Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice
Issue 46.3 (2025)
Special Issue: Liveable Futures: Radical Imagination as Method // Radical Imagination as Survival Research

Seeds of Change: Sketching a Black Feminist Afrofuturism for the New Space Age

by Nevandria Page

Abstract: The rapid advancement of human knowledge and technology has positioned us to realize a new colonialism in outer space. Those with a concern for the future cannot afford to refuse outer space altogether, but must actively devise alternatives to the colonial or capitalistic, imagining a just and peaceful future for humanity beyond the Earth. In this paper, I present Afrofuturism, specifically a Black feminist Afrofuturism, as not merely an aesthetic, but a scholarly methodology capable of disrupting the supposedly inevitable and damned futures awaiting humanity in a colonized outer space. I propose three practices comprising a methodology of Black feminist Afrofuturism. Countermemory involves a willful act of refusing dominant colonial, patriarchal, or white supremacist myths, challenging their hegemony and excavating Black knowledge and experiences from beneath their desolate surface. Interdisciplinarity refuses the practice of knowledge generation in isolation and demands direct collaboration—knowledge created in community—to derive new insights and perspectives from the convergence of disparate practices of countermemory. The third practice, worldbuilding, is a speculative exercise undertaken through the deliberate action of imagining or engaging with new visions of the future through a Black feminist or similar critical lens. These imagined worlds of Black feminist Afrofuturism reveal themselves as the muse for the acts of creation which might influence the trajectory of humanity's future in outer space, whether in the arts, academic research, public policy, or community organization.

Keywords: outer space; Black feminism; Afrofuturism; radical imagination; interdisciplinarity; worldbuilding

Résumé : Les progrès rapides des connaissances humaines et des technologies nous ont permis de concrétiser un nouveau colonialisme dans l'espace. Les personnes préoccupées par l'avenir ne peuvent pas se permettre de refuser catégoriquement tout ce qui concerne l'espace, mais doivent activement concevoir d'autres solutions à celles de nature coloniale ou capitaliste, en imaginant un avenir équitable et paisible pour l'humanité au-delà de la Terre. Dans cet article, je présente l'afrofuturisme et, plus précisément, un afrofuturisme afroféministe, comme une méthodologie ne se limitant pas seulement à l'esthétisme, mais comportant un aspect académique également capable de perturber les avenirs prétendument inévitables et condamnés qui attendent l'humanité dans l'espace colonisé. Je propose trois pratiques constituant une méthodologie afrofuturiste afroféministe. La contre-mémoire implique un acte volontaire de refus à l'égard de mythes coloniaux, patriarcaux ou suprémacistes blancs dominants, en remettant en question leur hégémonie et en mettant au jour les connaissances et les expériences de personnes noires qui étaient enfouies sous leur surface désolée. L'interdisciplinarité réfute la pratique de la création isolée du savoir et exige une collaboration directe, soit une création collective de savoir, afin de dégager de nouveaux points de vue et perspectives de la convergence de différentes pratiques de contre-mémoire. La troisième pratique, la construction d'un univers, est un exercice d'ordre spéculatif qu'on entreprend en agissant de façon délibérée pour s'imaginer ou discuter de nouvelles conceptions de l'avenir dans une optique afroféministe ou selon une approche analytique semblable. Ces univers imaginaires issus de l'afrofuturisme afroféministe s'avèrent une source d'inspiration pour les actes de création qui pourraient avoir une incidence sur la trajectoire que prendra l'avenir de l'humanité dans l'espace, que ce soit dans les arts, dans la recherche universitaire, dans les politiques publiques ou dans les organisations communautaires.

Mots clés : espace; afroféminisme; afrofuturisme; imagination radicale; interdisciplinarité; construction d'un univers

Author: Nevandria Page is a PhD student at the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. She holds a Master of Arts in Feminist and Gender Studies from the University of Ottawa and completed her Bachelor of Arts at Burman University in Lacombe, Alberta. Nevandria's research engages with outer space as a site of colonialism and considers how Black futurity and radical imagination can chart a path toward alternative anti-colonial human futures in space and on Earth.

Human exploration and activities in outer space increasingly replicate the discourse and devices of European colonialism. While technological advancements of the twentieth century empowered humans to foray into a previously inaccessible domain, the astonishing advances of the twenty-first century have created the conditions for a truly colonial epoch—continuous human habitation, resource extraction, warfighting, and, perhaps soon, migration. In a 2020 address, US President Donald Trump directly construed space exploration as a settler colonial project:

> We are a nation of pioneers. We are the people who crossed the ocean, carved out a foothold on a vast continent, settled a great wilderness, and then set our eyes upon the stars. This is our history and this is our destiny. Now, like our ancestors before us, we are venturing out to explore a new magnificent frontier. It's called space. (Rev 2020)

The mass proliferation of the same colonial myths invoked by President Trump and common to most settler states—manifest destiny, the frontier, terra nullius—has had horrendous and well-documented consequences. These myths inspired the colonial powers' unprecedented societal projects of dehumanization, violent exploitation, and genocide, especially in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the systematic erasure of Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Much like early European colonial powers in the Americas and elsewhere, the United States and Soviet Union's race to explore outer space in the mid-twentieth century was a way for rivalrous powers to flex their muscles, demonstrating the prowess of their respective regimes. Myths of manifest destiny, the frontier, and *terra nullius* were at times invoked by political leaders and other advocates of space exploration to galvanize the public around spacefaring initiatives. President Kennedy often embraced a language of adventurism and exploration when articulating why the United States would travel to the Moon: "As we set sail we ask God's blessing on the most hazardous and dangerous and greatest adventure on which man has ever embarked" (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum n.d.). Of course, these narratives did not go uncontested. Contrasted against the grandiosity of space and the rhetoric and resources channelled toward it, the lived experiences of marginalized peoples gestured to the primacy of one particular vision of the future populated by one construction of the human. That criticism, synthesized famously by Gil Scott-Heron's "Whitey on the Moon," remains as potent now as it was then (Scott-Heron 1970).

Only now, however, has our knowledge and technological sophistication progressed enough to truly realize a new colonialism in outer space, complete with the settlement of other worlds and the reaping of their natural bounty to sate the evolving desires and anxieties of the novel metropole, Planet Earth. Much as in the days of the colonial powers, today's spacefaring actors are a collection of government agencies, militaries, and, in much greater measure than the original space age, powerful corporations. All scrape together to capitalize on the opportunities presented by outer space. Likewise, outer space is today varyingly viewed as a repository for our polluting industries (Wattles 2021), a refuge to which we might flee in the event of complete environmental degradation (Rincon 2021; Bender 2021), a solution to resource scarcity, a playground for celebrities or stage for the performance of a commodified feminism (Khan 2025), and, perhaps most alluring with the prospect of visiting other planets, a vista for exploration (Dunbar n.d.; National Aeronautics and Space Administration

2020). A new and arguably irreversible space age has begun with little consideration for the colonial myths driving it or the violence, racism, and environmental destruction which such thinking inevitably yields.

For those who fear such a future, there is opportunity within our seemingly dystopian discursive landscape. As we navigate humanity's disparate intentions in outer space, we may imagine something beyond the colonial or the capitalistic, and certainly beyond a feckless refusal of outer space altogether. In this paper, I aim to present Afrofuturism, and specifically a Black feminist Afrofuturism, as not merely an aesthetic but an academic and mythmaking methodology capable of disrupting the supposedly inevitable and damned futures awaiting humanity in a colonized outer space. Working alongside each other, Black feminism and Afrofuturism offer a promise of a methodology stretching beyond a theoretical lens for viewing our world to something intentionally "curious" (McKittrick 2021a, 44), radical, embodied, and experienced individually and in community together. The methodology I propose is rigorous yet personal—one that cares most about the possibilities situated in Black life and liberation, joy, and hope. The shape of that methodology, of Black feminist and Afrofuturist thought and expression, may be found in three radical practices: countermemory, interdisciplinarity, and worldbuilding.

Theoretical Lens: Black Feminism and Afrofuturism

Having already invoked "myth," I should clarify the sense in which I employ the term through the rest of this paper. I refuse any colloquial understanding of myth as something fundamentally untrue. I adopt a definition of myth as "stories that tell a society what is important for it to know, whether about its gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure" (Frye 1983, 33). That is to say, a myth is "the opposite" of an untruth, signifying a story conferred with "special seriousness and importance" (Frye 1983, 33). Though Frye is by no means an affiliate of Black scholarship, I choose his definition for its utility, depth, and palpable resonance with Sylvia Wynter's writings on the powerful entwinement of storytelling and our understanding of the human. Wynter posits a hybrid humanist construction that sees humans as a "biomutationally evolved, hybrid species—storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological"(Wynter and McKittrick 2014). This idea is the theoretical bedrock of this paper's thesis. Wynter provides a framework for confronting the widespread modern understanding of humanness "that reifies Western bourgeois tenets; the human is therefore wrought with physiological and narrative matters that systemically excise the world's most marginalized"(Wynter and McKittrick 2014, 9). Wynter's hybridized human—an equal product of biology and story—affirms the possibility of emergent myths that can reorient our shared trajectory forward, outside of and beyond the colonial and the white supremacist. Wynter, like myself, is interested in "the possibility of undoing and unsettling—not replacing or occupying—Western conceptions of what it means to be human" (McKittrick 2014, 2). The shared belief in this possibility remains at the heart of my argument, but where I depart from Wynter are the devices I choose for fomenting what McKittrick (2021a) might call a disobedient and rebellious methodology: Black feminism and Afrofuturism.

With respect to theory, I rely on a feminist tradition that was born in response to the lack of representation of Black women in traditional white feminist spaces and discourses. Though only one of many distinctly "Black" feminisms, the Black feminist tradition with which I engage, and to which I feel I belong—among others, the writing of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, the Combahee River Collective, Katherine McKittrick, and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein—seeks to address how race, sex, and other domains of power interact to produce experiences which "traditional" feminisms failed to consider. This particular Black feminism has blossomed into a sprawling tradition permeating many disciplines (most notably Kimberlé Crenshaw's introduction of intersectionality in legal studies). Black feminist scholars like Caitlin O'Neill note the convergence of Black feminist practice with Afrofuturism in the work of Black women and gender diverse people who "imagine themselves as thriving, creating spaces where they are celebrated, engaging in an act of time travel and making present a world that does not yet exist" (O'Neill 2021, 63).

Originating in the arts, Afrofuturism has traditionally been regarded as an aesthetic template for generating creative works and undertaking research which may serve as an outlet for self-determination (Barber et al. 2018, 201). In this respect, it exists under a wider umbrella of Black speculative art and thought alongside Quantum Futurism, Afro-Pessimism, Ethno-Gothic, Black radical imagination, and various other ethnocultural futurisms including Indigenous futurisms (Barber et al., 2018; Anderson 2016; Kelley 2002; Dillon 2012). The term "Afrofuturism" was coined by Mark Dery in his 1994 text "Black to Future" to describe a Black American sub-genre of speculative fiction which "appropriates images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future"—a phenomenon which Dery also used to discuss the possibility for imagining Black futures despite systemic efforts to erase Black histories (Dery 1994; Hart 2021).

I much prefer and embrace Ytasha Womack's later description of Afrofuturism as a multifaceted concept at the "intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Womack 2013, 9). My preference for this specific definition arises from a desire to centre a Black feminist's definition of Afrofuturism. More specifically, Womack's emphasis on imagination aligns with my own view of Afrofuturism as more than an aesthetic movement but a framework for action, a roadmap toward liberation. As I will elaborate on later, Black feminist Afrofuturism as a method assumes the possibility for liberation and charts a path toward it that is collaborative, excited, and hopeful. As Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish write, "the sort of hope, courage and possibility the term [imagination] evokes are in short supply these days (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010, iii).

I choose to describe a distinctly *Black feminist* Afrofuturism to emphasize what I regard as a necessary convergence of Black feminist and Afrofuturist thought. I owe a great deal of inspiration to Susana Morris's "Afrofuturist feminism." My neglect of her nomenclature in favour of a separate term arises not from a substantive difference in perspective but a stubbornness on my own part to remain true to the Black feminist tradition which I have already described, wherein the naming of Black feminism is itself an important act in refusing erasure (Collins 2001). This convergence spotlights the possibility of imagining and realizing a future for Black women and gender diverse people that contests their systemic marginalization and attempted erasure. Afrofuturism in "symb[iosis]" with Black feminism argues that Black people will not simply exist in, but wholly inhabit futures where, as Morris articulates, "… Afrodiasporic cultural practices are vital to imagining the continuance of human society" (Morris 2012, 153). As an extension of Womack's definition, I adopt Morris's understanding of an Afrofuturism centring on Black women's knowledge and experiences, as well as one that makes space for Black liberation through self-determined acts of futurity. Like Morris, I consider Black feminism and Afrofuturism as essential, mutually amplifying ingredients, in this case of a methodology with the power to "incite a future quite different from the hegemony of present structures" (Morris 2012, 154).

Black Feminist Afrofuturism as Methodology

Why articulate Black feminist Afrofuturism as a methodology rather than yet another theory? As I will argue, Black feminism and Afrofuturism together extend far beyond a mere lens through which to view or understand phenomena. Black feminist Afrofuturism, I contend, is centred around three radical *practices* of countermemory, interdisciplinarity, and worldbuilding—actions which are not strictly intellectual but also lived and experienced individually and in community with others. These practices allow Black feminist Afrofuturism to be employed as a strategy of both radical imagination and actualization through a variety of mediums. I draw inspiration from Katherine McKittrick's assertion that, Black methodologies "offer rebellious and disobedient and promising ways of undoing discipline" (McKittrick 2021a, 41).

Similar to McKittrick's discussion of academic discipline, its relegation of Black life to sites of oppression, and the liberating capacity of the "demonic ground" beyond, I propose that Black methodologies, birthed and living outside of "colonial categories," likewise constitute the fertile grounds for new and autonomous myths (McKittrick 2012, 44). Interjecting from McKittrick's demonic grounds, Black methodologies—whether Black feminist Afrofuturism or others—may challenge the most entrenched of political, social, and economic

structures and even perhaps the very myths which undergird them. To establish the shape of such a Black feminist Afrofuturist methodology, I will outline each of its three radical practices: countermemory, interdisciplinarity, and worldbuilding.

Countermemory

Common to many Black art movements and academic traditions, the practice of countermemory involves a contestation of hegemonic Western or Eurocentric myths which, whether intentionally or merely effectively, marginalize and erase Blackness. For example, one practice of countermemory in the arts and academia is the re-framing of chattel slavery and the Middle Passage as an apocalyptic event or a focal set piece in the origins of modernity (Maynard 2018; Eshun 2003). Proponents of Afrofuturism have historically achieved this transgressive centring of Black diasporic experiences through the allegorical and aesthetic freedom of science fiction, ultimately presenting more hopeful readings of Black life as always propelling towards the future. Others have applied countermemory to reframe our imagination of Black people and individuals themselves. Chanda Prescod-Weinstein (2022b) characterizes Harriet Tubman as a scientific intellect, an astronomer, who acted with agency and intention of a kind denied to her by white writers keen to describe a woman stumbling towards freedom, ignorant of her surroundings, merely following the North Star. Put another way, countermemory is the pickaxe for breaching the seemingly boundless strata of Western myth to mine what has been concealed beneath.

Within a methodology of Black feminist Afrofuturism, countermemory begins as a willful act of refusing dominant colonial, patriarchal, or white supremacist myths, challenging their dominion, and excavating Black knowledge and experiences from beneath their desolate surface. It is a deconstructive practice. But challenging or shifting one's focus from prevailing myths inevitably unearths hidden, forgotten, or forbidden histories and experiences. These recovered fragments—what I regard as the seeds of future myths—unlock the potential for what others have called a "radical imagination" tracing liberated Black existences through the present and future (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010). As I will discuss later, this thread is what binds countermemory to two other radical practices of interdisciplinarity and worldbuilding.

The practice of countermemory in Black feminist Afrofuturism can likewise constitute a sort of temporal plurality, surveying the future, present, and past together to uncover further seeds by observing glimpses of each in the others. Nikki Giovanni practices a form of countermemory consistent with this construction in her poem "Quilting the Black-eyed pea, We're Going to Mars." Here, Western colonial myths are confronted and deconstructed through their situation alongside rationales for travelling to outer space. Past, present, and future are viewed simultaneously to spotlight "the necessary connection between black history and our collective human future" (Bashir 2002). Giovanni restates the narratives of conquest and adventure that propelled Western "progress" and modernity, interjecting images of racial violence, references to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, and scenes of the Middle Passage (Giovanni 2021). Blurring the lines between the experience of the Middle Passage and space travel cleverly challenges us to embrace Black knowledge as a means of discovering "new ways to be people" (Giovanni 2021; Prescod-Weinstein 2022a). Perhaps, Giovanni tantalizingly asserts, the look and nature of life beyond the Earth is embedded in Black diasporic experiences because, in some sense, Black people have already been there.

Giovanni, like Wynter, Fanon, McKittrick, and others, pulls on a thread to reveal how Black knowledge, gathered from across diasporic and pan-African Black experiences, can teach us things that may have otherwise been unknowable. As Robyn Maynard writes, "To be denied access to humanity is not to be subhuman. In fact, it is to have access to ways of existing beyond and outside the limits of the human" (Maynard 2018, 32). The lived experiences gained from a positionality of fungibility or subjugation, as imposed by a Western framing of Blackness, can reveal new knowledge through the practice of countermemory. The result is a confrontation and disruption of hegemonic myths, unveiling the suppressed histories and experiences of exploited and

oppressed communities to provide the seeds for further thought and myth-making around humanity's collective present and future in outer space.

Countermemory, as one practice of Black feminist Afrofuturism, enables the centring of Black histories and lived experiences, whether in the arts or academia. But these seeds must be watered if they are to blossom into the new myths we—practitioners of Black feminist Afrofuturism—need to actualize liberated, just futures in outer space. That garden of imagination and intellect may best be cultivated by a coalition of scholars, artists, activists, and others united by a practice of radical interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinarity

In academic circles, interdisciplinarity entails integrating ideas originating from one discipline in research undertaken within another or, in some cases, collaboration between scholars in different fields. For the purpose of Black feminist Afrofuturism, the practice of interdisciplinarity must go radically further than merely appropriating scholarship from a separate discipline. One could argue that, in conventional manifestations of interdisciplinarity, a primary discipline (that of the author) subordinates one or more secondary disciplines as mere metaphors used for illustrative or even performative purposes. Radical interdisciplinary eschews this approach of merely "reading outside our discipline, researching, and using slices and terms from people we do not normally read" (McKittrick 2021a, 119). As the second critical practice of Black feminist Afrofuturism, radical interdisciplinarity refuses the practice of knowledge generation in isolation and demands direct collaboration—knowledge created in community—to derive new insights and perspectives from the convergence of disparate practices of countermemory.

A truly radical form of interdisciplinarity, especially within the context of Black feminist Afrofuturism, is one whose aim is "sharing ideas comprehensively and moving these ideas into new contexts and places" (McKittrick 2021a, 119). McKittrick's *Dear Science and Other Stories* and S*ylvia Wynter: On Being Human As Praxis* are standout examples of the power of radical interdisciplinarity at work. Insight is brought to life within these works through their dialogue, the back-and-forth between sciences and humanities, and the compounding voices of not only McKittrick and Wynter but Frantz Fanon, Edward Glissent, Rinaldo Walcott, and many more. I have earlier described such interplay as the sowing of epistemological seeds harvested along the practice of countermemory.

Within both Black feminist and Afrofuturist spaces, a common manifestation of this sort of interdisciplinarity has also involved the convergence of art mediums, the inclusion of one or more art mediums into academic research, and the direct collaboration of scholars from different fields. Musicians like Janelle Monae have used visual Afrofuturistic storytelling and motifs to complement their musical compositions (Rashotte 2022). In a more strictly academic example, Katherine McKittrick and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein also exemplify a radical interdisciplinarity in their exchanges on *PublicBooks.org*. Discussing their respective texts (each also compelling examples of the deployment of countermemory), *Dear Science and Other Stories* and *Disorderd Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime, & Dreams Deferred*, McKittrick, a geographer, and Prescod-Weinstein, an astrophysicist, bring different perspectives to shared ideas about the sciences, Blackness, and the liberatory possibilities that exist within the intersections of both (McKittrick 2021b; Prescod-Weinstein 2021).

Black feminist Afrofuturism takes McKittrick's appeal to push ideas into new contexts and places to a further extreme by extending its creative and intellectual coalition to communities beyond academia or the arts. Such a posture closely adheres to the tradition of Afrofuturists like Alondra Nelson, for whom building communities which transcend the academy is essential for imagination and world-building (Nelson 2002). For example, Young-Scaags identifies fandom conventions as an important space for building like-minded communities while Stephanie Jones explores the growth of Afrofuturist networks online through a mechanism as simple as the creation of hashtags (Young-Scaggs 2021). Online networks, fandoms, advocacy groups, church congrega-

tions, hobbyist clubs, and community organizations are all repositories of valuable knowledge and experiences capable of contributing to Black feminist Afrofuturist thought.

In Black feminist Afrofuturism's most compelling instances of radical interdisciplinarity, the academy, the arts, and external communities of knowledge-holders may all coalesce to generate works propelling us toward new modes of liberating thought, expression, or being. In Camille Turner's "Afronautic Research Lab" (Turner 2016), the artist partnered with Outerregion to develop an interactive "social practice project" which "gathers and shares local histories" of the communities which the installation visits. Presented in a dark room lit only by neon lamps, the piece evokes futuristic science-fiction aesthetics, contrasted by the archival examples of "suppressed" Canadian history—enslavement, anti-Black racism, Black Canadian resistance—which adorn a central desk and chairs in the form of newspapers, books, and photographs (Turner 2016). Time in this space feels nonlinear as the observer becomes displaced, immersed in a "futuristic" aesthetic while being confronted by histories from which we are not so far removed. As a Black observer, I myself feel the weight of these histories everyday as I walk through Canadian cities and streets—the lingering presence of white supremacy and an acute awareness of the physical space which it domineers. Entering the Afronautic Research Lab, time coalesces and shades of the future and the past settle into my present. The desk, cluttered with suppressed Canadian histories, invites me to reflect even as, looking up to the neon sign, I feel an urge for change.

In each iteration, Turner's artistry is supported by Outerregion's academic research rooted in Black feminist theories and hauntology as well as the contributions of each local community and the individual visitors who deposit their own observations throughout the installation as post-it notes (Turner 2016). Turner's work is a true exploration of what possibilities exist when we concede that "inequitable systems of knowledge can be, and are, breached by creative human aesthetics" (Turner 2016, 153). Though just one example of the many ways a radical interdisciplinary practice can take shape, Turner's assemblage of art, research, and community engagement directs participants towards dialogue and critical reflection, inviting them to consider new pathways to liberation and, in the image of Wynter's human as storyteller, to "radically and creatively redefine—*re-word* … the representative terms of the human" (McKittrick 2021a, 152).

A table cluttered with newspaper clippings, journal articles, photos, books, post it notes, magnifying glasses. Camille Turner. Used with permission.

Such a sprawling coalition will not necessarily work in perfect harmony at all times and not all of its collaborative efforts will yield groundbreaking innovations. The point, rather, is that sharing a common vision of a just, liberated future and assembling diverging perspectives within a discursive space of mutual respect and care sows and nurtures the seeds of Black feminist Afrofuturism's most powerful outgrowth and its final core practice. Only by placing knowledge produced and amassed outside of the academy on equal footing (rather than relegating it to the margins of discourse) can Black feminist Afrofuturism forge the sort of collaborative and diverse coalitions needed to imagine new worlds and support their emergence.

Worldbuilding

Worldbuilding is the practice of imagining alternative worlds, generally undertaken as part of the creative process in speculative genres of fiction and film. Though worldbuilding is conventionally understood as an independent practice wherein a sole author constructs a secondary world for readers or viewers' enjoyment, I would contend that the practice is fundamentally a collaborative one. The author may establish and communicate the imaginative architecture of the world but it is the mind of the reader or viewer which populates it with their own imaginings, thereby bringing it to life. As McKittrick notes, sharing stories is a radical, collaborative, and relational act (McKittrick 2021a, 73). More concrete examples could include co-authorship (for example, Terry Pratchet and Neil Gaiman's *Good Omens*), large multimedia franchises which invite numerous creative participants (consider *Star Wars* or major comic book publishers like Marvel and DC), fanfiction, and games—especially role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons* where players share responsibility for building compelling worlds and stories.

Worldbuilding is often mobilized within the arts as a means of responding to and resisting the inequities of our present "real" world. Afrofuturist writers in particular use genres of science fiction and fantasy "as devices to articulate their issues and visions" through the worlds they create while, I would add, compelling our imagination towards an expanded understanding of the future and, in true Wynterian fashion, the human (Womack 2013). In Nnedi Okorafor's (2015) trilogy of *Binti* novellas, the eponymous protagonist undergoes a miraculous series of transformations along a journey through a diverse cosmos, "starting off as a Himba girl, to becoming part alien, part indigenous, part bio-spaceship" (Priyadharshini 2024, 9). Through her repeated transcendences, Binti learns to recognize the other in herself and herself in the other, discovering in alterity a means of bringing peace between warring peoples while never compromising her identity as a dark-skinned Himba girl (Okorafor 2015). Likewise, Tade Thompson's novel *Rosewater* features a version of our world where aliens touch down in Lagos, drawing attention to the Western-centric lens through which the world is viewed in both science fiction literature and our own reality (Thompson 2016). In these and other stories, Afrofuturists rely on worldbuilding as a chief means of imagining Black existences beyond the hegemonic myths of whiteness and the West.

Though worldbuilding is seldom invoked explicitly in social science and humanities research, I observe aspects of its practice in the more established discourses around "possible futures," and various forms of imagination including "Black feminist imagination" and "radical imagination"(Hill-Jarret, 2023; Hobson, 2021; Haven and Khasnabish, 2010). All apply various strategies of imagining to articulate realities removed from oppressive systems, norms, or myths identified in our current reality—a pivotal feature of Afrofuturist approaches to worldbuilding. Most pertinent to my discussion of Black feminist Afrofuturism, Morris (2012) and O'Neill (2021) discuss visions of a specifically Black feminist future that offers Black women pathways to self-determined and joyful existences. They are, in effect, describing another world though, crucially, they do not set that world beyond the scope of the possible. Black feminist Afrofuturist futures are not alternative, but true and imminent as any other, their emergence just as contingent on the choices we make and the stories we tell today.

In the methodology of Black feminist Afrofuturism, worldbuilding is undertaken through the intentional action of imagining or engaging with imagined futures for Black feminist existences. As mentioned in an earlier

section, the first practice of countermemory unlocks the possibility for a radical imagination tracing liberated Black existence through the past and future. Worldbuilding is where this radical imagination is utilized, first to envision possible futures and then to inform action towards real change. As Khasnabish and Haiven note, a "radicalizing idea of the imagination…speaks to our ability to create *something else*, and to create it together" (Haiven and Khasnabish 2010, 3). An example of this may be found in the otherworldly imaginings of Octavia Butler and the Black feminists who have immersed themselves within them. In discourse with Butler's novel *Fledgling*, Morris describes the text as revealing an Afrofuturist feminism (see: our own Black feminist Afrofuturism) that "illuminates…epistemologies that ultimately present possibilities for our own decidedly unenchanted world." (Morris 2012, 147). In this third practice of Black feminist Afrofuturism, seeds that have been collected and sown in the preceding practices of countermemory and interdisciplinarity can now begin to take shape in our collective imagination and inform the shape of our lived reality.

A Black feminist Afrofuturist practice of worldbuilding can actualize change in the "real" world, driven by our radical imaginings. Where Morris and others see Butler as merely gesturing toward future possibilities through her fiction, I see in her works—most especially *Parable of the Sower*—a framework for Black feminist Afrofuturism's worldbuilding project of actualizing change in the real world. *Parable of the Sower*'s protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina, creates a new religion, Earthseed, as a means of uniting humankind around a shared goal of "taking root among the stars." (Butler 1993, 222). How she goes about such a monumental undertaking models for proponents of Black feminist Afrofuturism the path to actualizing our own collective imaginings. Lauren's project begins with the simple act of imagination; rejecting the religious tradition of her father and family, she chooses to imagine something else for herself and the people around her, namely through a single key assertion:"God is Change" (Butler 1993, 3). Lauren's second act is to not keep her imaginings to herself, but to write them down and subsequently to share her writings with others. Through this final act of forming a community around Earthseed and its teachings, Lauren has created the conditions for her group to actualize change in the world by living according to their newfound myth.

The Black Lives Matter organization is one standout example of how community activists have worked collectively to imagine, communicate, and organize around a vision of a world that does not yet exist. Beginning with the simple transgressive assertion that Black lives do indeed matter, the Black Lives Matter movement describes a reality that refutes the oppressive systems of the world we currently inhabit. Through mass communication of this idea and related ones (such as #SayHerName), Black Lives Matter has galvanized enormous demonstrations online and in communities around the world. The movement's growing influence has since inspired real-world changes in policing and criminal justice systems around the world, including normalization of body cameras, unconscious bias training, and banning of certain tactics. While imperfect and acknowledging that policing reforms do not necessarily equate to systemic change within the justice system, these changes are evidence of adrienne maree brown's assertion that we may "bend the world to assert and embody that Black lives matter" (brown 2017, 161).

One might synthesize Lauren's worldbuilding process—and that of Black feminist Afrofuturism—as imagination, communication, organization, and finally, action. In practice, this model of worldbuilding as imagination proceeding to action may seem unlikely in the short term to result in the emergence of any new religions. However, it can be leveraged as an effective model for any activities oriented towards building just and liberated futures. To return once more to McKittrick, "The work of liberation does not seek a stable or knowable answer to a better future…it recognizes the ongoing labour of aesthetically refusing unfreedom. The aesthetic labour perhaps reveals, if only for a second and imperfectly, black consciousness" (McKittrick 2021a, 61). In McKittrick's "aesthetic labour," I see the radical practice of worldbuilding, manifested in research, activism, art, policymaking, media, STEM, or any other activity involving the generation of ideas, systems, or artifacts that will implicate human lives and futures.

Sketching a Methodology

In the preceding discussion of radical countermemory, interdisciplinarity, and worldbuilding, I have alluded to the contours of a Black feminist Afrofuturist methodology as a process of "sowing," but the shape of its final form remains unstated. Like the ecological process of growth, decay, and rebirth, the methodology of Black feminist Afrofuturism is cyclical, finding its way again and again to acts of creation through structured practices of imagining. These practices can unfold repeatedly and in many contexts, anchored by and oscillating with the evolving continuum of Black knowledge. Black feminist Afrofuturism, like Butler's Earthseed, is a methodology, indeed a way of being, capable of reflecting and responding to the constancy of change through its recursive form.

While radical practices of countermemory, interdisciplinarity, and worldbuilding can and will unfold simultaneously, their deliberate sequencing and recursion constitute the methodology of Black feminist Afrofuturism, galvanizing us towards an actualization of just and liberated futures. Through countermemory, the practitioner of Black feminist Afrofuturism confronts existing myths (in our case the colonial, the patriarchal, and the white supremacist) and excavates the histories and experiences hidden beneath their veneer of authority. As I have mentioned earlier, doing so may be understood conceptually as gathering the seeds of future myths. Having undertaken disparate practices of countermemory, practitioners across diverse disciplines and communities next aim to share their respective insights by joining together in coalitions united by the common aims of Black feminist Afrofuturism. I have called this practice radical interdisciplinarity. Through intentional direct collaboration and knowledge exchange, practitioners sow the seeds they have recovered together and in doing so derive new insights which propel us collectively toward new modes of liberated thought, expression, and being. Finally, empowered by the transgressive act of countermemory, practitioners can apply a radical imagination to worldbuilding. Here practitioners cultivate the seeds of their thought into new stories or imaginings. However, practitioners of Black feminist Afrofuturism may go a step further, following the example of the archetypal sower, Lauren Olamina and permitting the new stories or worlds of our imagination to guide us towards a further stage of worldbuilding unfolding through our action (Butler 1993). The imagined worlds of Black feminist Afrofuturism reveal themselves as the muse for our creative actions, whether they be the production of art and literature, academic research, policymaking, or community organizing.

Like Lauren Olamina, practitioners of Black feminist Afrofuturism are sowers, scattering the seeds of nascent myths—stories that over time may compel the emergence of new orientations of thought, expression, and being. Our relationship to the myths of future generations is strange and tenuous and deserving of further theorization in other works. We cannot possibly manufacture or control what those myths will be, though we can orient our thought, expression, and action towards aims of justice and liberation which we hope will ripple into and from the future. adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy* could be read as one example of an individual's attempts to contend with the enormous scope of such a project within the temporal and corporeal restrictions that bind our individual labours (brown 2017). A more feasible objective for practitioners of Black feminist Afrofuturism, we might conclude, is to imagine new stories and allow them to change ourselves, others, and, through our varying acts of creation, the world in which we presently live.

As we enter a new space age, a movement which promises to be transformative for human life, we must redouble our efforts to confront the colonial, patriarchal, and white supremacist myths foundational to our world's present architecture and disrupt the troubling futures which they portend. Colonialism unleashed incalculable suffering on humanity—are we foolish enough to try it a second time? Perhaps so, but until we have filled outer space with the same structures and ideology that have caused so much harm on Earth, we have time to imagine and tell new stories. We can direct our collective thought, expression, and action toward futures that are more just, hopeful, and considerate of one another. In doing so, we may sow the seeds of new myths that, in the recollections of future generations dwelling beyond the Earth, did not merely disrupt the oppressive structures of our current world, but unmade them altogether.

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