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Athazagoraphilia: On the End(s) of Dreaming – InVisible Culture

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In the introductory chapter of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, entitled “When History Sleeps,” scholar and activist Robin D.G. Kelley ties his own political engagement with his mother’s “dream of a new world,” an inherited belief “that the map to a new world is in the imagination.”¹ In the remainder of the text, Kelley delves into the various political and cultural manifestations of this call to map out a social-political paradigm through the *conscious* act of imagining—a “nowhere” or “different future.”² Thinking through what can be called the *unconscious* of this act of imagining and the dreamwork that is subsequently produced, I reconsider the consequences of this production.³ What if, as Anthony Paul Farley states, the production of the dream also “does the mental work that keeps the structure from falling apart?”⁴ Said another way, what if an end of dreamwork is to keep the dreamers dreaming? Though this may seem to effect a call to end the dreaming, it is rather a call to sit with that which animates it, to “wallow in the contradictions,” to understand that our flights from this context may work to sustain us while also working to sustain the system that creates the conditions of possibility for the dream.⁵ In such a context, the call to end the dreaming is also in itself a dream of flight. This essay is, in effect, a meditation on what it might mean to dream more lucidly.

In *Thinking Through the Imagination*, John Kaag endeavors to dig beneath the everyday use of the concept of the imagination, which is a far cry from the infinite expanse assumed by many scholars. He asks, “Where does the imagination, a creative power that has been regarded as distinctly human, come from? And where exactly does it take us?”⁶ He finds that the imagination provides the grounds to the very act of understanding and of meaning making in the most general sense, having much greater importance beyond the aesthetic and moving solidly into the realms of the onto-epistemological. He continues: “imaginative thought is intimately in touch with the world in so far as it is an outgrowth of [...] biological processes that obtain embodied and thoughtful lives.”⁷ That is, at the core of his project is an investigation into the nature of cognition and imagination as they are constituted at least in part by one’s embodiment and lived experience. Systematically moving through and beyond the Cartesian mind-body dualism, Kaag finds that just as the imagination serves as the glue of human language and cognition it finds its ground in “the bodily experience of individuals in a particular context.”⁸ Drawing together studies in neuroscience and philosophy, he carefully demonstrates how *lived experience* is the site of, subsequently constituting a limit for, the imagination. In the case of the black body, in which violence

becomes a matrix that constitutes ways of being in the world and ways of knowing in the world, this assertion moves from a positive or neutral valence into the negative and insidious, as the violence of the real enters into the once assumed sovereign world(s) of dreaming.

As the violence of the real enters the dreaming, it becomes a source of the bid for escape, inflecting, or contouring, the maps of flight as it does so. To situate the act of dreaming within the context of an antiblack world, then, troubles the assumed sovereignty of our thought-worlds, of the purity of our imagination. David Marriot describes this conundrum and the psychic landscape that antiblack violence conditions as a “turning of the subject inside out through the breaching of an internal enclosure or screen.”⁹ Psychic and physical violence intersect as a fantasy projection of the figure of the black body intrudes upon the black psyche, causing a self-same seeing of its abjection. The interiority of the subject is externalized—or, rather the external of the subject is interiorized—and the violation of the intrusion is registered in the symptom.¹⁰ The self-same seeing blurs the lines between the internal and external, producing a “fractured doubling of self,” linking the landscapes, or topographies, of the imaginations of Black and nonblack psyches in a “bonding over phobia.”¹¹ This brings to bear an enduring question: “How then can we hope to dream a reprieve from the real when that real is already a part of our dreaming”; if “racism, as Fanon intimates, brings dreaming to a halt, can dreaming ever save us?”¹² In this query, Marriott is re-situating the mundane yet spectacular violence surrounding black lives into the discourse of dreaming and the imagination. What we find then is a psychic space which is affected and infected at least in part by a type of seeing that is antiblack. The black dreamer dreams in the wake of a disfiguring violence that irrupts into the psyche and produces a self-same seeing that is at least capable of confusing the lines between what is *genuinely* desired and what is *inauthentically* imposed from without. This violence constitutes the life of the black body even in or before childhood and constitutes an irruption into the psyche even in the years in which the imagination “knows no limits.”

In the examination of the imagination and dreams as they intersect with the lived experience of the black body, few texts are as exemplary as Kelley’s *Freedom Dreams*, which was, “not only the first book to relate surrealism to the long and eventful history of black radicalism, but also—and more precisely—the first to compare surrealist ideas to the thought of [...] great black dreamers, theorists, and activists.”¹³ In *Freedom Dreams*, Kelly is building on the work of the surrealist movement, notably the

theoretical work of André Breton. Breton, ruminating at length on the imagination and its importance in the life of the subject, theorizes that childhood is where imagination “knows no limits,” the passing of which forces the subject to “make a *slave* of the *imagination*” which is then only “exercised according to the arbitrary laws of utility.”¹⁴ The imagination, for him, finds its fullness in the dreams and fantasies of childhood, wherein “childhood [...] comes closest to ‘real life’” and which “thanks to surrealism” the opportunities to experience this “real life” returns.¹⁵ We find then that the concepts of childhood, imagination, and surrealism are intimately linked.

Ultimately, the project of *Freedom Dreams*, which is “deeply rooted in surrealism’s high priorities [of] poetry, freedom, love, and the unfettered imagination” and has had a strong impact on the field of surrealism, globally, according to Franklin Rosemont, is to explore the dreaming of the historical black revolutionary.¹⁶ Lamenting the condition of the hopeless traditional leftist, *Freedom Dreams* was written for “anyone bold enough still to dream.”¹⁷ Kelley argues that “progressive social movements do not simply produce statistics and narratives of oppression; rather [they] transport us to another place, compel us to relive horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.”¹⁸ He situates this potential for reformation and redress in social movements’ capacities to imagine something different. Kelley politicizes Breton’s surrealism, or rather excavates the political exigence of surrealist dreams, arguing that “by plunging into the depths of the unconscious and lessening ‘the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams,’ we can enter or realize the domain of the Marvelous.”¹⁹ Interpreted as an inherent desire of a refusal of the “real,” dreams and dreaming become the quintessential act of fugitivity. This leads Kelley to argue that “Surrealism...offers a vision of freedom far deeper and more expansive” than other political and social movements.” He continues, “Surrealism may have originated in the West, but it is rooted in a conspiracy against Western civilization.”²⁰ Arguing that, for Surrealists, freedom of the imagination was integrally tied to political and social freedom—that surrealism, above all, was a revolutionary movement—Kelley then unearths what Toni Morrison would perhaps call the “Africanist presence” in surrealist thought. Suffice it to say, for Kelley, “black revolt shaped the development of surrealism as a self-conscious political movement,” and this presence is what imbued it with its potential to articulate (vis-à-vis the imagination) a comprehensive freedom, effectively what makes them *freedom dreams*.²¹

How this plays out in Kelley’s discussion of surrealism is nuanced. He sees the Africanist presence in the work of white surrealists as an affirmation of the importance

of black figures within the work. But why would we look to this as affirmation when this type of “black surrogacy” has been at work in white imaginaries, geographic locations notwithstanding? Slavery, which ushered in not only modern Human relations but also the libidinal economies that subtend its political economies, provided flesh for the eking out of subjectivities and philosophical conceptualizations.²² The very ideas of freedom that Breton espoused were, unwittingly or unthinkingly, mired in the literal and figurative constraints placed on the black body. This breaks in upon the notion that surrealism is actually “rooted in a conspiracy against Western civilization” when the very practices that produced Western civilization and surrealism are being reified. When Kelley, then, notes the importance of black music, and jazz in particular, within surrealist thought, he doesn’t break new ground so much as excavate a centuries old truth about the relationship between the black body, or the figure of the black body and its cultural productions, and its deployment within western imaginaries, inadvertently doing “the dreamwork needed to make death look like life.”²³ In this historical and social context in which the body provided the playground for fantasy as such, it could only ever be a dream that the black body’s own psyche could escape whole or uninjured. And even, or especially, such a dream would demand interrogation as its condition of possibility, its grounding metaphor, is one of violence. In the case of surrealism as Breton presents it, the connections to childhood and the psychic landscape that are privileged must be examined in and through the violence that produces black subjectivity (or rather that violently negates it). For a psyche haunted by the real, for which the violence of a racial imaginary irrupts, there is inevitably a continuity that disturbs the already historically contingent and unstable lines between childhood and adulthood. As Farley states, “Childhood is innocent and the black body [...] must remain guilty. Childhood is [...] removed from the black body through a series of savage inequalities which are, through a peculiar act of mental gymnastics, denied.”²⁴ Breton’s childhood, rather than providing a method or mode of seeing that one craves to return to, becomes a psychic hell that the black body strives to escape.

I would argue that this is the same imagination and dreamwork that feeds the cultural products of black speculative labors. The field of Afrofuturism is generating a corpus of critical work, both within and extant to the academy, and both the creative and critical works are growing at an exponential rate, each influencing the other as though locked in an intimate dialectic. Kodwo Eshun, Greg Tate, Isiah Lavendar, Alondra Nelson, Ytasha Womack, Reynaldo Anderson, and Walter Mosley, to name but a few, are developing a body of scholarship in this burgeoning field. Collectively, the goal of Afrofuturism can be summed up by, but perhaps not reduced to, this statement made

by Eshun: "Afrofuturism [...] is concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional."²⁵ Afrofuturism is concerned with expanding the limits of Black possibility, signified by its discourse which is riddled with the common derivatives of a progressive logic. The goal here is to excavate that which haunts the concepts of the "predictive," "proleptic," "virtual," "envisioned," and "possibility" and their specific relationship to and with blackness and Black people, paradigmatically, not in an attempt to criticize the projects of Afrofuturism but to aid in uncovering and developing that which is already there.

Eshun's work has been exceptional in this regard. Author of *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, his commentary on Afrofuturism is consistently considered an important text on the field both in terms of cultural and academic analysis. In "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism" he deftly mixes a Marxist economic critique with references to popular culture, sounding a clarion call of sorts. Eshun states that "[b]y creating temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress, these futurisms adjust the temporal logics that condemned black subjects to prehistory."²⁶ In this, we see that Afrofuturism is not simply a way of writing blacks into the future, but that it is centrally concerned, additionally, with creating new pasts (or counter-memories as Eshun terms them) in a bid to escape the "melancholia-in-revolt" that Homi Bhabha theorizes (and Eshun agrees) Black people to be mired in. This situates the problem, and so the answer, of black "futurism fatigue" in the imagination. In other words, we must act toward a future that is not yet written, proleptically and imaginatively, to escape the problem of the present.

Ytasha Womack's *Afrofuturism*, a text that, not unlike Eshun's work, blends scholarship and cultural references, the "canonical and popular culture," extends this commentary on the importance of the imagination in Afrofuturism's primary goal of liberation. She states that, "Afrofuturism is an intersection of the imagination, technology, the future, and liberation." She continues, "Afrofuturism unchains the mind [...] stretch[ing] the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation."²⁷ In this, we find the echoes of Robin D.G. Kelley's *freedom dreams*, and the crucial point at which the discourse on Afrofuturism deploys an uncritical notion of the imagination. The imagination is posited as a space of freedom, belonging to an individual, and to political movements. In both cases the conditions of possibility are the social, and for the black body "possibility" is circumscribed by (and

defined in and through) violence that grounds the imagination, begging the question: how can you trust your dreams when they are constructed in and by the very epoch that orders your violent negation? The assumption seems to be that there's an outside we can dream ourselves into which requires what can be called *misremembering in future tense*.²⁸ This misremembering seems to hinge on an idea that our thought-worlds and dreams are private, but if we recognize that they do not come into being in a vacuum, and that the violence of antiblackness breaks in upon the psyche, then how would imaginative labors escape reproducing, at least in part, through dreaming, some traces of this violence?²⁹

Here I will shift to consider Octavia Butler's "The Book of Martha," (2005) as a text that attempts to think through and embody this polemic. I will start my reading at the end of the story, with a quote of the final lines, spoken by the eponymous protagonist, Martha Bes, after an encounter with God:

"I want to forget," Martha said, and she stood alone in her living room, looking blankly past the open drapes of her front window at the surface of Lake Washington and the mist that hung over it. She wondered at the words she had just spoken, wondered what it was that she wanted so badly to forget.³⁰

In the encounter, she is tasked by God to provide a solution, or a stop-gap measure, to the disaster that is humankind's adolescence. Martha goes through several thought experiments in conversation with God and eventually arrives at a solution: let everyone live their best possible lives in their dreams. Butler has stated:

"The Book of Martha" is my utopia story. I don't like most utopia stories because I don't believe them for a moment. It seems inevitable that my utopia would be someone else's hell. So, of course, I have God demand of poor Martha that she come up with a utopia that would work. And where else could it work but in everyone's private, individual dreams?³¹

This utopia has as its condition of possibility the dismantling of the process of dreaming as it exists now—as a communal endeavor inextricably tied to the social—to invent a sovereign dreamworld where we can live our best lives. Yet, if one is to live their best possible life in their dreams, the dreaming would have to be decoupled from the social—a rupture in relationality—such that the latter no longer influences the former. Or rather is there not a reflective comparison in the concept of "best" that highlights an impossibility—specifically that relationality and dreaming are imbricated to the point of being mutually constitutive? In this, it seems as if Butler posits a

destruction of the structure of the unconscious as such—shifting the topography of this wasteland of “wishful-shameful” wounds that accrete their libidinal charge from the failures and traumas inevitable to the encounters with the other. This is the utopia—the no-place—and it’s an end to dreaming. Simultaneously, it highlights an end, or purpose, to dreaming. What if, too, dreaming, the act, the process, has an end, a purpose. What if the purpose is to keep the dreamers dreaming, to a/effect a pedagogy of misremembering, or *athazagoraphilia*?

“The Book of Martha” forces us to think through what can be described as a juxtaposition of the desire to dream with a desire to forget—not only the dream but also the desire to dream—in order to think through the influence of social dynamics and relations in the contouring of our imaginations. In considering Black cultural productions (e.g. Afrofuturist works) as a kind of dreamwork attempting to imagine ways of being otherwise, as, essentially, a flight from the present through an exercising—which should not be conflated or confused with exorcising—of the imagination, perhaps the desire to forget can be posited as a flight from the flight.³² In “The Book of Martha,” Martha desires to forget the entirety of the encounter with God and with it her hand in the production of a “different” world, presumably so as to not countenance the pain she would cause both to herself and to others. There is, I argue, a useful analogy here with which we can excavate the role of the black cultural producer as the dreamer, the product being produced as dreamwork, the corollary effect of the dreamwork as that which encourages further the production of dreams, and the desire to forget the role in sustaining this production.

Butler’s work has recently enjoyed a resurgence, taken up in various ways by contemporary social-political movements. Considered to be the only Black woman science fiction for a time, she would come to be considered as an early Afrofuturist writer, her work (along with the work of Samuel Delany) retroactively categorized as such. Lauded for her imagination, which editors Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown argue “explored the intersections of identity and imagination, the gray areas of race, class, gender, sexuality, love, militarism, inequality, oppression, resistance, and—most important—hope,” her work has been taken up as visionary fiction.³³ Butler’s vision was expansive, to the point of appearing as prophetic, with significant social commentary and resonance. In this generous and generative description of her work, it is the “gray areas” of hope—which shouldn’t be confused with a “hope for gray”—that are particularly interesting to my considerations of “The Book of Martha,” and/as dreamwork.³⁴

There is an ambivalence that marks the work, that sits in the gray areas, and the potential of and through ambivalence, can be lost in the imposition of a trajectory, a telos. For example, when speaking of Butler's novel, *Kindred*, Hortense Spillers says "we have no fiction quite like it in joining so terrible a historical contingency to the canons of the magical; *Kindred* is also rare in its refusal of a unidirectional concept of time and the inevitability of progress."³⁵ There is a complication of time and the notions of "progress" in Butler's fiction that can serve as a space for understanding that finds its virtue in the rejection of the assumption of forward movement which evades subsumptions under any single model of interpretation—perhaps closer in *practice* to what Jared Sexton theorizes as the incessant movement of a "black universality" or what James Baldwin thinks through as a pulverization of theory by life.³⁶ Hazel Carby, in her examination her Butler's novels, remarks upon the resistance of Butler's work with regards to categorization, stating that "the genre labels of science fiction and Afrofuturism are insufficient to capture Butler's exploration of degradation, violation, oppression and alternative modes of belonging."³⁷

Butler's work effects such a meditation—a self-reflection manifesting as a lucid dream that Martha wills herself to forget. At one moment, near the story's denouement, Martha, who has seen God in turn as white, twelve-feet tall and inhumanly beautiful, then black, stout and deep-voiced, sees God transform again:

Martha stopped, startled, then sighed. "I see you as female now," she said. "Actually, I think you look a little like me. We look like sisters." She smiled wearily and handed over a glass of cider.

God said, "You really are doing this yourself, you know. But as long as it isn't upsetting you, I suppose it doesn't matter."

"It does bother me. If I'm doing it, why did it take so long for me to see you as a black woman—since that's no more true than seeing you as a white or a black man?"

"As I've told you, you see what your life has prepared you to see." God looked at her, and for a moment, Martha felt that she was looking into a mirror.

Martha looked away. "I believe you. I just thought I had already broken out of the mental cage I was born and raised in—a human God, a white God, a male God ..."

“If it were truly a cage,” God said, “you would still be in it, and I would still look the way I did when you first saw me.”

“There is that,” Martha said. “What would you call it then?”

“An old habit,” God said. “That’s the trouble with habits. They tend to outlive their usefulness.”³⁸

Analogizing ways of seeing as either a cage or a habit, points toward, while stopping short of, something significant signified in and by the language itself. That is, if we were to accept this at face value, we may fail to understand the nuances of the cage or the habit, highlighted through the argument that this is something that we do to ourselves. In other words, this is not how, or rather not only how, cages or habits *work*. The cage, which is built to contain, separate, to bind, in the very act produces that which is caged and contained through its separation, *as well as* all those things that are outside of its walls. It’s not for nothing that even language has been referred to as a “prison-house.”³⁹ Yet while it may exist as such, and indeed it is, its utility is undeniable, as it is what enables legibility, individuality, and thus community *as we know it*. Words are cages for meaning that likewise enable communication. Just as representations—or series of representations—will necessarily operate as containers for meaning—as representations, visual and otherwise, are essentially texts to be read, each instantiation of God was “meaningful” for Martha and essentially created by her, all tailored, or prepared for her, by the life that she had lived. Each of these representations are self-contained markers of differentiation—a heterogenous series down to its final form—in which she is both encoder and decoder, encoded and decoded, effectively rendering a *mise-en-abyme* that breaches the confines of the story. There is a referentiality, a reflexivity, or dialectic, that is useful to the concept of dreams and the context that produces them. To see herself as God is to reckon with, come to terms with, her capacity for complicity in and as creation. She sees it and decides to will herself-as-God to forget:

Sometime later, she added, “I want to go home.” “Do you want to remember being here?” God asked. “No...No,” she repeated. “I’m afraid of the unintended damage that the dreams might do.” [...] “I want to forget.”⁴⁰

In this Martha (and Butler) exemplifies the ambivalence that Spillers notes.⁴¹ “The Book of Martha,” as a text, interrupts that process of forgetting by explicitly representing its enactment. The plausible deniability that would otherwise be

proffered by forgetting one's own complicity in the maintenance of the present is troubled. We are finally forced to sit with, and within, the gray area of "hope."

Footnotes

1. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 2-3. [↵](#)
2. Kelley, *Freedom dreams*. [↵](#)
3. Here, I am following the work of Frederic Jameson: "A theory of some narrative pensee sauvage—what I have elsewhere termed the political unconscious—will, on the contrary, want to affirm the epistemological priority of such "fantasy" in theory and praxis alike. The task of such a theory would then be to detect and to reveal—behind such written traces of the political unconscious as the narrative texts of high or mass culture, but also behind those other symptoms or traces which are opinion, ideology, and even philosophical systems—the outlines of some deeper and vaster narrative movement in which the groups of a given collectivity at a certain historical conjuncture anxiously interrogate their fate, and explore it with hope or dread. Yet the nature of this vaster collective sub-text, with its specific structural limits and permutations, will be registered above all in terms of properly narrative categories: closure, recontainment, the production of episodes, and the like." Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), 282. [↵](#)
4. Anthony Paul Farley, "Perfecting Slavery," *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 36, (2005): 227. [↵](#)
5. Percy Howard, "Frank B. Wilderson, 'Wallowing in the Contradictions,' Part 1," *A Necessary Angel*, July 9, 2010, <https://percy3.wordpress.com/2010/07/09/frank-b-wilderson-%E2%80%9Cwallowing-in-the-contradictions%E2%80%9D-part-1/>. [↵](#)
6. John J. Kaag, *Thinking through the Imagination: Aesthetics in Human Cognition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 3. [↵](#)
7. Kaag, *Thinking through the Imagination*, 16. [↵](#)
8. Kaag, *Thinking through the Imagination*, 146. [↵](#)
9. David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 210. [↵](#)

10. "...for the symptom involves the self's desire to hurt the imago of the body in a passionate bid to escape it." Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 210. [↵](#)
11. Marriott, *Haunted life*. [↵](#)
12. David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), xiv. [↵](#)
13. Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 315. [↵](#)
14. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, ed. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Michigan, 1969), 4. [↵](#)
15. Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 40. [↵](#)
16. Rosemont and Kelley, *Black, Brown, & Beige*, 315; Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 7. [↵](#)
17. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*. [↵](#)
18. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 9. [↵](#)
19. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 158. [↵](#)
20. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 159. [↵](#)
21. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). [↵](#)
22. Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*. [↵](#)
23. Farley, "Perfecting Slavery," 244. [↵](#)
24. Anthony Paul Farley, "The Black Body as Fetish Object," *Oregon Law Review* 76, no. 3 (1997): 523. [↵](#)
25. Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 239. [↵](#)
26. Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," 297. [↵](#)
27. Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 9. [↵](#)

28. I would argue that this is the case even for a film like *Black Panther*, which depicts a “what-if” scenario that is enabled by a temporal reversals but is decidedly focused what Eshun considers “science fiction capital,” the “futures industry,” and “proleptic intervention.” [↵](#)

29. It is worth noting that Eshun would come to lament these “self-congratulatory” aspects of the field. Christoph Cox, “Afrofuturism, Afro-Pessimism and the Politics of Abstraction: A Conversation with Kodwo Eshun,” 2012,

<http://faculty.hampshire.edu/ccox/Cox.Interview%20with%20Kodwo%20Eshun.pdf>. [↵](#)

30. Octavia E. Butler, *Bloodchild and other Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 212-13. [↵](#)

31. Butler, *Bloodchild*, 214. [↵](#)

32. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison elaborates on how the figure of the black body provides the absented presence in the white imaginary. It performed the duties of “exorcism and reification and mirroring” and “enrich{ing} the country’s creative possibilities.” [↵](#)

33. In the introduction to *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, Imarisha writes: “‘Visionary fiction’ is a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending toward justice. We believe this space is vital for any process of decolonization, because the decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive form there is: for it is where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless.” Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, eds., *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (AK Press, 2015), 4. [↵](#)

34. “Black is the color of freedom, but it fails to retain any such liberatory potentiality once it comingles with what is revealed to be the domesticating, imprisoning power of white, its defining point of contrast. In equal proportions, black and white together negate possible action; their gray coalition saps the life force and dulls the mind, undermining the curiosity that provides a basis for ethics. And, as Robert Motherwell claimed, without ethics there can be neither art nor politics. There’s no hope for gray, it seems.” Jared Sexton and Elizabeth Lee, “Hold Everything Black,”

Open Space, September 6 2017, <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2017/09/hold-everything-black/>. ↵

35. Hortense J. Spillers, "Imaginative Encounters," in *Afro-Future Females*, ed. Marleen S. Barr (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2008), 5. ↵

36. "But a black universality, the universality of blackness, is one that cannot settle or rest or accept what is universal within it. It is a ceaselessly universalizing universality, attentive to, insistent on, and skeptical about every particularity, every local situation through which it is articulated." Jared Sexton and Daniel Colucciello Barber, "On Black Negativity, Or The Affirmaion of Nothing: Jared Sexton interviewed by Daniel Barber," *Society + Space* (2017), <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing>; "I think all theories are suspect, that the finest principles may have to be modified, or may even be pulverized by the demands of life, and that one must find, therefore, one's own moral center and move through the world hoping that this center will guide one aright." James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 9. ↵

37. Hazel Carby, "Black Futurities: Shape-Shifting beyond the Limits of the Human," *InVisible Culture* 31 (2020), <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/black-futurities/>. ↵

38. Butler, *Bloodchild*, 210. ↵

39. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
↵

40. Butler, *Bloodchild*, 212. ↵

41. She continues, "we do not want to know that the cost of our being here has been inestimable and that the way to our current pace swims in blood and truncated bodies of the violent dead. Spillers, "Imaginative Encounters," 5. ↵