which result from their collaboration with slavery. Collar covers 'add far more weight to the neck than the circle of iron they cover', observes one house slave (Delany 1979: 224). Delany uses the symbol of the collar cover to illustrate the morass of moral dilemmas which slavery inevitably produces.

In order to ensure that the *Nevèrÿon* series can describe the entire history of slavery, Delany employs a clever technique of narrative acceleration. Historical developments which took centuries in the real world take decades in Nevèrÿon. This allows characters to comment on broad historical transformations. Some of these characters are able to describe the problems that emerge when slaves are emancipated. 'Freedom is not so simple a thing as that', a house slave points out when confronted with possible liberation. 'Where do you expect us to go? If we leave here, what do you expect will happen to us?' (ibid.: 221). Here Delany recognises that the transition from a traditional economy based on chattel slavery to a market economy based on formally free wage labour will not be an easy one. The former slaves who join the ranks of the impoverished urban working class may find that their lives have not improved. Indeed, another house slave argues that 'you free the labor pens into a world where, at least in the cities and the larger towns, a wage-earning populace, many of them, is worse off than here' (ibid.: 225).
Despite these potential (and, in the case of American history, very real) problems, many citizens of Neveryón are willing to fight for the abolition of slavery, under the leadership of a former slave known as Gorgik the Liberator. Delany makes it easy to see why slavery arouses such intense anger. The ethical atrocities which result from this kind of non-consensual socio-economic power are clear, particularly when Delany examines the sexual dimension of the slave system. In Neveryón, as in the antebellum American south, slavery encourages rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Long before he begins his campaign against slavery, Gorgik (not yet ‘the Liberator’) visits the slave market. ‘Buy me, lord!’ begs a woman slave. ‘You will take me, please, away from him! We go to the desert tribes and I’ll be sold there again. Do you know what they do to women slaves in the desert? I was there before. I don’t want to go back’ (ibid.: 135). Surely few moral crusades could be more inspirational than the campaign to end such violations.

And yet the same narrative which contains this thorough critique of socio-economic slavery also includes a very sympathetic portrayal of consensual, desired play-slavery. Gorgik does not buy the woman at the slave market. Instead, he purchases a slave boy called Small Sarg. Sarg suggests that Gorgik should have bought the woman instead, for he could have had her work by day, her body by night. Gorgik replies, ‘you think I’ll get any less from you?’ (ibid.: 137). At first, this sounds like another example of non-consensual sexual slavery. But in fact the relationship between Gorgik and Sarg is far more complex than that. The first time Gorgik approaches Sarg sexually, he informs Sarg that the boy must wear a slave collar this time, but that on another night Gorgik will take the collar off Sarg and put it on himself (ibid.: 143). It turns out that Gorgik’s sexuality is directly linked to the symbol of slavery. It doesn’t matter to him which partner wears the collar, because the roles are reversible, as they often are in S/M (Foucault 1984: 169). The specific power configuration of Gorgik and Sarg’s first encounter seems quite arbitrary: Gorgik refuses to wear the collar himself only because he does ‘not feel like wearing it ... at least tonight’ (Delany 1979: 143).

Even if we read the first encounter between Gorgik and Sarg as non-consensual, this aspect of their relationship seems to last no longer than one night. The next morning, Sarg awakes to find Gorgik asleep, the collar off. Sarg slips away and could easily have escaped. He finds a girl hiding in the bushes; the first thing she says to him is ‘you’re not a slave now’ (ibid.: 145). Perhaps to emphasise this, Delany has the girl repeat this point twice more: ‘you are not a slave any more’ (ibid.: 148). This triple invocation, formulated a bit differently each time, suggests that Sarg has indeed left socio-economic slavery behind. He chooses to stay with Gorgik, shares desire with him and fights by his side. Gorgik does sometimes wear the collar; when he does, he calls Sarg ‘little master’ (ibid.: 234). When Gorgik tries to explain the nature of their relationship to others, he claims that ‘we are both free men’ (ibid.: 237). The reality, however, is that neither is free, for they are both enchained by mutual desire. By participating in a kind of play-slavery, Gorgik and Small Sarg reappropriate the symbolic structure of the socio-economic slavery which they hate, and use that structure to fulfil their erotic needs.

Certainly, Delany is well aware of the explosive danger which is contained within such play-slavery. In Neveryón, the second volume of the Neveryón series, Small Sarg turns against Gorgik. ‘Before you sit a man whose every word and act is impelled by lusts as depraved as any in the nation, who would make a slave of all and anyone to satisfy them, calling such satisfaction freedom!’ says Sarg of his former lover (Delany 1983: 77). We don’t know what, exactly, caused Sarg to reject the relationship which he once shared with Gorgik; these developments occur ‘off-stage’, outside Delany’s narrative. But the fact that Sarg was able to leave Gorgik is important. As Highleyman observes, a play-slave ‘has an out’, and this is one thing that makes his situation very different from that of African American slaves in the nineteenth century (Highleyman 1997: para. 16). Sarg tries to kill Gorgik, but Sarg himself is killed in the ensuing conflict. Yet even though Small Sarg has just tried to kill him, Gorgik will allow no ill to be spoken of his former lover. ‘But that man, dead on the tile, was also a friend — once’, Gorgik declares. ‘Had his friendship not been so great, his hatred might have been less’ (Delany 1983: 87). Gorgik still remembers Sarg fondly, and even Sarg’s betrayal is not enough to dissuade Gorgik from his campaign to bring ethics to power. As always, he continues this campaign on two simultaneous fronts, waging a guerrilla campaign against the institution of slavery while also deploying erotic power relations as a dramatic ethical alternative to that institution. Flight From Neveryón, the third volume in the series, finds Gorgik in another kinky relationship, this time with a one-eyed former mine slave called Noyeed. Gorgik and Noyeed develop their relationship consciously, with great deliberation and care. ‘What we do together, you and I,’ says Noyeed, ‘we do very much awake’ (Delany 1985: 123). Noyeed and Gorgik recognise the dangers inherent in a relationship such as theirs, and they are mindful of the example of Small Sarg. Nonetheless, they still choose erotic play-slavery, as a liberating alternative to the socio-economic slave system which they fight by day.

I must, therefore, strongly contest the interpretation advanced by Robert Elliot Fox. In his study of sexual politics in Delany’s work, Fox asserts that one of the things which is so thoroughly repulsive about the master/slave relationship in sado-masochism is that it is a psychosexual parody of a relationship (which, to be sure, had its own psychosexual aspect) involving large masses of people, not just individuals, under conditions of the most overt compulsion.

(Fox 1996: 52)

Here Fox completely fails to grasp the nature of consensual, desired play-slavery. On Delany’s worlds and moons, this type of ‘slavery’ represents a
liberation precisely because it replaces a non-consensual form of slavery – which both liberals and anarchists would probably find repulsive – with a form of play based upon consent and mutual desire. In the land of Nevèrøn, it is not the radicalness of Gorgik's campaign against the institution of slavery that bothers the ruling class (since that institution was dying anyway, of 'natural' economic causes); [rather, it was the radicalness of his appearance that had bothered the nobles, merchants, and their conservative employees – not the Liberator’s practice so much as his potential; for appearances are signs of possibilities’ (Delany 1985: 9). We cannot afford to discount the significance of this point, because the Nevèrøn books, like much of Delany's writing, operate within a semiotic system which is informed by the poststructuralist theories of people like Foucault. Within such a semiotic system, the most significant political acts are likely to occur not on the material level of political economy, but on the level of sign and symbol. In this respect, as in many others, Delany's work is postanarchist. Jes Battis has recently noted the specifically kinky valence of Gorgik's semiotic system: ‘it is through S/M sexuality ... that Gorgik stages political interventions within the gendered order of his own world’ (Battis 2009: 480). A semiotic system like this demands that we take seriously arguments such as the one that Gorgik advances: ‘As one word uttered in three different situations may mean three entirely different things, so the collar worn in three different situations may mean three different things. They are not the same: sex, affection, and society’ (Delany 1979: 238). By developing this radically contextual theory of semiotics and symbolism, Gorgik (and Delany) resolve the apparent contradiction which Fox believes he has identified. The symbolic redemption of slavery from the semiotic and ethical abyss in which it lingers is a crucial part of Delany's project. Jeffrey Allen Tucker is right to suggest that ‘Gorgik became a revolutionary who sought to attain for himself and all slaves in Nevèrøn the power to wrest symbolic control of the slave collar from the aristocracy and the freedom to shift the significance of the collar from one context to another’ (Tucker 2004: 148). This is the apex of Delany's kinky poststructuralist anarchism: freedom is defined here as the power to create context, the right to signify freely.

But if we wish to observe the full realisation of Delany's theory of erotic power, we must Return to Nevèrøn. In a book by that name (originally published as The Bridge of Lost Desire in 1987), Delany brings his philosophy of power as close to a conclusion as such an open-ended theoretical project could come. In ‘The Game of Time and Pain’, a tale set shortly after the liberation of Nevèrøn's slaves, we learn that S/M is 'one of the more common perversions in a Nevèrøn so recently awakened from a troubling dream of slaves' (Delany 1987: 24). Here Delany makes explicit the historical connection between non-consensual socio-economic slavery and its consensual erotic reflection. This connection might seem to have ominous ethical implications for play-slavery. But here it is crucial to consider Delany's philosophy of history. In Return to Nevèrøn, he assures us that history, 'despite our masters, is never inevitable, only more or less negotiable' (ibid.: 34). Delany goes on to argue that history must 'be founded as richly on desire as on memory' (ibid.: 74). His argument points towards a radically subjective form of history – indeed, it suggests a kind of Lacanian history. After all, Lacan saw desire as the Freudian version of the Cartesian cogito: the 'nodal point' where subjectivity occurs (Lacan 1981: 154). Delany's work suggests that history is experienced by this desiring subject. But what might such a negotiated, subjective, desiring history look like? Clearly, such a history would involve what Nietzsche called a 'revaluation of all values' (Nietzsche 1969: 254, 310–13). Thus Delany's Gorgik dreams of ‘a land of wholly inverted values where the very sign of my servitude, the iron at my neck, would be taken by all I met as a symbol of transcendent freedom’ (Delany 1987: 34).

For Gorgik and for other citizens of Nevèrøn, such an inversion of values is inherently political. For us it is anarchic: as always, the relevant politics are the politics of consent and desire. Delany's storytelling emphatically demonstrates that non-consensual socio-economic slavery cannot be erotic. Gorgik recalls an erotic moment which he experienced when he was still a slave. Temporarily uncollared, Gorgik watched an aristocrat place a slave collar around his own neck – and Gorgik felt desire. But when the aristocrat discovered that Gorgik was watching, he quickly moved to re-collar the slave. Gorgik speaks of the collar: 'And just as I had recognized the sexual in his placing of it about his own neck, I knew that, though lust still reeled in his body and still staggered in mine, this gesture was as empty of the sexual as it is possible for a human gesture to be' (ibid.: 54). The fundamental realisation that no reconciliation is possible between socio-economic slavery and play-slavery sets Gorgik on the path to true knowledge and true freedom. For this is what Gorgik learned that night in the aristocrat's tent: 'I knew, at least for me, that the power to remove the collar was wholly involved with the freedom to place it there when I wished. And, wanting it, I knew, for the first time since I'd been brought to the mines – indeed, for the first time in my life – the self that want defined' (ibid.: 57). Here Gorgik is announcing a rather remarkable epistemological revolution. It is a revolution of the Lacanian variety, in which the self is actually constituted through desire – and, indeed, through a specifically fetishistic desire, as Georgia Johnston has noted (Johnston 2007: 54). But what is truly significant here is not merely the creation of a desiring subject, but rather the fact that through desire this self called Gorgik is set free for the first time in his life. And he is free (indeed, there is a 'he' who can be free) because he has the power to give that freedom up willingly. It is important to note that the 'he' created in this way is not the self sought by modern humanism or the liberal state, for it was Lacanian desire that brought Gorgik into existence, rather than any rationalist Cartesian cogito.

Perhaps the meaning of Gorgik, then, is freedom – at least for those citizens of Nevèrøn who recognise that the ethical wound of non-consensual slavery can be healed, in part, through the consensual exchange of erotic power. For
them, as for Gorgik, consent and desire are the razor-sharp blades which separate the ethical from the criminal, the erotic from the economic. As Neveryon awakens from its nightmare of non-consensual slavery, its S/M community flourishes. ‘When I was free,’ old Gorgik tells his would-be lover, ‘I learned that the power, the freedom, the pleasures you and I would indulge here tonight take place within the laws of a marginal society and an eccentric civility that allows us to grasp them, one and the other, with a stunning force and joy that whoever skulks after them like a slave cannot imagine’ (Delany 1987: 63). As always, Delany celebrates marginality: explicitly, the marginality of the kinky community, but also Gorgik’s and perhaps Delany’s own. If Delany’s work has a utopian moment, it is surely this. In liberated Neveryon, Delany dreams of (and Gorgik remembers) a world in which power flows in accordance with the rules of civility and desire. It is a world which recognises the inevitability of power, and simply insists that such power be used ethically.

Delany’s work, like Butler’s, embodies an attempt to describe a range of ethical power relations. The basic rule for both authors is that these relations must be consensual and desired. In this sense, their projects are fundamentally anarchistic. But Butler and Delany also represent the culmination of a theoretical tradition which began when Masoch added the concept of consent to the philosophy of erotic power, thus creating the category of practices and strategies which would eventually come to be known as BDSM.9 Of course, Butler and Delany are interesting not merely because they make innovative contributions to kink theory via the medium of paraliterary genre fiction — though that certainly would be a remarkable enough achievement in its own right. Butler and Delany also expand, enhance and refine kink theory. Surely the most significant contribution which Butler and Delany make to our understanding of power emerges from their reappropriation of the master—slave dynamic. Relationshps such as that of Doro and Anyanwu, or Gorgik and Small Sarg, show, as no amount of dialectical thinking ever could, that there is, after all, a kind of mutual reciprocity to such relationships. Most crucially, Butler and Delany give us, through the principle of consent and the practice of mutual desire, a set of tools which we may use to distinguish unethical slavery from ethical play-slavery. This may well turn out to be their lasting contribution to the power of S/M and the erotic practices which flow from that philosophy.

Notes
1 I use the phrase ‘speculative fiction’ rather than ‘science fiction’ so that Delany’s Neveryon books, which describe vital components of his philosophy of power, may be included in the discussion.
2 Sadly, Marxism is no help here. As Rubin points out, ‘the issue of consent has been clouded by an overly hasty application of Marxist critiques of bourgeois contract theory to sex law and practice’ (Rubin 1982: 222). So liberalism and Marxism share the suspicion that kink can’t be consensual. But the anarchist concept of consent, which is broader, deeper and more open than those of most other political philosophies, may have room for kink.
3 Mistress Venus recognises that if there is a reactionary danger in what she does, that comes from the fact that her kink is inscribed within the structures of capitalist exchange. It is capitalism, not kink, that promotes ‘body fascism’ (Anarchist Federation 2002: 8).
4 See White (1985: 234ff) for a good account of the enormous dilemmas which female slaves faced, especially with respect to issues of sexuality and reproduction.
5 In a well-known section from The Phenomenology of Mind entitled ‘Lordship and Bondage’, Hegel examined the richly intricate ways in which masters and slaves come to depend upon one another. He concluded that since the consciousness of the master must always be mediated through the consciousness of the slave, the master cannot attain true independence, but only a ‘dependent consciousness’ (Hegel 1967: 234ff).
6 Moser and Kleinplatz (2005) have argued eloquently, however, that the American Psychiatric Association should remove sexual sadism and sexual masochism from its DSM. Although the paraphilias will likely remain in the DSM, the proposed revisions to DSM-5 would distinguish paraphilias from paraphilic disorders. This is meant to reflect a consensus among clinicians that paraphilias such as sexual sadism or sexual masochism are not ipso facto psychiatric disorders (American Psychiatric Association 2010):
7 The emphasis which Delany places on negotiation is not surprising. Real world S/M communities, including the California communities with which I am most familiar, often regard negotiation as one of the most important skills. Jay Wiseman calls it the most important (Wiseman 1996: 57). Pat Califia points out that the community uses negotiation for everything from individual scenes to entire relationships (Califa 2001: 25).8 It’s interesting to note here that Lacan said of the analytic method that ‘its operations are those of history’ (Lacan 1968: 19).
9 Mosach used the mechanism of the contract to explore the concept of consent in his famous erotic novel Venus in Furs (von Sacher-Masoch 1991 [1870]).

References