Melina Pérez

Text Experiment: Imaginations of Complete Visions

Understanding Audre Lorde's *Poetry is Not a Luxury* in a Black Queer Space Time

Black queer poet Audre Lorde emphasized the complexity of the issues involved in striving for the participation of all people in a democracy, a topic present in Lorde's unpublished correspondence, speeches, essays, and published interviews. Lorde described poetry as a playground of ideas and a space for accessible exchange within and between social groups, as well as a means of expressing participatory claims against democracies and governments. Through a conversation between freedom thinkers and poets, this essay reveals continuities in the expression, exploration, and formulation of freedom through the centuries.

The widely discussed theoretical approach of Black queer space time uses non-linear storytelling and affection-based, repetition-recognizing writing to negotiate knowledge systems in multidisciplinary approaches.[1] This reveals the interactions and interconnections between freedom thinkers, free from the necessity to exist in the same space and time. Black queer space time rather asks about experiences based on similar systems of oppression, and a Black queer *affect* allows us to be more truthful about the closeness that Black freedom thinkers felt towards each other through different times and places, connected by a space of experience.[2]

The theatre script – used as a means of negotiating this new and necessary form of presenting knowledge – was, for example, employed by Manuela Ritz and Sharon Dodua Otoo to discuss Black Germanness accurately throughout history in the pro-

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1 Anaïs Duplan, Blackspace. On the Poetics of an Afrofuture. Undercurrents, Boston, MA 2020; Ann-Louise Keating, Myth Smasher, Myth Makers: (Re)Visionary Techniques in the Works of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde, in: Emmanuel S. Nelson (ed.), Critical Essays. Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color, New York/London 2010, 73–95; Rasheedah Phillips, Dismantling the Master's Clock. On Race, Space, and Time, La Vergne 2025.

2 Kara Keeling, LOOKING FOR M –, in: GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 15/4 (2009), 565–582, doi: 10.1215/10642684-2009-002.

duction *Homestories Deutschland*, released in 2008.[3] This script does not explicitly understand itself as a critical fabulation, but rather as a methodical approach that allows for an intimate interaction and proximity of quotations, ideas, and concepts that, when surrounded by the contextualization of each quotation required by the linear narrative before moving on to the next quotation, lose their intimate sameness, proximity, or difference and the dynamics of producing new and more complex ideas.[4] This is what the essay *Poetry is Not a Luxury* proclaims: poetry and the poetic text as spaces that allow new findings and ideas to be created and interwoven, producing a methodology that generates academic discourse and conclusions. Hence, Lorde's phrase "Chaos of Knowledge" is used to title the script below. In order for different thoughts, insights, philosophical concepts, and ideas to be juxtaposed without simplifying them methodologically along the lines of 'same decade, same city, same social circle', the inadequacies of their proclaimed universality must be overcome. Through this form of academic script-writing, I aim to highlight what Lorde and others have already revealed: when academic forms of writing become a standard rather than functional, flexible tools for knowledge production, they lack the ability to create and address the entangled, intertwined, and complex networks of freedom thinkers who are, in their lived reality, inherently untroubled by the boundaries of linearity. Lorde, Marx, Fanon, Baraka, and the others addressed fictive, explorative writing as a form of knowledge building that is often dismissed as irrelevant in academic circles. By interlinking these arguments and revealing their similarities and discrepancies, I provide insight into the messy process of creating decolonial ideas within the context that Lorde termed "the mouth of the monster": thinking freedom in inherently unfree circumstances.[5]

3 See also the discussion on Critical Fabulation for History-Based Playwriting, in: HowlRound Theatre Commons, 3 March 2021, https://howlround.com/using-critical-fabulation-history-based-playwriting (10 April 2025). I first learned about this approach to historical writing through: Sharon Otoo/ManuEla Ritz, Homestory Deutschland. gelebt-erlebte Schwarze Deutsche Geschichte(n), unpublished, 2008.

4 Using Critical Fabulation for History-Based Playwriting, in: HowlRound Theatre Commons, 3 March 2021, https://howlround.com/using-critical-fabulation-history-based-playwriting (10 April 2025).

5 Audre Lorde, Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface, in: Audre Lorde/Cheryl Clarke (eds.), Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches, Revised Edition, The Crossing Press feminist series, Berkeley 2007, 60–66, 64.

Chaos of Knowledge[6]

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Audre Lorde (AL) 1934–1992 was a Black Grenadian-US citizen, lesbian, mother, poet, thinker, writer, and community builder. She lived through the women's rights movement, the civil rights movement, the Black Arts Movement, the Black German Movement,[7] the anti-Apartheid Movement,[8] and the emergence Black Gay Thought in the 1980s.[9] Her poetry, fiction, essays, and speeches are frequently referenced in discussions of intersectionality and Black feminism. The essay that will be discussed by the cast is Audre Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" (PiNaL) from 1985.

Phillis Wheatley (PW) 1753–1784 lived in the United States and wrote poetry after being enslaved in Ethiopia at a young age. Her biography adds another layer of meaning to her powerful poems, which are the only surviving words of a Black survivor of the Atlantic slave trade[10] "for where borderlines and dots become dominant, people are erased".[11]

Many of Wheatley's biographical details remain uncertain; the archive is silent on the matter or provides contradictory information. She wrote and performed her poetry, and after negotiations, she was able to publish it in the UK and gain her freedom.[12] She later married a freed black man.

Karl Marx (KM) 1818–1883 is imagined mainly through two perspectives on his work. First, the character is referenced in the often quoted *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*,[13] which is widely used in analyses of Lorde's essay. Second, the script draws on Weyher's re-reading of Marx and emotionality,[14] which followed the emotional turn in sociology and addressed significantly overlooked statements and writings by Marx.

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6 Audre Lorde, The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 110–114.

7 Tiffany Nicole Florvil, Mobilizing Black Germany. Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement, Black Internationalism, Illinois 2020, 25–52.

8 Audre Lorde, Apartheid U.S.A. 1985, in: Ibid, Burst of Light – and Other Essays, Dover 2017, 54.

9 Jafari S. Allen, There's a Disco Ball Between Us. A Theory of Black Gay Life, Durham 2021, 75.

10 Vincent Carretta, Phillis Wheatley and the Rhetoric of Politics and Race, in: Melvin L. Rogers/Jack Turner (eds.), African American Political Thought. A Collected History, Chicago/London 2021.

11 Henk van Houtum, Remapping Borders, in: Thomas M. Wilson (ed.), A Companion to Border Studies, Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 2012, 405–418, 412.

12 Announcement Phillis Wheatley Poetry Festival, copy of a Bulletin announcing the Festival for "First Book published by a Black Person in America" Lorde presented Poems and biographical Notes on a Panel with June Jordan and others on November the 5, Spellman Collage, Atlanta, Audre Lorde Papers, Box 8, 1.2.045.

13 Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, Werke, Band 8, Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte, Berlin 1972.

14 L. Frank Weyher, Re-Reading Sociology via the Emotions: Karl Marx's Theory of Human Nature and Estrangement, in: Sociological Perspectives 55/2 (2012), 341–363.

A.B. is a stand-in for contemporary thinkers and reflections on Black Queer Space Time.

Frantz Fanon (FF) 1925–1961 was born in the French colony of Martinique and wrote two highly influential books on colonialism and the mindset of Black people: *Black Skin, White Masks,* and *The Wretched of the Earth.*[15]

Amiri Baraka (AB) 1934–2014, poet, Black nationalist, and essayist, will discuss Lorde's thoughts, specifically, the question of hope and futurism in the context of immediate and permanent intimate closeness to death. I invoke Baraka first for his profound admiration of Fanon and his perspective on Marx, and second for his poem "Why Is We Americans?",[16] which helped me reflect on the recurring losses and disappointments experienced by Black and marginalized people in the US in a more thoughtful manner. Lastly, I draw on Baraka for his conflict with Wheatley and his subsequent apology, whom he initially dismissed as a failure, but later acknowledged his own shortcomings.[17]

Stuart Hall (SH) 1932–2014 was one of the leading voices in the early field of cultural studies.[18] A critical Marxist and Jamaican-British professor, he reflected deeply on the formation and avoidance of racial identities. I understand his collection of essays as a dialogue in itself, engaging with previous and alternative concepts surrounding Blackness, freedom, class, nationalism, and justice. In this theatre script, his voice is used to contrast the US-centric perspectives of others and to present Baraka's and Marx's strong opinions as a discourse rather than a monologue.

Pat (P) is a reference point for the scholarship of Black Futurism in the broad field of media studies, from the 1990s to the present day. By referencing the work of Janelle Monae (*Many Moons*), Janet Jackson (*Rhythm Nation*) and, on the other hand, the more playful and optimistic Missy Elliott's *Supa Dupa Fly,* the character of Pat (AAE for rhythmic worship, dance, and movement)[19]allows us to understand the approaches of text-based thinkers in conversation with music, visuals, and reflections on their artistic process. Following Missy's approach, the future is the main character in the visual narrative of Chaos of Knowledge, embodied by the character of Pat.[20]

15 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, New York 1967; Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, New York 1963.

16 Amiri Baraka – Why is We Americans (Excerpt), https://genius.com/Amiri-baraka-why-is-we-americans-excerpt-annotated (20 January 2023).

17 Kimberly W. Benston/Amiri Baraka, Amiri Baraka: An Interview, in: boundary 2 6/2 (1978), 303–305.

18 Stuart Hall and the Rise of Cultural Studies, in: The New Yorker, 17 July 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/stuart-hall-and-the-rise-of-cultural-studies (27 February 2023).

19 https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/23/style/african-american-english-oxford-dictionary.html (2 June 2025).

20 In a 2001 Interview, Elliott describes how her artistic practice, encompassing production, visualization, imagination, lyricism and performance, fulfils her vision as a Black, fat woman. While her

SETTING: A small room with a spacious window. The furniture looks as though it came from East Sussex, England, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The bed is covered with white lacquered linen. In the alcove at the headboard are books – some are novels, others are standard socialist works. In front of the dusty fireplace stands a typewriter; a chair has been placed in the niche between the end of the bed and the wall. Above the bed is a large window through which whoever is sitting on the bed can look out. The floor moves slightly beneath the beat that can be heard in the background, contrasting the scenery. Through the window, we see the galaxy in bright colours. It becomes apparent that the bedroom is behind the large glass pane of the spaceship that lands at the beginning of "Sock It 2 Me" by Missy Elliott.

The characters appear one by one, seemingly from nowhere. Phillis Wheatley has convened the meeting in a very particular place, Virginia Woolf's bedroom in Monk's House, located within the very unspecific space, the galaxy of Black adventures in Missy Elliott's "Sock it 2 Me". Wheatley smiles; she associates the British air with her first real experience of freedom after slavery. In eighteenth-century Great Britain, she was the first survivor of the Black Atlantic Slave Trade and the first African-American, Ethiopian woman to publish a book of poetry. Although she is only thirty-five, her vigour and calm leave no doubt that she instructs and speaks with natural authority today. She holds *Spill* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs in her hands and reads from it while sitting in front of the window.

(Actor playing PW reads off stage)[21] *Phillis Wheatley sits facing the window, wondering who will vouch for the black ink shaped by her deeply lined hands, brown as oak and interlaced. And who will be a witness and what drum call will be remembered. The sound of her writing is the quietest dance, tiptoing over the ocean. Tree floor drum trunk may you reach. Mother, tilt back to the west and hear me.*

> [PW nods at everyone who enters the room. She is sitting on a wooden chair next to the window and the small bed. KM is kneeling on the bed and stretching uncomfortably towards the built-in bookshelf behind it. He is trying to read the titles of the books on the non-fiction shelf. He grins at FF, who has just appeared.]

queerness is not explicitly mentioned, it is referenced through her experiences of gendered interactions with co-workers and her appreciation of diverse approaches to womanhood within the arts. Christoph Dallach, Interview mit Missy Eliott: 'Ich verkaufe Pop, nicht Sex' (5 August 2001), https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/musik/interview-mit-missy-eliott-ich-verkaufe-pop-nicht-sex-a-148525.html (1 March 2023).

21 Alexis Pauline Gumbs: Poem: For Phillis Wheatley, the first Poem in the Chapter 'What She did Not Say,' in: Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity, Durham 2016.

KM Looks like you are not on the shelf again. Me, on the other hand –

[KM points at some huge books on the top shelf.]

KM – translated into English, reprinted, and archived.

[FF nods, not reacting to the negging; he isn't looking for his own publications but rather for a clue as to what century they are in right now. He opens up a blotter laid on the bamboo bedside table. It is Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.]

FF[22] *But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and* fiction – *what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain –*

[He stops and looks self-assured.]

FF[23] It is 1928! We are in Virginia Woolf's Room of Her Own. I wasn't even born yet, dear Karl. A low-hanging fruit to win a round of our recognition competition.

[KM shrugs it off and puts his books on a higher, more presentable shelf. FF greets Phillis, but doesn't get the chance to speak to her as Audre Lorde, hectic as always,[24] appears and storms towards Phillis.]

AL[25] Good Morning, love. I am unsure if this is a good idea or the right place. I just got the attendance list for today's Black space and I think they –

[AL gestures towards KM and FF.]

AL – and the others will not get it. I mean, you know, it is such a contemporary piece of mine. 1977 – when it got published both of them were already …

[She slows down towards the end of the sentence, realizing who she is talking to.]

AL[26] I mean, I know you were also … indisposed by then, but –

22 Here, Fanon is reading from Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

23 Frantz Fanon was born on 20 July 1925. The stage has been designed to resemble Monk's House, where Virginia lived while writing *A Room of One's Own*, an essay about the material resources needed to write prose and how this is heavily gendered. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Berlin 2019.

24 Alexis De Veaux, Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde, New York 2004.

25 In 1980 Audre Lorde almost ended her two-year friendship with Michelle Cliff. Cliff had planned to write about Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which Lorde criticized. Lorde disagreed with Woolf's iconic status in feminist circles, believing that the theoretical room Woolf opened for female writers did not include Black writers like Lorde. DeVeaux, Warrior Poet, 2024, 183–184.

26 This reaction towards an older Black woman is inspired by Audre Lorde's conversations with Ellen Kuzwayo. Dagmar Schultz, Audre Lorde and Ellen Kuzwayo, Berlin 1992, released as a feature about the Audre Lorde's Berlin years.

[AL stops when she sees the look on PW's face. PW doesn't even need to answer AL's mumbling; a raised eyebrow is enough. A.B., SH, and ME appear too. AB is the last to arrive, and the overly formal way in which he and PW greet each other makes it clear to everyone that there is tension between them. They all take a seat. Only ME is nervously watching outside the window at the planet that the room-spaceship is approaching.]

PW[27] So we will discuss Audrey's text in our Black space today. What we will not do is use our temporality as an excuse – rule number one, as you are all well aware. We will also try to be mindful of how much space we take up and –

[She focuses on KM.]

PW[28] We will remember that every perspective is limited by our experiences as well as by what we are missing out on. I will moderate today's discussion. AB will help bridge the gap between art and science, and Audre Lorde –

AB Will present her amazing text today! It is not just poetry; it is an essay too.

AL Well, an essay on the importance of poetry. Never underestimate the importance of poetry, as *it is a vital necessity of our existence*![29] *The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized*.[30]

PW[31] Light, as in God, I might suggest!

27 PW addresses AL as Audrey, her birth name, as the practice of changing your name as a form of Black self-identification had not been established during PW's lifetime. See Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, New York 1982.

28 See Da Silva's discussion of knowledge and missing knowledge, revealing the inherent limitations of human experience and thought. Denise Ferreira Da Silva, Unpayable Debt, London 2022.

29 Quoted in: Audre Lorde, Poetry Is Not a Luxury (1977, henceforth PiNaL), in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 36–40.

30 PiNaL.

31 Wheatley incorporated Christian and faith-based imagery and morals in her poetry. While it can be assumed that she believed in the Christian God, it should also be kept in mind that most of her poems were published at a time when she was enslaved and unfree, "hence anyone attempting to identify her political beliefs in any particular writing must consider how free she was to express them, as well as whether the voice we hear is that of the author or that of a persona she has created." Jack Turner / Melvin L. Rogers, African American Political Thought: A Collected History, Chicago 2021, 36.

AL[32] Sister, yes and no. Light as in from a goddess, perhaps sent by an elder or our ancestors – or even by you? But not exclusively the Christian God.

SH[33] Live as a product? As a critical Marxist, I just have to ask what you mean by that. I might read it as the legacy of our lives, as what we leave behind.

AB[34] You've got it all wrong, brother. We think of everything in capitalist terms over here. Perhaps the sister is addressing what you contribute to your surroundings. Like, what do you bring to your community, to your nation, as in Black nation? You have to ask Fanon about that!

FF[35] Audre refers to scrutiny. It is not about what happens after you die. It's about constantly refocusing to examine your way of living as a colonized Black person. Rather than valuing a lifetime, it is a compass to adjust your behaviour in that very moment, not yesterday, nor tomorrow, as both of those times are inaccessible per se.

PW A moralist guidance. For me, that is God. For you, Audre, it seems to be woman-ness.

KM[36] Well, it is about having a vision and taking steps towards that vision that make sense, isn't it? I think it is more than moralist guidance. It's more like a well-thought-out plan than a compass. But it's a plan that's been thought out by reflecting on what's right, not what's been done in the past. It's about setting new goals for society and achieving them through new tools!

AL[37] We definitely need new tools. Sorry, but *Look here Karl Marx the apocalyptic vision of amerika! Workers rise and win and have not lost their chains but swing them side by side with the billyclubs in blue securing Wall Street against the striking students.*

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32 In Zami (1982) and her poems, Audre Lorde focused on African, Indian, and non-European belief systems. Audre Lorde, New York Head Shop and Museum, Detroit, MI 1974.

33 Stuart Hall, Ideologie, Kultur, Rassismus: Ausgewählte Schriften 1, Hamburg 2018, 12.

34 Baraka focused on the concept of Black Nationalism. He can be understood as a Marxist influenced by Fanon, or a Black Marxist. In "Why is we Americans" he concludes that reparation must be made to every oppressed group and that the state must be fundamentally restructured before asking Black people why they do not identify as American. Tatjana Milosavljevic, AMERICANA. "Let the world be a Black Poem": Frantz Fanon in Amiri Baraka's Poetry of Revolt (27 December 2022), http://americanaejournal.hu/vol11no2/milosavljevic (3 January 2023).

35 Fanon's Wretched of the Earth, 1963 and Black Skin, White Masks, 1967.

36 See Karl Marx, Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, ed. by Theodor Borken, Berlin 2019.

37 Last paragraph of "The Workers Rose On May Day Or Postscript to Karl Marx", in: Lorde, New York Head Shop and Museum, 1974.

[AL offers KL a chance to respond, but he seems emotionally overwhelmed by this update. Lorde wants to elaborate, but PW's raised eyebrows make it very clear that Lorde has already crossed the line by not acknowledging her own presence. After an awkward silence, Lorde continues with her essay presentation.]

AL *This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience, from which true poetry springs, births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.*[38]

PW[39] Poetry as a tool to find words, to address issues that are formally forbidden to talk about. May I share something?

Imagination! who can sing thy force?
Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
Soaring through air to find the bright abode,
Th' empyreal palace of the thund'ring God,
We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
And leave the rolling universe behind:
From star to star the mental optics rove,
Measure the skies, and range the realms above.
There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,
Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul.

[AB, A.B., and ME look both confused and impressed. KM seems conflicted.]

AL[40] Yes, yes, this! They might forget it. Perhaps we weren't able to name it before, but we can now, through poetry. What I hear is that we've always been as human as white people and that they had better recognize this while they are alive on earth, otherwise they will be in for a shock in Heaven.

KM Not the biggest fan of that Christian imagery.

38 PiNaL.

39 On Imagination, in: Wheatley. Poems on Various Subjects, Boston 1773.

40 Lorde often refers in her poetry, speeches, essays and interviews to the importance of turning "silence into language and action." In one of her essays, Lorde concluded, "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect." Lorde, The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 40.

AB[41] I think it is very comfortable and much easier to ignore the class differences between Black and white people and just focus on the spiritual aspect.

A.B. Just a quick note to both of you: shut up. You have no clue what life was like for an enslaved person. She used the language and images around her and reformulated them to express her thoughts.

FF[42] But Phillis, you are a colonized writer. I talk about this all the time. In the end, you are using the language and religion of the colonizer!

A.B. But is she? She uses the language she was given, but in a way that was forbidden.

KM When I tell you that I wrote about this and everyone quotes me on this! Poetry –

[A.B. interrupts.]

A.B. Yes, he will quote now that poetry can't be revolutionary when it is drawing on the past. Everything is new, and so on, so –

KM[43] Well, yes and no. I specifically address the nineteenth century. People tend to think of the nineteenth century and beyond, but Wheatley lived before those years. In Miss Lorde's words, she illuminated a new facet to her oppressors.

AL[44] I agree. I think Phillis's eighteenth-century writing was poetry from the future. I think Marx is right that poetry should not just reproduce or glorify but be bold and creative, like creation or birth.

AB[45] I am still not convinced. The form, the chosen words … felt that what Phillis wrote there *wasn't Black literature in the first place; it was an imitation.*

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41 Amiri Baraka, Afro-American Literature & Class Struggle, Black American Literature Forum 14, 1 (1980), 5.

42 Fanon's description of the colonized writer is applicable to Baraka's style during his transitional phase (1963–1965), Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, 222. See also Milosavljevic, AMERICANA, 2022.

43 Weyher, L. F. Re-Reading Sociology via the Emotions: Karl Marx's Theory of Human Nature and Estrangement, in: Sociological Perspectives 55/2 (2012), 341–363.

44 I based Lorde's reaction to a conflict on her criticism of other conflicts. Lorde, Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 62.

45 In 1978 Baraka reconsidered his 1967 essay *The Myth of Negro Literature* in an interview, particularly with regard to his stance on Wheatley. Previously, he had referred to her as a writer who had styled herself for the white bourgeoisie. He recalled: "I condemned black writing because black writers all wanted to style themselves after the white bourgeoisie. I felt that what they wrote wasn't actually black literature in the first place; it was an imitation!" Benston/Baraka, Amiri Baraka: An Interview, 1978, 303.

[KM wants to answer, but AL shushes him with her librarian skills.]

AL Anyway, may I continue with my text now?

[Everyone nods, Marx is trying his best to stay quiet and instead scribbles down some notes.]

AL *As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.*[46]

Pat[47] I feel that. I do. Checkin' in with yourself, with your vision – does it lead me? Does my work, do my products reflect it? Why am I doing what I'm doing? Is that what that poem about you meant, Phillis? The scrutiny we writers feel, when we proofread our texts over and over for form but as much also for content? I must think of Elliott's:

Me, I'm supa fly / Supa dupa fly, supa dupa fly (I can't stand the rain) against my window

Is there always a Black girl reflecting on herself, staring through a window?

FF But isn't that song more about sex, Pat? Can we compare the lyrical window that Phillis needs to reflect on poetry as an intervention with Missy Elliott's aroused window?

AL[48] I'd sit next to that window. No matter what emotions that women held, she held them with her. Amiri, you've got it all wrong. She's right. Intimacy, sex, poetry. The unspoken, the vision – I tried to hide all of this in that sentence.

KM[49] Which makes the text unreadable. There – I said it. There are main conflicts and side conflicts. Desire, sex – all of these serve as a distraction from the real struggle!

PW Finally something we can agree on! Even so, 'struggle' wouldn't be my choice of wording. Doesn't that distract the reader from the main theme of your text, Audre? Thinking about sex through the word of intimacy when it's actually is about the spiritual and the question of writing?

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46 PiNaL.

47 Missy Elliott Goes Behind the Scenes on 'The Rain', 1997.

48 Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007. This also highlights one of the key moments in media studies: the so-called 'nipple-gate', which marked the beginning of YouTube and the end of Jackson's career: https://medium.com/@latoyaprincessjackson/unbreakable-janet-jacksons-rhythm-nation-generation-in-formation-7b413efafd11 (3 January 2023).

49 Hall, Ideologie, Kultur, Rassismus, 2018, 12–13.

Pat[50] Phillis, girl, you know I'm as much Christian as you are, but is there really any conflict between being Christian and being "the definition of avant-garde"? That doesn't mean I can't enjoy the body God gave me. And poetry maybe shouldn't only be about the mind, it should be about everything the world involves – connections of bodies, hearts, and thoughts. [51]

[KM shakes his head in disagreement.]

KM Well, let's see if the text will now focus on poetics again instead of the sexual.

AL Well, I guess you should get ready to be disappointed.

For each of us as women, there is a dark place within, where hidden and growing our true spirit rises,

'Beautiful and tough as chestnut

/Stanchions against our nightmare of weakness' and of impotence. These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.[52]

FF[53] *Places of possibilities*, the *deeps in a soul* – Audre Lorde, is it about the psyche? The mindset? The way our self is structured through colonization, through the globalization of exclusion – is it that?

AB Nightmare of weakness – weakness, but as a nightmare, as something that isn't actually real for Black folks? This dark place – how can it hold creativity and emotionality at the same time? Love that you tag it as dark and beautiful and non-white, though.

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50 The "definition of avant-garde" is quoted from Elliott's Twitter biography, last checked 26 January 2023.

51 This is a reference to the spoken-word intro to Janet Jackson's "Rhythm Nation": "We are a nation with no geographic boundaries, bound together through our beliefs. We are like-minded individuals, sharing a common vision, pushing toward a world rid of color lines." This is based on a shared belief, even when there is no shared belief system, on Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814, 1989.

52 PiNaL. This Poem is quoted by Lorde by herself. Originally it is from "Black Mother Woman," Lorde, Your Silence will Not Protect You, 1971,178.

53 Fanon analysed the colonized mindset at different times; see The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, 53. Cherki uses the phrase "the globalization of exclusion" to explain Fanon's description of a mindset that is spreading worldwide. This mindset is paradoxical in that it does not lead to greater understanding, but rather to the increasing use of exclusion as a social practice. Alice Cherki, Frantz Fanon: Portrait, Paris 2016.

A.B.[54] So a Black space inside the Black individual? Unrecorded, you say. So those feelings and emotions haven't been penned down, recorded on tapes, or converted into data. They exist inside, as the outside is too dangerous for them, but at the same time – they should still be used.

AL[55] This is more of a description, a metaphor for how I see the Black creative situatedness under oppression. This isn't a criticism, neither it is a celebration. It is simply a view into the being of Black women.

PW So when everyone has it in themselves –

Pat Everyone can access it.

PW That is also how I would understand it.

Pat This should explain why I could write poetry even though there were no role models.

Pat You have to be your own role model first. Dear Phillis, I feel you on that. There was no one before my generation; I expressed myself through the lights and pictures in the music everyone was listening to. By doing what I wanted to do, what I was able to do, Futurism influenced the present. This gave me access to that emotionally deep and dark Black space. But even on this planet, there may be opportunities and euphoria, but the separating lines of race and gender are still there.[56]

> [Pat points out of the window. They realize they have landed on a planet. We see two Black women in a futuristic combat armour leaving the spaceship, their adventure begins. But soon, a bigger robot appears and begins to chase them.]

Pat Before anyone was talking about imagining Black people and Black women in the future, Missy Elliott had already visualized it. She visualized us into it.

PW Well, I wrote them into it.

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
'Their colour is a diabolic die.'

54 Duplan, Blackspace, 2020, 114.

55 For example in Lorde, Sexism, 2007, 62.

56 In Neo-Afrofurism, as exemplified by Janelle Monae's *Many Moons* there is "no postrace or postgender either now or in the 2719 world of androids". Daylanne K., English/Alvin Kim, Now We Want Our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe's Neo-Afrofuturism, in: American Studies 52/4 (2013), 217–230, 222.

Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

AB So on point!

[ME nods. A.B. looks confused.]

A.B. I'm sorry, what? What is a Cain?

Pat[57] Well, Cain is a biblical figure. After failing to appeal to the Christian God, he was given a mark. Christians interpreted this as a meaning that Cain had dark skin. After all, he was the first to commit a sin. At the beginning of the US white people thought: that dark, black mark must represent Blackness. So, they believed that every Black person, rather every African, was guilty because they had to be Cain's descendants. Phillis uses this idea here to talk about you and me, Cain's children, Black people, Africans.

AB[58] I still feel like this is so hard for my sisters and brothers to understand, yet so easy for white upper-class people to decode.

A.B. You must be joking. On the Cain part, not on your ongoing rant around Phillis's poems.

AB I ain't joking about either of these equally important topics. And they used the imagery of Cain, the presidents, and everyone who built this nation, to legitimize slavery.

A.B. But why then "refined"? Aren't we good enough?

[AB is gesticulating a very clear "told you so," but everyone is ignoring his ongoing affront against Phillis's work.]

57 Various interpretations of this Old Testament Bible verse have codified the mark of Cain as being Black: "And the Lord said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." Genesis 4:15. Brigham Young, the second president of the Mormon Church and governor of Utah, stated that, based on the story of Cain, "we must believe in slavery". Brigham Young: Slavery Because of the Curse of Cain (5 January 1852). The following is a discourse of Brigham Young, quoted in its entirety. It can be found in several places, including The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young, ed. by Richard S. Van Wagoner, Salt Lake City 2009, 1:468-71. The discourse is usually dated on February 5 but was apparently given on January 5 1852 (16 March 2018), http://mit.irr.org/brigham-young-slavery-because-of-curse-of-cain-5-january-1852 (12 July 2020).

58 Baraka, Afro-American Literature & Class Struggle, 1980, 5.

PW Well, I wanted to get published. To me, it can have two different meanings. 'Refined' as in 'not good enough'. Or 'refined' as in 'reestablished as equal'. 'Refined' in the eyes of society doesn't mean the same as refining someone who requires refinement. Everyone can interpret it the way they want, the threat is still standing.

A.B. [confused] What threat?

PW [chuckles] That in heaven, they will have to deal with Black people as equals. I worked with the future of all Christians' desire – Heaven.

AL I will continue. I think this adds to your points, Missy and Phillis:

When we view living, in the European mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.

But as we become more in touch with our own ancient, Black, non-European view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.[59]

FF We, as in "Black people living in colonized parts of the world", right?

AL Maybe, yes – let's say yes, as I want to hear your argument, Frantz.

FF[60] In that case – I agree. The reality of living under the European model is not just something to overthrow; it is something to keep in mind as a fundamental structure of our world after the era of global colonization. It is not enough to reform; we must also rethink, revolutionize, and restructure. Seeing something in existence as solely deserving of destruction is, in itself, a European mindset. It would be violence, but on the question of violence, specifically, the elites are ambiguous. They are violent in their words and reformist in their attitudes.

SH[61] Lasting action – Frantz, keep that in mind. As Audre said, merely creating ideas isn't enough. Someone also needs to create space for emotions and ambiguity. Feelings, not just ideas, shared feelings as a foundation for a culture. Then, I suppose, a

59 PiNaL.

60 Quoted in: Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, 314.

61 See: Stuart Hall (ed.), Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Culture, Media and Identities, New York 1997.

culture can then create long-lasting forms of togetherness. How does that work for you, Frantz?

FF The idea of returning to a pre-colonial mindset does not seem plausible to me. Colonization has been in existence for too long. I don't see how we can recreate something from before our lifetime that we don't fully understand.

[FF points to the others.]

FF Look, even in this in-between place you all call Black space, none of us is pre-colonial. We all suffered under colonization. Or we benefitted from it, or we were at least raised in it.

[KM is noticeably uncomfortable.]

FF So how should we go about returning to that place? I have no idea how that would work from a scientific or psychological standpoint, or how to prove it?

AB[62] Brother, as you know, my work is gravitating around yours. I appreciate your words more than any other words ever written. But you ain't a poet, you ain't an artist. You come from the European mindset, the European tradition. As sister Audre said, freedom is already a colonial idea, something created out of the European mindset. But this is about something else, something that was in us before colonization, hidden deep within our being to help us survive colonization, but it doesn't show up in poetry, songs, or the arts. You have to feel it! Ideas are nice, but it is feelings and emotions that create art that matters and will change the nation!

Pat I think feelings and ideas have to go together, though, don't they? Feelings alone don't build up to a text, a track, a video, or a performance. It needs ideas to transform those feelings. It is the combi –

[AL is interrupting her by grabbing her hand. ME looks baffled, but stops.]

AL Hold onto it! I am on my way to go there:

At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for the fusion of these two approaches as keystones for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile wordplay that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean – in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight.

62 See for Baraka's close readings and appreciation of Fanon: Milosavljevic, AMERICANA, 2022.

(Audre mumbles through some lines.)

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the bedrock experiences of our daily lives. As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings – and the honest exploration of them – become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action.[63]

FF An honest exploration of Black emotionality. Focusing on context rather than offering a degrading analysis of the Black situatedness. Rather than seeing those feelings as something to fix or change, we should see them as a sanctuary. But doesn't that run the risk of fetishizing and legitimizing our anger, instead of learning to become a decolonized being?

SH[64] Firstly, Frantz, I would challenge you on that. Is there a mindset – or, as we would have said in my day, an identity – that is decolonial? Is identifying as Black the pinnacle of decoloniality?

AL[65] Black names, what is the bitter reality? *We are the bottom line in the world order.*

PW I refused the term 'negro'. I refused to be called anything other than Ethiopian. I understood that we were seen as negroes.

SH[66] I understand that. I also struggled with US-American and specifically British oversimplification. In Jamaica, we have so many different terms to describe hair shades and textures, and how we exist in the in-between spaces. *We have to create an equivalence between how people look and what their histories are. Their histories are in the past, inscribed in their skins, but it is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads.*

A.B. You both use a lot of words to avoid facing reality. In Haiti, we understood that we were Africans, Black, negro, whatever. We were a new group of people, cut off from

63 PiNaL.

64 Stuart Hall, Accessibility Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities, in: Anthony D. King (ed.), Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity, Minneapolis 1997, 41–68. See also Hall, New Ethnicities, in: The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, London 2006.

65 Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light and Other Essays, New York 2017, 49.

66 Freely based on Hall's argumentation in, for example, Hall, Accessibility Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities, 1997, 42–68, 53.

the knowledge of our ancestors by the Black Atlantic, a wound that can never heal. We were Black because we never received information about our specific heritage.

PW[67] The word I use for myself is Ethiopian, and it holds the power to remind white Christians: We were already in the Bible, we spoke with authority.

SH[68] This – why call yourself something else when you know your heritage? And if you don't – why create an identity that is just a new term for a colonial construct? We are all so different from each other. We can still unite for specific causes, but why should I, in the double diaspora, abandon my cultural heritage twice just to fit a discursive framework?

Pat To me it feels like –

[She smirks toward AL while repeating her words.]

Pat We all have pretty strong opinions about labels, identities, differences, and how we describe ourselves. But aren't all of those also ideas? Words that we found? Were they not also ways to describe how we connect and interact with what we were given from God and from our surroundings? And isn't it also telling that the first answer lies in our chosen words of self-description, which evoke feelings that lead to actions? We are living in the present and should address it and imagine the future. 'African American' is in the past.

KM[69] Yes, *the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content*. So that you can follow up on these, at least, ten ideas, dear Misses Lorde!

67 In an earlier draft of "On America 1768" (unpublished), also known as "America", Wheatley identifies as Ethiopian (lines 5–6). She explores the relationship between England and the USA in the context with state politics and slavery. Library Company of Philadelphia manuscript at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Rush Family Papers, Series IV. Miscellaneous Documents, Box 14/Folder 27). Included in Wheatley's 1772 "Proposals" [18]; unpublished.

68 Building on the texts mentioned by Hall, Lao-Montes transformed the concept of the double-diaspora into a philosophical and historical methodology, summarizing it as a decolonial shift from the Caribbean to the US-centric field of Black Studies. Agustin Lao-Montes, Decolonial Moves, in: Cultural Studies 21, 2–3 (2007), 309–338, 312.

69 Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1852.

AB[70] No offense, Karl. But I don't think it works in every context or century. They do not even address our past, the oppressions and nations built on archived lies. So we have to address these issues in our poetry. We must unbury our African past to even get an idea of our content! Otherwise, we're just rewriting what white people wrote with a bit more flair.

FF[71] Which is also an important step for a colonized writer, but there has to be more. They move through contexts, languages, and social mechanisms that push them to act in a colonized way. This can't be all that life offers a colonized writer before sudden death.

SH Okay, life and death again – we always get there in every text discussion. Is that the ending of your paper proposal, Audre, or is there more?

AL It's an essay, but yes, there is more. In fact, I will double down on Frantz's mention of language:

And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. I also wrote down: For women, then, poetry is not a luxury.[72]

AB[73] I don't know, sister. I think poetry is more of a tool than a form of architecture. Doesn't that obscure the steps that need to be taken after realizing something through poetry?

AL[74] What holds a movement together? When you have a disagreement with a comrade, isn't it music, a poem, or a shared love for a book that brings you back to the table to realize the shared struggle?

KM From my viewpoint, poetry has to be part of the revolution, working specifically for the cause of all of us who are fighting for a world without differences, a world of equality.

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70 Inspired by Simmon's "Unburying the African Past", which refers to the fact that Black identities in the Americas do not address their African ancestry. Kimberly E. Simmons, Reconstructing Racial Identity and the African Past in the Dominican Republic. New World Diasporas, Gainesville 2010.

71 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, 47–50.

72 PiNaL.

73 Baraka rejected the idea that poems have a function in the struggle for an equal nation, instead attempting to describe what poems would need to do and experience to change the recurring deaths of Black leaders. Amiri Baraka, Black Art (poem), in: Liberator Magazine, New York 1966, 7.

74 Lorde, A Burst of Light and Other Essays, 2017, 41.

PW Every one of you addresses poetry as something that exists within a community, a state, a nation, connected to others to be of purpose. I think differently about it. I think it does hold power even when you are the only person who fully understands it. It writes you into the memory of a world that is looking forward to finally forgetting you.

KM Not me!

A.B. Yeah Karl, not you. Wonder why that is.

KM (doesn't get the irony) Well, I think I can explain it by reflecting on the specific historical context in which I wrote it –

Pat (interrupts softly) Karl, they're messin' with you. Also, remember Phillis's rules, don't use your century's context as a tool in the discussion.

PW Yes. Audre, go on!

AL *We can sometimes work long and hard to establish one beachhead [. . .] of real resistance to the deaths we are expected to live, only to have that beachhead assaulted or threatened by canards we have been socialized to fear, or by the withdrawal of those approvals that we have been warned to seek for safety*.[75]

FF So, whenever we achieve a small victory in the fight against oppression, we must look out for the easy ways to fail again – as Audre puts it in the example here, these can be in the form of canards.

A.B. Colonial lies.

FF[76] If you want to call them that – yes, colonial lies. And they are exploiting the fear of the Black man not being recognized. This fear prevents Black men from fighting for a beachhead. Instead, they try to look and sound like white men while trying to remain Black.

75 PiNaL.

76 Here I refer to the concept of mimicry, as understood by Bhabha, which was developed based on Fanon's psychoanalytical interpretation of Black malehood. See Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 1967. See also Bhabha, Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse, in: Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis 28 (1984), 125–133, 127.

A.B.[77] *How can we speak about freedom if the language we're using isn't free?* You can only code-switch so many times before you start to believe in the righteousness of your oppressive surroundings.

SH[78] Everyone wants to be part of the social groups close to them. I would even go so far as to say that, for those in the double diaspora, for those in dominantly white countries, the danger of canards is higher, way higher. I feel a lack of ideas about the future, I feel hopeless.

Pat starts to rap a Missy Elliott song in a talking voice to the depressed-looking SH, who seems to recognize the track.

Pat[79] *I got the Martin Luther King fever I'm a feed ya whacha teacha' need to preach ya. It's time to get serious, black people all areas, who gonna carry us? It ain't time to bury us. Cause poetry be our first love, say "I Do" let's cherish it.*

PW Yes, Pat, I do. I do believe that poetry will carry us. And that we can talk the truth in it, against the canards, to protect what we have achieved, to create God's heaven on Earth.

[Pat nods and lifts her hands in prayer toward PW.]

KM Your lyrics seem very specific to particular situations, but in the broader sense of finding an effective approach to revolution: isn't this too naive, to burdened by desires and emotions that are disconnected from the real fight for monetary justice? You ask so much of poetry, when revolution needs action, not just clever words.

[Pat points towards the books by Markson the shelf.]

Pat You mean clever words like those?!

KM (quickly) Well, let's continue and hear what dear Audre has to say, shall we?!

AL Well, Karl, my paper goes on like this:

We see ourselves diminished or softened by the falsely benign accusations of childishness, of non-universality, of self-centeredness, of sensuality. And who asks the question: am I altering your aura, your ideas, your dreams, or am I merely moving you to

77 Duplan, Blackspace, 2020, 70.

78 Hall, Populismus, Hegemonie, Globalisierung, 1989, 172–173.

79 In wake up (2003, Elliott ft. Jay-Z), Elliott raps the word 'music' instead of the word 'poetry' used here.

temporary and reactive action? […] The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us – the poets – whispers in our dreams: I feel therefore I can be free.[80]

A.B. Audre just called you a white father, dear Karl.

KM I noticed and I do not appreciate it.

PW[81] I feel like I was called a mother. Again, have never been one. Why are you future people so fixated on that idea of me being a mother?

FF I refuse the idea of being the child of the two of you. Isn't there strength in fighting for justice through thought processes as well as feelings? Audre, I'm really confused by this part.

AL I think it will become clearer as we continue with the text. I just wanted to point out that I am not saying here that the white father's approach is inherently bad. I'm merely describing how I see it.

Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, our hopes, our most cherished terrors. For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare.[82]

KM[83] *The Human being as an objective sensuous being is therefore a suffering being, and because we feel our suffering, we are passionate beings*. Passion is our fundamental drive to achieve our goals. It is the feelings and emotions of humans that keep

80 PiNaL.

81 Carretta noticed that earlier biographers had assumed that Wheatley had given birth. However, there is no evidence of this and it is now believed to be an error made by writers who assumed that women would have children in Wheatley's lifetime. Carretta, Phillis Wheatley and the Rhetoric of Politics and Race, 2021, 33.

82 PiNaL.

83 This line is based on the new reading of Marx by L. F. Weyher, Re-Reading Sociology, 2012, 341–363.

capitalism in check. It is this feeling that helps us notice when those who own things grab everything that those who work have.

AB[84] *And we do not just want the end of those structures – we want the extra price we paid be recognized. Then we can talk about being American. Then we can listen – then we can listen without the undercurrent of desire to first set your ass on fire. And we aren't the only ones – Chicanos, poor white people, Native people – we all have been ripped off identifying with that foolish American Dream.* As sister Audre said, they even dare to lie to us in our dreams.

Pat[85] Boys, this ain't about you; it's about women. Yes to everything you said, but let's be more specific. This is for the sisters – who have suffered through everything the two of you addressed, and more. They had to hide it to be good social activists, good Black activists, which somehow includes hiding those feelings alongside our power, something that all of you and society fear more than anything else. Every woman here can relate.

PW Well, there is the idea that "there are no new pains" – maybe in your generations (towards AL and ME), but this is where your otherwise so outdated text is actually very timely. To be completely honest, I couldn't have written those words. There are new pains, new experiences of oppression that neither you nor I have heard of. I think that behind this pessimism, you are hiding naivety. It's as if the devil couldn't trick humans into new cruelties.

AL But slavery didn't start with the Europeans. Maybe it started there for you, Phillis, but when we look at the continent as a whole, we have to acknowledge that, like the Europeans, we also enslaved and were enslaved by each other.

KM Not in an industrialized way. The slave trade, as part of the capitalist machinery, brought a new quality to it.

A.B. It brought cultural aspects to it.

FF It brought a new mindset for both the enslaved and the colonizers to it.

84 Baraka, Why is We Americans, 2023.

85 Based on discussions on gender and art, for example in Dallach, Interview mit Missy Eliott, 2001, and the expansive scholarship on 'nipple-gate', e.g. in Jessica MacIsaac, Nipplegate and the Effects of Implicit vs. Explicit Sexuality in Pop Music Performance, in: Nota Bene: Canadian Undergraduate Journal of Musicology 12/1 (2019), 46–64.

SH[86] It turned slavery into genocide and land theft. It combined old horrors in a new way. It simultaneously destroyed, created, and mixed old and new identities.

AL But doesn't it matter to understand that none of this is completely new? So, none of this should to be a reason to give up, but can be a starting point. For new thoughts, for poetry, for actions in your presents? Wait [she looks into her text]. I have something on that, too:

… experience has taught us that the action in the now is also always necessary. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?[87]

FF Let me try to summarize this. We must act now to create a different future. But to do so, we need to dream through poetry. To do so, we need to change our mindset and dream differently about our enslaved ancestors. So, we can create a different future by behaving differently towards the next generation on a daily basis. As only if they care for each other differently will the future look differently.

SH[88] Maybe they would even understand that they have to do the same. Maybe we love negritude, Black Power, British Blackness, or identifying as Ethiopian. That isn't wrong, but it won't be right for every generation to come. They have to find their own terms, their own understanding of our terminology. Everything is just a stepping stone towards a cultural shift that leads us away from colonized behaviour towards each other.

FF So, we could see it as both a process of decolonization within the individual and an intergenerational shift? Is that where your analysis starts, Stuart?

SH Maybe, yes, that could work. There is work that needs to be done at all levels: personal, interpersonal, within a society and the cultural landscape, basically. – Amiri:

AB Within the nation that we are building.

SH Right – and intergenerational!

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86 Hall, Accessibility Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities, 1997, 45.

87 PiNaL.

88 Stuart Hall, Jeder muss ein bisschen aussehen wie ein Amerikaner, in: Christian Büschges/Nora Räthzel/Ulrich Bröckling (eds.), Populismus, Hegemonie, Globalisierung. Ausgewählte Schriften 5, Hamburg 2018, 203–214, 203.

Pat So, even if trailblazers like Janet Jackson, Missy Elliott, and Janelle Monae did everything right, the next generation will not reproduce the practice of reshaping the music industry. I will alongside them, not in their footsteps.

AL[89] *In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action.* This is exactly the kind of conversation I was hoping for! It proves that poetic, philosophical thinking is a necessity. It isn't simply a distraction from the real course or just a place where our feelings can exist. It is part of the ongoing process of creating better futures.

PW[90] "In the now", you write, dear Audrey. Maybe that is where we have fallen short through the generations, always holding old poetry to the standards of our present instead of seeing how it shaped our current reality. I loved what you presented last time, dear Amiri. But a Black state –

AB[91] Wasn't on your table, I get it now. You dreamed big in your contemporary surroundings by arguing that Black people should enter the same heaven as white people.

PW[92] I claimed humanity for us*, dared to create myself: a poet.*

AB So I could start claiming full citizenship for us. I get it now. Sorry, Phillis, my harsh criticism was kind of ignorant.

(PW nods, as that is not news to her, but she doesn't give AB the comforting understanding he was hoping for.)

Pat I may be avant-garde, but I'm also just a child of the two of your contributions. You two paved the way for my generation to claim fun and adventurous futures that include us.

(PW and AB look visibly uncomfortable at Pat's suggestion of shared parenthood.)

89 Lorde, The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 112.

90 Lorde, Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 116.

91 Baraka later criticized his own analysis of Wheatley's work, understanding it as being situated within its specific historical context of unfreedom. Benston/Baraka, Amiri Baraka: An Interview, 1978, 305.

92 The italicized phrase is a rearrangement of June Jordan's question in: June Jordan, The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America: Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley, in: Ibid., Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays, Boston 2003, 87–98.

A.B.[93] Dreaming up another future drastically shows how far we have to go to make that future happen – a future that is already present for white people. So, in order to imagine ourselves as people in heaven, we need to live a life with agency so that we can fulfil the requirements of heaven. Dreaming of us as citizens requires us to act without fear and regret as citizens of a nation, today. And dreaming of a future where Black people are fleeing space monsters on another planet …

(A.B. points outside the window towards Robot-ME, who is still running from a giant robot and towards the ship.)

A.B.[94] (speaking faster with every word) … we need to enter NASA, enter university, enter PhD programmes, and we need daily safety and MONEY and not being shot, so that we can be educated enough to go to –

Pat As Elliott called it a planet.

A.B. The name of this planet is … "a planet"?

Pat No need to name it. In my imagination, this ain't a one-off trip where two Black people and their dance crew were allowed to join. It's just the norm for this future. It's just another planet for Black people to have adventures on, just like white people do.

AL[95] I hope that one day one such planet will be called Earth.

AB[96] Well then, *let the world be a black poem! And Let All Black People Speak This Poem Silently Or LOUD*.

PW But even this Black space is located in Woolf's house, where she will be writing *A Room of One's Own* today.

93 Duplan concluded, "poems have inherent qualities but it's impossible to say, once and for all, what those qualities are." From that point on, I wondered whether it would be helpful for Duplan to be part of this conversation in order to find an answer. Duplan, Blackspace, 2020, 103.

94 Ibid., 89.

95 This idea is explored by Glissant, who described the forced arrival of enslaved people in the Americas as akin to arriving on a new planet – planet Earth – to demonstrate that the notion of viewing the Earth as a holistic entity is also forced upon people by colonialism. Édouard Glissant, Poetics of Relation, Ann Arbor 1997, 7.

96 Baraka: Black Art (poem).

AL[97] Well, she will write about womanhood and writing. No matter how important poetry is –having the resources to do it is still pure luck for a lot of women throughout the centuries.

> [ME's fictional robotic self bursts through the screen and mumbles something into Lorde's ears]

Lorde[98] Well, guess we won't be fooled by Virginia any longer! They just told me that Virginia might complain about not having a room of her own, despite owning not just a complete house but also a side house.

> [As Virginia Woolf enters the conversation, having kindly provided a space for today's meeting, the lights go off. The discussion continues in mutterings, the music grows louder and then stops.]

The END

97 See Lorde's notion on Woolf's essay in: Lorde, Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 116.

98 Lorde criticized Woolf's essay for providing an incomplete analysis of writing conditions. See Lorde, Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference, in: Lorde/Clarke, Sister Outsider, 2007, 116. The Monk's House was smaller when the Woolfs moved in, but buildings were added throughout their time there. This raises the question of whether Woolf's text as a self-reflection is accurate or whether she was actually addressing and understanding her privilege as a woman writer compared to other writers of her time.