A R T I C L E

.5

Exploring the Dark Matter(S) of Wakanda: A Quest for Radical Queer Inclusion Beyond Capitalism

Amber Johnson
Saint Louis University
USA

Abstract

Black Panther shattered box office records while creating a safe space for Black Americans to reimagine their role in the world as belonging to a mythical, affluent, African country. Our histories were affirmed and uplifted in blockbuster fashion. But how much of that reimagining required a return to dark matter for those bodies that live on the margins of the margins? This essay pinpoints the moments of invisibility and nostalgia that cloak queer narratives of existence as non-existent, uninhabitable, and undesirable. Queer here is used as a phrase for otherness, including albinism, disability, queer sexuality, and trans identity. I begin by locating Black Panther as an Afrofuturistic text, then I use Dark Matter, Nostalgia, and Canonical Exception to unpack cisgender, straight, white capitalism's chokehold on the radical imagination as a site for liberation.

Keywords: Dark Matter, Radical Inclusion, Queer Theory, Canonical Exception, Nostalgia, Visibility Politics.

Black Panther shattered box office records while creating a safer space for Black Americans to reimagine their role in the world as belonging to a mythical, affluent, African country. Our histories were affirmed and uplifted in blockbuster fashion. The way Black folks showed up to support *Black Panther* matched the films bravura (Campbell, 2018, p.97). From the impeccable fashion filling theatre seats, to ticket sales and online engagement, audience members displayed the affinity and desire for a futuristic Africa that could compete with Westernized whiteness in the form of beauty, capital, technology, and power. Despite the beauty of *Black Panther*, I left the theatre feeling a sense of longing in addition to my wonder and excitement. I could locate my blackness all over the films narrative and cinematography, but I could not locate my body as a site for gender variance, multiple sexualities, and varying (in)abilities. Simply put, where were the queer folks, the trans folks, the fat folks, the disabled folks, the folks suffering from and naming their depression and anxiety? The unparalleled engagement despite these notable absences left me wondering why here, why now, why this *Black Panther*? This essay pinpoints the moments of invisibility and nostalgia that create space for celebrating blackness but cloak queer narratives of existence as non-existent, uninhabitable, and undesirable. I use the term queer as an umbrella term for otherness, including albinism, disability, queer sexuality, and trans identity.

I begin by locating *Black Panther* as an Afrofuturistic text, then I use Dark Matter, Nostalgia, and Canonical Exception followed immediately by a series of questions to unpack cisgender, straight, white capitalism's chokehold on the radical imagination as a site for liberation. I used questions here intentionally, not as an indictment, but rather as a generative quest to unpack our own compulsory connections to the appropriate performances of social identity categories.

Afrofuturism

Birthed from a nexus of social movement, technology, transnational capital, and artistic expression, Afrofuturism is an aesthetic manifestation of storytelling critically aware of possibility (Anderson and Jennings, 2014, p.35). Designed to project the mind and body into a future free from colonialism, Afrofuturistic artist, activists and scholars look towards the critical embodiment of Afrocentric imagination in art forms such as film, music, visual art, fashion, and literature as a means of replacing presumed whiteness as authority. Afrocentric in practice, "Afrofuturism emerged as a means to understand the transformation of African peoples as they dealt with the oppressive forces of discrimination, and the complexities of modern urban life and postmodernity" (Anderson & Jennings 2014, p.35). "Astroblackness is an Afrofuturistic concept in which a person's black state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe" (Rollins, 2015, p.127). The precise moment of imagined possibilities wherein the Black body seeks a future that centers its Blackness instead of whiteness is Afrofuturism.

Black Panther's unapologetic blackness, technological advancement, power, and zero-reliance on whiteness squarely roots it in the Afrofuture now, or a concurrent depiction of Africa that exists at the same time, but with an alternate history that beseeches power, wealth, and independence to the thriving mother country of Wakanda. The imagery, religious and spiritual rituals, and clothing rooted in various West African traditions alongside the direct portrayal of a morally corrupt North America and England did something for audience members who were proud to rep for Wakanda, citing Killmongner as a source of inspiration as he dismissed the European museum curator's antiquated understanding of historical artifacts. It was a proud moment to witness as hooting and hollering filled theatres. The Afrofuture now was alive and well on the screen, but not without some problematic features.

While the language of Afrofuturism creates a level of unification that renders the critical imagination of Blackness visible, the erasure of non-normative identities has been employed as a tool for the technological future. From genderless embodiment erasing gender variance and compulsory heterosexuality at the expense of queer realities, to the forced ideas of superheroism at the expense of disabled folks, mainstream Afrofutures have fostered essential narratives that create a particular kind of freedom that is exclusive and rooted in historical oppression, but connected to what Sheree Rene Thomas calls dark matter, or the invisible gravitational pulls that affect existence beyond our understanding or vision. *Black Panther i*s no exception.

Dark Matter

Sheree Renee Thomas (2000) uses dark matter - "a nonluminous form of matter which has not been directly observed but whose existence has been deduced by its gravitational effects" - as a metaphor to describe the invisible labor Black people engage in that has a direct impact on society but often without any notice. In her groundbreaking edited collection of essays, Thomas charts speculative fiction that illuminates the dark matter of Black folks existence through science fiction, acknowledging that in each short story, the authors consider how Black people influence and impact society while their presence remains unknown until the end (Thomas, 2000). A direct

by-product of slavery, Thomas exclaims that as Africa became the unknown and blackness attached to the institutionalized 'other," Black people as individual contributors to society "receded into the background. They became dark matter, invisible to the naked eye, and yet their influence –their gravitational pull on the world around them—would be come undeniable." (Thomas, 2000, p.xiv). As speculative fiction grew into future imaginings and the eventual Afrofuturism, Walter Moseley warns us that Black folks are not high in participation due to the overwhelming whiteness of science fiction and how the images they project in their productions invade our psyche, prompting us to believe that we are not a contributing factor to society, further limiting our imaginations within and beyond it (Mosley, 2000). However, in the same essay Walter Mosley offers hope, acknowledging that, "the destroyer-creator must first be able to imagine a world beyond his mental prison. The hardest thing to do is to break the chains of reality and go beyond into a world of your own creation," (p.407). To do so is to unleash the imagination, and thus set a foundation for a decolonized future.

While dark matter has been employed to think through the taken for granted and invisible work Black people do for their/our communities, I am interested in pushing dark matter further and thinking through the ideological pitfalls that chaperone our participation and leave us longing in the movie theatre. Throughout the great creative process of writing, directing, filming, and editing Black Panther, what ideologies were exercising their gravitational pull to redirect the message and leave audience members feeling a sense of absence and cognitive dissonance? As we awaken to the traumas and ills of societies, what ideologies keep us connected to the constraints of oppression and how do they show up in our work? This essay's first concern is with that dark matter and how it shows up in *Black Panther* and beyond.

As an activist entering and exiting multiple spaces designed for generating liberation, I am constantly reminded that not all activists understand all modes of oppression or have the capacity to confront modes of oppression not directly connected to their own immediate experiences. Historically, when we look to social movements, we see evidence of movement spaces espousing freedom and liberation for one group while perpetuating discursive and physical violence against other groups. From famous feminist movements that excluded women based on race, class, and the gender binary to the Civil Rights Movement, which ignored the distinct struggles that Black women face, to labor movements that disregard indigenous folks and people of color, to all three of these examples not taking up problems associated with trans and disabled people, singular movements ignore important intersections and cultivate insensitivity towards disconnected differences that activists might assume do not affect them. Compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodied identity along side the gender binary, exoticizing the other, and capitalism are five instances of dark matter directly affecting *Black Panther* via the assumption that only certain bodies are attractive enough to be included, even while celebrating marginalized blackness in aesthetically pleasing ways.

Compulsory social identity expression

With every communication act, whether expressive in performance, verbal communication or otherwise, humans have the opportunity to reify, reject, challenge, or generate the norms attached to certain categories. Despite the potential to disrupt, some identity categories and their attached performances of acceptability are so ingrained that we assume they are natural and normal and reiterate those performances across interactions (Butler, 1988). Rich (1980) defines these performances as compulsory because they are assumed to be natural and carry with them consequences when humans choose to deviate. Toxic masculinity is one example. When aggression, anger, and toughness are connected to masculinity, failure to perform those tropes suggest deviation from masculinity and create pace to ridicule those bodies that do not adhere to those norms. We see this carry out in everyday acts of masculine violence and the direct shaming of masculine identified folks who are more feminine in performance, or queer, or refuse to engage aggression, anger, and tough statures (Rich, 1980).

Heteronormativity results in compulsory heterosexuality, or the assumption that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise, and the admission of queer identities results in shaming, physical and discursive violence, and shunning (Rich, 1980). Compulsory able-bodiedness extends from compulsory heterosexuality (McRuer, 2006), in that everyone is assumed to be able-bodied until proven otherwise, and people assume that one should hide a disability if possible to avoid ridicule or shame (Scott-Pollock, forthcoming). Toxic constructions of masculinity are directly linked to compulsory heterosexuality an able-bodiedness—those who are queer and/or disabled are not considered masculine enough, this controls one's ability to exist as a nuanced and identity variant body (Connell, 2005). I would extend the idea of compulsory identities to gender as well, and the absence of gender variant folks in popular culture.

We see this manifest in *Black Panther* with the direct refusal to include queer characters, despite the Gay and Harvey (2015) rendition of *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* included a lesbian relationship. We also see this in relation to able-bodied characters and the lack of gender variant characters. When characters are confronted by potential disabilities in the film, technology is used to *fix* characters, including Agent Ross' new spine, Klaw's bionic arm, and the countless characters who drink the purple flower super juice to be miraculously healed. The gender binary reveals its gravitational pull in the direct absence of gender variant bodies as well as the regulations of the strong women characters to masculine servants. I felt myself asking where are the trans and non-binary characters? The fat characters? The disabled characters? The characters who suffer from anxiety and depression openly? And why, when we have the chance to showcase strong black women as full and complex characters, do we only understand each woman as a servant to patriarchal Wakanda?

Capitalism is another compulsion. Why must we accept a version of Africa that is rich in technology, weaponry, and financial resources? Is that what makes Wakanda attractive to the millions of viewers? If so, is that because it is filtered through a lens of Western capitalistic success? Or is it a response to political nostalgia that places financial growth at the pinnacle of success?

The Politics of Nostalgia

Nostalgia is culturally defined as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations. While positive associations may ring true for some, nostalgia is a complex notion that exists within three dialectical tensions. Jennifer Delisle (2006) focuses on the tensions between experiential nostalgia and cultural nostalgia. Experiential nostalgia encompasses one's personal memories and experiences. Cultural nostalgia comprises collective memories and cultural myths. The tensions erupt when cultural narratives erase or misalign with personal experience. This occurs in particularly traumatic histories where collectives, institutions, and communities try to protect their legacies through creating positive nostalgic narratives that purport a particular image to save face, or re-write history by writing out trauma.

Svetlana Boym (2002) focuses on the tension between restorative and reflective functions of nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia focuses on the past, whereas reflective nostalgia focuses on the lost, or an inability to recover the past. "Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia,* in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym, 2002, p.41). Boym argues that restorative nostalgics do not refer to their work as nostalgia, but as a project of truth. We witness these "truths" of restorative nostalgia in the total reconstruction of monuments, whereas one might witness reflective nostalgia in "ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place or another time," (Boym, 2002, p.41).

A final tension focuses on survival of the past versus coping with the present. Jennifer Delisle (2006) contends that, "nostalgia is not only a means of affirming survival of a past trauma, it can

also be a means of coping with a present trauma " (p.394). Past trauma can destroy our ability to view ourselves positively or extract meaning from our current experiences; however, "by privileging the positive aspects of post-traumatic memory, the nostalgic refuses to be a victim" (Delisle, 2006, p. 393). Nostalgia can create space for us to engage with trauma in order to heal, be a source of relief, or defy time to conflate the present with the past, which allows us to address the needs of the present with a past where those needs may have been met (Delisle, 2006).

These three tensions exist in remembering what is lost, what is past, what is personal, what is cultural, what was traumatic then, and what is traumatic now. While we may think of nostalgia as a positive feeling associated with a memory of past time, nostalgia is not always positive or affirming, and must find balance between and beyond these tensions. "Nostalgia and traumatic memory are not mutually exclusive; to argue that nostalgia and positive memory have an essential role in community-building is not to say that trauma should not also be remembered. Rather, "nostalgia is a means of *completing* memory…Both the positive and negative elements of memory must be balanced so that the individual does not become lost in national narrative" (Delisle, 2006, p. 399).

To create cultural products based in the imagined and real past is to wield the rhetorical power of nostalgia, or the re-writing of personal and cultural memories that orient audiences to old and/ or new perceptions (Shackel, 2001). *Black Panther* garnered potential in the retelling of a narrative closely connected to an overwhelming large population of people that can trace the origins and creation of humanity back to Africa, and experience a deep desire to do so, while also remembering vividly the lessons that erased and demonized Africa from our own personal and collective pasts. Nostalgia creates the potential to allow people to "celebrate their love, dreams, and innocence as a means of subverting pervasive violence. It can enable audiences to deal with trauma, but refuses to let trauma define their lives. It can allow them to give voice to their identities as individuals, as a part of a community with hope for a diverse but cohesive future" (Delisle, 2006, p.401). Released at the continued persistence of the Movement for Black Lives, *Black Panther's* release was met with much anticipation and hope for a narrative that rendered blackness visible, beautiful, successful, and thriving. What I, and many more audience members, didn't anticipate was the lack of nuance regarding how that success would be conceived. The rhetorical power of *Black Panther* rested in the possibility of drafting narratives that made space for Blackness to be celebrated in full color, while also celebrating multiple modes of Blackness steeped within tragic and magic histories. The movie could have held space for the simultaneous reinvention of a racist and resistant past without caving into a revision of Africa cloaked in capitalistic dreams. In this regard, *Black Panther* failed.

Black Panther failed to wield the rhetorical power of nostalgia because it lacked definitive balance. It failed to wrestle with the three tensions in productive ways that allowed for narratives to generate a sense of nostalgia that offered agency to the bodies present in the film and the bodies witnessing the production.

The tension between experiential and cultural nostalgia manifest as personal connection versus cultural myths connected to Africa. As someone who has visited six African countries, I carry many personal experiences connected to a deep love of my past travels into the movie theatre. My first visit was to Ghana where I felt a deep sense of familial connection and history despite never having visited the country. I saw people that resembled family members while several people told me I could be a member of their community. I experienced goose bumps across my skin when I went into several structures or listened to the narratives of the elders and ancestors. They felt like they were a part of my bloodline, dancing in and on my skin. I also remember the lessons I was force fed prior to my arrival that prefaced the trip with fear. Those lessons mimicked what I learned throughout elementary school—that savage, uncivilized Africans were something to fear and stay away from. I was in a social work class and our professors implored us to never give to beggars, to keep our money and valuables close to our hearts and out of sight. The fears were deeply entrenched in capitalistic ideals that beg those who have to guard their belongings against those who do not.

I saw evidence of these false truths mimicked on screen in *Black Panther,* but filtered through an American capitalist lens. We saw the great African continent through the perspective of a thriving Wakandan State. A place that had no need for any American handout or support. A country without beggars or thieves or the incessant need to guard your belongings. A place without a gay *problem*, a disability *problem*, a trans *problem*, a colorism problem, a poverty problem. Wakanda was America washed in ideals that responded directly to the cultural myths I was taught in grade school as if that was the only Wakanda I could support and love. Wakanda was the reimagined and reinvented Africa that offered a nostalgia that resulted in repetitive trauma. Our own memories collided with the memories of what we were taught as Black Americans in grade school and that contradiction plays out on the screen. At its very basic rendering, Killmonger colonized Wakanda in order to free the Black Diaspora. As a Black American I feel the contradictions and redemptive value simultaneously. I also understood why people from West African may not embrace that same redemptive value or feel like this movie was made for them. These nostalgic playbacks idealized Africa for Black Americans and the diaspora, but perhaps not West Africans living and residing on the continent, resulting in the Afrofuture versus the africanfuture (Okrafor, 2019).

Restorative versus reflective nostalgia offers a different field of view. Restorative nostalgia is about restoring that which has been lost and is no longer seen while reflective nostalgia praises the ruins of a community, or that which is no longer living but it still visible. In restorative nostalgia, the creator has the opportunity to revise history and package it in ways that are acceptable, shiny, and new. In reflective nostalgia, we do not alter the ruins, but we can alter the stories connected to those ruins. As I witnessed *Black Panther,* I took notice of the restorative functions of Wakanda juxtaposed against the reflective ruins of Black America and the deep desire for the fictive Wakandians to save Black America from deep, emotional trauma and attachment disorder. What does it mean for these two narratives to coexist and how do they each do the work to erase what is? And as McAllum (2018) suggests, "in a burgeoning renaissance of transdisciplinary exploration, the practice of futures needs to obsess less about tools and explore more about how narratives can be created, where both futures and the past are woven into a macrohistorically framed consciousness" (n.p.).

Survival and coping add another layer, pushing us to think through the Afrofuture and what is possible looking forward. Survival nostalgia requires remembering past traumas as a source of acknowledging pain, confronting traumatic memories, and choosing to actively heal through them. Coping requires using historical traumas and the memories associated with them as history lessons in how to cope with current traumas. There are two traumas at play in Wakanda that wrestle in the background and beg for acknowledgement: how West Africans let Black Americans down by selling them into slavery and refusing to hold themselves accountable or come back to save Black Americans, but also how whiteness continues to prevail as a source of erasure and pain that, until dealt with, will always outshine any role Africans played in the slave trade because it left them with insurmountable traumas to survive and cope with as well. How do we complete memories and let them go versus reinvent and repeat history? Both Killmonger and T'Challa use tactics of the past to cope with the present. Killmonger chooses to forcibly take Wakanda over, effectively colonizing it, while T'challa chooses silence and an unwillingness to be honest about his father's shortcomings while repeating them. What does it mean to face a tragic colonized past from the perspective of Wakanda versus Black America and then use that past to forge a new future, versus repeat the same mistakes and reinvent a capitalistic and colonized Wakanda by a Black American.

Canonical Exception

Canonical exception also stems from rigorous stereotyping and is informed by canonical prejudice. Román (1998) defines canonical prejudice as an "overinvestment in the cultural forms of the elite" (p. xxvi) that erases non-normative experience and cultural production from canonical

archives. While several scholars use the term canonical prejudice to look at the ways in which texts become marginalized and erased because they stray from normal conventions in literature, music, or other art genres, Daileader (2005) specifically addresses how White supremacy, racism, and female subordination serve as points of erasure for Black literature that could be considered canonical texts. Canonical prejudice illuminates the ways in which systemic oppression consistently denies bodies of color the right to live their lives, produce artifacts about those lives, and archive them into the fabric of American history. Instead, canonical prejudice ensures that we are erased, dismissed and read via very particular modes of framing.

Jeffrey McCune (2015), in his working manuscript *Read!: An Experiment in Seeing Black* discusses "canonical ways of reading/seeing Blackness that further produce canonical prejudices, which fundamentally sediment a practice of framing Black bodies in nonproductive ways" (p.173-176). Canons function at the core of institutions as designators of value, which legitimize the institution and the process of erasure.

If canonical prejudice is rooted in erasure, negative framing, and devaluing the lives of marginalized communities, we might consider the term *canonical exception* as a critically useful term that pinpoints the ideological system that perpetuates canonical prejudice (Johnson 2017, p. 6). Canonical exception serves as a point of departure for interrogating the exceptional bodies that are accepted. Ideological systems like respectability politics grant entry to particular kinds of bodies in dominant spaces, and further ostracize bodies that don't make the cut due to embodying stereotypes, and instead are deemed deserving of erasure (Johnson 2017, p.6). Canonical prejudice and canonical exception then work concomitantly by creating the criteria for inclusion and erasure. Providing particular kinds of exceptions directly correlate to demonizing other bodies, resulting in a vicious cycle of aesthetic cleansing.

Canonical exception rears its head in *Black Panther* by alluding to an acceptable Africa that exists under the guise of capitalism. What kind of Africa is required for Black Americans to celebrate its existence? What does capitalist America need to love Black Panther? Africa needs money, power, technology, and no queer folks. This is an Africa we can get behind.

However, like master narratives of multiple African countries, queer identities and non-binary gender norms were wholly absent from the film and regulated to the dark matters of the Dark Continent. Even in an imaginary world, we had to deliberately erase the most marginalized. The queers—and in this sense of the word queer, I mean all the queerdos of the world, the disabled, the homosexual, the trans, the albino, the non binary and those folks routinely left out of the narratives of successful Africaness, and even Afrofuturism to a point. The deliberate non-inclusion of the queerdos and wierdos, the monstrous (Calafell, 2015), and the demonstratively different renders a canonical exception in Wakanda—a fictional African country that I don't have to fear visiting or head warnings about beggars and thieves, food-born illness, water contamination, and culture shock. No. They are just like us—capitalisti, rich, greedy, exclusive, and interested only in protecting their nationalist legacy.

Samuel Delaney (1999) warned future creatives of a racism built into the very system cultural production was intended to undercut when he writes:

> *Editors and writers need to be alerted to the socioeconomic pressures on such social groups to reproduce the old system of racism inside the new systems by virtue of "outside" pressures. Because we still have a racist society, the only way to combat it in any systemic way is to establish—and repeatedly revamp—anti-racist institutions and traditions. This means actively encouraging the attendance of nonwhite readers and writers at conventions. It means actively presenting nonwhite writers with a forum to discuss precisely these problems in the con programming. (It seems absurd to have to point out that racism is by no means exhausted simply by black/white differences: indeed,*

11

one might argue that it is only touched on here). And it means encouraging dialogue among, and encouraging intermixing with, the many sorts of writers who make up the science fiction community (p.396-397).

I want to push Delaney's assertions even further and look towards the dark matter fueling other marginalized notions of being. It is not enough to uproot racism within science fiction and other forms of production charged with critically imagining a liberated future. To reach a liberated future, we must also invite the queerdos and weirdos that depart from other compulsory identities to those conventions and creative spaces. We must deconstruct as many systems as possible, which means telling complex stories with complex characters that better mimic the messiness of life, not the sanitized and pre-packaged performances of social identity categories that stereotypical dreams are made of.

Including complex characters is not without contention. I struggle with conflicted feelings about creating characters as entry points into humanizing difference. How do we avoid characters becoming reductive overtime? How do we avoid turning a complex character prototype into a stereotype? In attempting to prescribe solutions, or a list of people that should be included, what happens when those lists and solutions turn into checklists that absolve creators and producers from being radically inclusive because they checked off boxes and included key stereotypical characters? What does complexity look like in story form? While we can look to producers and creators who have done this well, we can run the risk of reproducing their characters without including community in our character ruminations? This last question brings me closer to a possible solution: radical inclusion. When we are radically inclusive from the beginning of idea production, and include the bodies of those most marginalized as we build our productions, we decrease the risk of being reductive and open the possibility for creative and critical reflection around inclusive practice. *Black Panther* did this well in inviting people from various countries through Africa to help tell a fuller story of an imagined West African country. From clothing and set design to accent and narrative reproduction, *Black Panther* evidences radically inclusive community input. The next step is including marginalized others that don't have a direct connection to the content (Africa and Wakanda) but are always already in our lives. The queerdos and weirdos are always here, often regulated to the background, and eager to share our stories and make mainstream media more inclusive.

Despite my critical read of Coogler's dismissal of queer identities, this is not an attempt to blame or degrade him. As Delaney (1999) reminds us, systems of oppression are indeed systems, which manifest through individual actions and decisions, it is not the individual that stabilizes the system, we must begin using stories and direct actions to dismantle the system itself. This is not about blaming Coogler or other creative who worked in the film, but rather about unpacking the system we live in, which is suffering from America and other western notions of ideation.

Discussion

Inherent possibility exists in the momentum of Wakanda's wake. The film opened our senses to a distant Africa that could liberate us from the confines and constraints of racism, which is a start. I have never been so proud of folding my arms into an X and greeting my Black siblings anywhere in the world. Wakanda unified the diaspora from a proactive place of future desire versus a social movement rooted in tragedy. In my lifetime, this is unprecedented and deserves to be celebrated. It shows great potential in Afrofuturistic cultural production as a site of radical imagination and liberation. Witnessing to the utopian ideal, Robin D. G. Kelley adopts his mother's belief that "The map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us," (2002, p.2). Walter Mosley (2000) would agree, writing that:

> *The world we live in is so much larger, has so many more possibilities, than our simple sciences describe. Anything conceivable I believe is possible. From the creation of life itself…to freedom. The ability to formulate ideas into words, itself humanities greatest creation, opens the door for all that comes after. Science fiction and its relatives (fantasy, horror, speculative fiction, etc.) have been a main artery for recasting our imagination (p. 405).*

Black Panther was a portal to the radical imagination of Blackness inherent in all of our bodies spread throughout the diaspora. It opened our eyes to begin (re)imagining our very own liberated future on the continent, free from racism. "[If] the power to imagine is the first step in changing the world," (Mosley, 2000, p.406), *Black Panther* gave us a reason to imagine. It gave us an idea of Africa to look forward to. Unfortunately, it also only tended to the ills of racism overtly, and sexism covertly if you were paying attention. However, "the metaphor of the speculative and revolutionary tail could be language as power—the hero, and choir that disrupt the status quo" (Mosley, 2000, p. 409). "If we don't unleash our imaginations to tell our own [science fiction] and fantasy stories, [others] will tell them for us. And if we don't like the way [they are] telling them, its up to us to tell them on our own way." (Saunders, 2000, p.400). *Black Panther* gave us a glimpse into the revisionist histories full of regret and alternative lives, albeit pregnant with possibility, that Mosley (2000) warns us about in Black to the Future when he writes, "Science fiction allows history to be rewritten or ignored. Science fiction promises a future full of possibility, alternative lives, and even regret," (p.405). But what good is a science fiction that doesn't stimulate creativity by taking readers and witnesses off "the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of "everyone" is saying, doing, thinking" (Butler, 2005, p.135). *Black Panther* showed us a version of ourselves that was not pretty, or easily digestible in both T'Challa and Killmonger, but it did make us think, it did inspire conversation, aesthetics, and new material that forced us to wrestle with a contentious African and American past riddled with systemic oppression, deceit, mistrust, and dishonor, but also beauty and nostalgia with a heavy dose of pessimism.

Correspondence

Amber Johnson
Saint Louis University
USA
E-mail: amber.johnson@slu.edu

References

Anderson, R., & Jennings, J. (2014). Afrofuturism: The digital durn and the visual art of Kanye West. In *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West*, edited by Julius Bailey, 35. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boym, S. (2002). *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal, 40*(4), 519-531.

.Butler, O. (2005). Positive Obsession" In Bloodchild and Other Stories. 2nd ed. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Calafell, B. (2015). *Monstrosity, performance, and race in contemporary culture*. New York: Peter Lang.

Campbell, C. C. (2018). Forging a new future: Africa and her diaspora. *Journal of Futures Studies, 23*(1), 95-100. doi:10.6531/JFS.201809_23(1).0007

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Daileader, C. R. (2005). *Racism, misogyny, and the Othello myth: Inter-racial couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Delaney, S. (1999). Racism and science fiction. In Sheree R. Thomas (Ed.) *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. New York: Warner Books, 391-397.

Delisle, J. (2006). Finding future in the past: Nostalgia and community-building in Mhlophe's *Have You Seen Zandile*? *Journal of Southern African Studies, 32*(2), 387-401.

Gay, R., & Harvey, Y. (2015). *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*. Marvel Comics.

Johnson, A. (2018). From academe, to the theatre, to the streets: My autocritography of canonical exception and aesthetic cleansing in the wake of Ferguson." *Qualitative Inquiry, 24*(2), 88-100.

Kelley, R. D. G. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The Black radical imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Lucia, C. (2002). "Abdullah Ibrahim and the Uses of Memory". *British Journal of Ethnomusicology 11*(2), 125-143.

McAllum, M. (2018). All revolutions are equal; but some are more equal than others. *Journal of Futures Studies*, *23*(2), 1-12. doi:10.6531/JFS.201812_23(2).0001

McCune, J. (2015). The queerness of blackness. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmarking 2*, 173-176.

McRuer, R (2006). *Crip Theory: Cultural signs of queerness and the body*. New York: New York University Press.

Mosley, W. (2000). Black to the future. In Sheree R. Thomas (Ed.) *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. New York: Warner Books, 405-409.

Okorafor, Nnedi. (2019). Africanfuturism Defined. *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog*, retrieved on November 18, 2019 from http://nnedi.blogspot.com/2019/10/africanfuturism-defined.html

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian existence. *Signs, 5*(4), 631-660.

Rollins, A. (2015). Afrofuturism and our old ship of Zion: The Black church in post modernity." In Reynaldo Anderson and Charles Jones (Eds.) *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of AStro-Blacknesss*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 127.

Román, D. (1998). *Acts of Intervention: Performance, gay culture, and AIDS*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Saunders, C. R. (2000). Why blacks should read (and write) science fiction. In Sheree R. Thomas (Ed.) *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. New York: Warner Books, 398-404.

Scott, J. A. (in press). Disrupting compulsory performances: Snapshots and stories masculinity, disability and parenthood in cultural currents of daily life. In Amber Johnson and Benny LeMaster (Eds.) *Dancing with Gender in the Intersections: Critical Autoethnography, Intercultural Communication, and the Case for Gender Futurity*. New York, Routledge. n.p.

Shackel, P. A. (2001). Public memory and the search for power in American historical archeology." *American Anthropologist* 103(3), 655-670.