AFROFUTURISM
IN POSTNORMAL TIMES

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Did you hear that?

Perhaps just the residual flutters of presbycusis.

First, we are shown a couple eerie production title cards reminding us, the audience, that we have bought tickets for what is indeed a horror film. Raucous, then silence. Then to blackness. A hard cut into a cold open. The suburbs. A man wonders through the all-too-normal neighbourhood. He is lost. He is also black. He shuffles in fright. This is a contrasted mirror of the innocent white person lost in the rundown 'hood,' a jungle of low income urban decay, haunted by the ever suspicious other. In place of the abandoned shell, green lawns, cookie-cutter family homes, the inviting glow of illuminated street lights.

Adding to our black hero's terror, a car passes playing loudly from its radio a nostalgic classic. The song is Flanagan and Allen's *Run Rabbit Run*. The song is that upbeat barbershop quartet style foot tapping music that provided the soundtrack to a simpler time, the good old times, of course before the troubles of desegregation, homosexuality, and drugs. After a little game of stalker, the car stops, its door opening as the music roars louder, run rabbit, run, run, run…

And then a masked man, our hero subdued, and the slamming of the boot as the cue to cut to:

Rapid fire fiddling, sharp cuts, a scratching, which returns uncomfortably too soon. The screeching tunes and tempo that solidifies any doubt you had that you are in fact in a horror film. Suddenly, we are of the perspective of driving through a wooded timber and credits flash upon the screen. The classic New England woods of American horror. The fiddles cease as a

more traditional tasting song crescendos. The lyrics may at first sound like sung English, but quickly spoils the ear to it being different. The song is Swahili. The song is also equal parts ritualistically dance-like and prelude warning to a cautionary folktale. The lyrics roughly translate to meaning 'Listen to your ancestors, Run!'

Half a frame of pitch black accompanied by a breathless pause, cut to:

The everyday struggle of life in America. Except the subject of this photographic art collection are African Americans somewhere between living and surviving in the contemporary world. The music drastically transforms from classic horror-shop to smooth and catchy. Childish Gambino's *Redbone*, while also being a sort of anthem of the times, is the contemporary hit that brings us from Suburban white wash into the real, normal world of our hero, Chris, who is packing to meet the parents of his white girlfriend. Childish Gambino warns our hero to 'Stay Woke,' as ignorance and uncertainty cloud his nerves like a realistic dream.

Through music Jordan Peele has thrust us forth into his first feature. *Get Out*. From its use of popular music to the blending of the Swahili song's motif into the score, even to the taping of a spoon upon a tea cup, Peele creates a beautiful work of art through his use, and even absence, of sound. The power of filmmaking as art lies in its not simply being a visual medium, but in that its use of sight and sound allow for us, the audience, to see what cannot otherwise be seen. To hear what no one is listening to. Peele's talent with this craft and brilliant play on parody brings the uniquely black viewpoint to the forefront of the minds of those with other worldviews.

This power, building off of humanities inherent sociality, is the object of the same game played by Afrofuturism. More specifically put, Afrofuturism is the attempt to portray the struggle of black Americans, potentially all minority and disparaged communities, so that the other may see it for themselves. The question we will later address is whether or not the harnessing of this ability can translate into tangible change either through policy or social upheaval. In the spirit of the colloquial conceptualisation of the future, it would only make sense that this is most prominently seen in the genre of science fiction, but it should not be so quickly pigeonholed into being only that of pulp sci-fi. Even Peele's *Get Out* can be seen as a work of Afrofuturism and perhaps one of its greatest contributions for the effect it triggered.

Like a film, Afrofuturism itself began in sound - music. To this day, it still remains a staple of many black musicians, even if not as overt as in the case of Sun Ra. Afrofuturism dates back as old as the issue of race itself amongst the African diaspora, but was first coined and seriously discussed by Mark Dery in 1994. Mark Sinker was also credited with investigating the phenomenon in Britain through various articles written for *The Wire*. In his article 'Black to the Future,' Dery wonders as to why more African American writers have not chosen to embrace the science fiction genre especially since it is the ideal medium for discussing slavery, alienation, and xenophobia. Dery interviews one such writer, Samuel Delaney, a cultural critic, Greg Tate, and an academic, Tricia Rose. to begin this dialogue. Essentially, there simply is not a large number of black writers, let alone those who look to the universe of science fiction to create their art. The article does not come to any group breaking conclusion, but it does get the ball rolling and, whether intended or not, illuminates a potential within popular culture.

The idea behind Afrofuturism is that it could provide the general public with the epistemologically reflective exposé of the plight of contemporary African Americans on the public opinion-altering level of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* or Woodward and Bernstein's Watergate reporting. Yet, Sun Ra and George Clinton led the way for a blend of technology and African tradition in their music since the 1950s. Sun Ra, taking his name from the Egyptian god, spoke of Saturn as his mythical home world and how music was a mode of escape with the power to heal the wrongs of this world. In his film, *Space is the Place*, music is used as a means of time travel. He even applied through NASA, unsuccessfully, to be an artist in residence with the organisation. The work Sun Ra did with his art and especially with avant-garde jazz in Chicago carried on with George Clinton and Parliament funk into the stylings of Herbie Hancock and the more commercially known Miles Davis and Jimi Hendrix.

To this day the movement continues with the obvious influence of technology within the music and music videos of Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Missy Elliot. Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler have pioneered black sci-fi writing for such contemporary writers as Nnedi Okorafar and N. K. Jemisin. Kendrick Lamar tops billboard charts with his blending of the entire history of African American music into his beats and Marvel's *Black*

Panther has broken box office records. The soundtrack of that film was largely developed by black artists and headed up by Lamar himself. Yet racism in America is far from having progressed. The daily news is tainted by police murdering minority citizens, horrific displays of gentrification and institutional racism, and even America's leaders are not above blatantly racist remarks in public addresses.

So, what is happening?

Has Afrofuturism failed to wake the public? Is the dream of pop culture having the power to provoke and inspire real change just that? Or has art simply become the numbing white noise needed to get America's opiate addicted citizenry through the day to day grind?

To begin the long overdue discussion of these questions requires an unravelling and analysis of a multiplicity. Since it is often nature to assign blame, I will address that now so as to kill any attempts at pinning fault. This particular blend of problem is societal and, as such, the fault lies not only in all constituents of society, but all such external factors that frustrate a system from randomness to ignorance, uncertainty, and the unavoidable impression of chaos. All of this is exponentially more threatening in postnormal times.

Perhaps the best place to begin in facing such a complex situation is with a Marvel movie.

As a critic, a cinephile, and a comic book nerd I expected a lot, even too much, of *Black Panther*. Donald Trump had been President of the United States for one year. Ferguson, Flint, Detroit, and a host of other cities and communities throughout the country remained starved of justice. No decisions had been made on the deaths of minority victims of white cops in overly suspicious circumstances capsised within evidence of discrimination and xenophobia. The Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare despite its being a widdled down version of its glory to originally appease the Republican Party, was being drawn and quartered. Immigration restrictions harshly enforced. Talk of privatisation of prisons and increased election restrictions whispered systemic racism. #BlackLivesMatter resurfaced upon Twitter followed by all of its controversy. Nostalgia for the Obama years reached the point of provoking a fiction mystery series where the former president and his vice president,

Joe Biden, adventured around solving cases. The progressive hope of 2008 was shell of a corpse, devoid of all organic material.

In Hollywood, a much different tale was unfolding. Resistance found footing in the alliance of #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. Crimes of yesterday were being exposed with the fall of Harvey Weinstein and the slurry of other allegations against sexual discrimination and violence surfaced. White washing of foreign tales and characters was being exposed and stood trial before the modern revolutionary guillotine of public opinion and social media. Inclusion riders, female directors, and gay heroes were all the rage. Patty Jenkins's *Wonder Woman* single handily revived the DC cinematic universe. Guillermo del Torro, an immigrant, took home Oscar for both direction and best picture for *The Shape of Water*. Oprah Winfrey gave the call to action at the ceremony, earning herself the public's official endorsement as the perfect foil to Donald Trump in 2020 (There were even campaign posters made following her Oscar speech).

Black Panther wasn't an origin story. Check. After all, if American audiences are not completely showing super hero fatigue, they are at least burnt out on the same old fallen man becomes a risen hero, chapter-one storyline. We met T'Challa in an earlier Marvel film, *Captain America: Civil War*, which was essentially a trial run of the universe encompassing Avengers films to come. *Black Panther* was unique in that we discover a whole new, hidden country, and we discover it at a time of flux, a regime change. We are introduced to a whole new world of characters that, aside from being well acted, are written to be original and the kind of persona that sticks with the audience. The audience sees themselves within these characters with realistic personalities and relatable flaws. The audience finds themselves saying 'that is totally me' or that one character or another is reminiscent of an old friend found in the oblivion of time. The effects and cinematography are some of the best that Marvel has dished out to date. Overall this film will be remembered not simply for it being a delightful ensemble of African American art, but as a key piece of cinema in general.

It makes sense that *Black Panther* is seen as a revival of Afrofuturism. The film's imagery is richly engrained with classical elements of precolonial Africa and space age technology. Cloaking technology allows Wakanda to appear to the outside observer as a grassy oasis in the heart of Africa's

jungle near a simple yet impressive waterfall overseen by farmers clad in multi-coloured robes wielding archaic spears. Revealed, a bustling, densely populated metropolis with an impressive skyline mixing pre-colonial huts with western skyscrapers. Vehicles fly about this presently grounded version of a Jetsons-like city that could be easily taken for any other major urban centre in the East or West. In fact, I would not be surprised if a McDonalds or Starbucks (or four of each every few blocks) resided within this setting that could easily be inspired from London, New York, or Dubai. One of the Wakandan king's councillors perfectly exemplifies the blend desired by Afrofuturism. He wears a lime green lip plate with an easily vibrant lime green Western business attire suit. But wait, Wakanda is suppose to have been untouched by colonialists or globalisation.

While *Black Panther* does a remarkable job of exemplifying and, so some, reviving Afrofuturism, it also points out a key flaw in the genre through a logical inconsistency. Afrofuturism is deeply rooted in a historical narrative. Usually the stories in this genre draw from a mythical ancient Nubian civilisation or a black Egypt of the Pharaohs and anthropomorphised gods. This past is then projected into a western standard of cosmology. While the product is very groovy, it is fundamentally limited. Afrofuturism, for instance, is dependent on racism, a constructed social form devised by colonialists and perpetuated by the phenomenon of globalisation. The artificial entity of racism allows for an open discussion of slavery, alienation, conquest, segregation, Jim Crow, gentrification, and the multiverse that is xenophobia. The colour is most certainly black, but the structure is fundamentally white.

Under a more critical eye, *Black Panther* is riddled with details that breakdown the ideal of Wakanda and provide a clue to a more sophisticated Afrofuturism. The reason for this is that Marvel created a film that fundamentally tells an African American story in the context of Africa. Less scrutiny is spent on emphasising the language of Africa's plight against conquest at the risk of costing the narratives ability to speak to the contemporary struggle for racial equality in the States. While white men in the film are referred to as colonisers, the intent is to emphasise the otherness and tyranny of the white majority experienced in the United States. To Africa the threat of colonisers is the destruction and exploitation of black Africa in order to gain wealth for the colonists, be that the

Europeans of the last century or the contemporary threat of China, America, Russia, or global corporations themselves. It is a subtle difference, but these small cracks chip away at what Wakanda stands for. If Wakanda has managed to evade the threat of globalisation since time in memorial, why do kids in the streets wear the slickest Western styles, struggle with Western monarchical patriarchy, or Wakanda's cities reach to the stars with their phallic buildings, a typical Western urban architectural design? Ryan Coogler may launch a thousand ships for the future of black science fiction and film. But will they be able to overcome the limits of Afrofuturism?

Here it is important to pose the question. Is it enough for Afrofuturist pieces to convey, from artist to audience, the historical struggle of African Americans? If so, then the project can take a different path of informing. Is it simply more escapism? But there is no escape. And what might be waiting out there beyond what is being escaped? But perhaps that is not enough. In fact, perhaps Afrofuturism can take the next step and inspire action. Maybe this is not simply a lofty dream of Afrofuturism, but a need demanded by the rapidly burning out contemporary discussion of race in the West.

Michael Eric Dyson's latest book looks at a point in United States history when racial tensions were overflowing and beginning to mix dangerously with other vocalised instances of discord in the country. Following the assassination of John F Kennedy in 1963, his brother Robert Kennedy, who had recently taken a change in priorities towards the race question in America, called a meeting. Did this meeting include Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X, the leaders of the movement at the time? No. He turned to artists. James Baldwin, Henry Belafonte, Lena Horne, Lorraine Hansberry, and Jerome Smith. As if dreamed up from the mind of philosopher Richard Rorty, Kennedy, at the darkest hour of the 1960s, held this meeting of artists in search of a resolution. Perhaps where all other action fails we must turn to the artists to have the creativity and openness to seek the unthought and plot a course for navigating hard, and potentially post normal, times. Dyson's conclusion following the analysis of this historic meeting and the contemporary discussion of race in America is for us to 'be Wakandan.' Go out there and listen to as much rap and R&B music, read as many stories of Afrofuturism, and see as many

Black Panther movies as possible. Not only view, but participate. Create and through this maybe understanding and progress can be distilled. Pop culture is powerful, and perhaps the work done by Donald Glover aka Childish Gambino can give us some insight to this power.

The same day the multi-artistically talented Childish Gambino was to be the musical guest of Saturday Night Live, he dropped an emotionally raw and visually moving music video titled 'This is America'. The music video all takes place in a massive empty warehouse. A man plays guitar upon a bench as Gambino, with dishevelled hair and the trousers of a Civil War-era confederate soldier, begins dancing. The music is very uplifting sounding like an old tribal song of celebration from the Africa of old complete with a church's chorus singing back up. Gambino makes faces and body gestures that impersonate the old caricature of Jim Crow period posters and black face reproductions. Then seemingly out of thin air Gambino draws a gun and shoots the guitarist in the head. The gun is taken away, two-handed, in a fine cloth as the body is dragged away like rubbish. The music rapidly changes tempo to something more synthetic. Gambino walks on as people behind him run about and then the music again becomes more playful as younger individuals join him in a dance fashioned after the dance performed by black students in celebration of the end of apartheid in South Africa. Then as everyone is in celebration a church chorus is revealed as Gambino dances with them, then is thrown an AK-47 which he uses to gun down the chorus. A familiar symbol of church shootings in the United States. As the music again changes tempo, the scene moves to chaos with cars on fire and people running and dancing about. Overhead, children stare on but only through the lens of their smartphones. The music cuts as Gambino pretends to shoot a gun and then proceeds to light a cigarette and dance upon substandard cars in a mockery of rich rappers dancing on top of sharply painted sports cars. Meanwhile the car factories in Michigan remain closed. We close on Gambino being chased by faceless white men.

The video is jarring and the lyrics mock a consumerist America intentionally ignorant of the disaster in her communities, focused on making wealth and a social media persona in love with the second amendment of the constitution. Powerful is one of the least impressive words you could use to describe this video and the song attached to it.

Both pull impressively from history and project themselves into the future. Nonchalantly, Childish Gambino reminds us over and over again, that this is America. Childish Gambino's alternate persona, the actor Donald Glover had just finished staring as the younger Lando Calrissian in *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. What Glover did through his music video in all its poignancy, only begins to tap at what has been made a career by the filmmaker Spike Lee.

Rolling Stone magazine recently did a cover story on Spike Lee where he talks about his latest film BlacKkKlansman and life in Trump's America. Other news outlets took on this story and asked 'Where did Spike Lee go?' Spike Lee's response is that he hadn't gone anywhere. For thirty years he was breaking waves in independent and black cinema. Each of his pieces provide another view on racism and black America. Some widely received like *Do the Right Thing*, *Chiraq*, and most recently *BlacKkKlansman*. Others have faded into obscurity. While he has been out spoken about politics and current affairs, his films have never gotten mass release, yet always hit hard breaking standard and parlance. *BlacKkKlansman* is very much a spiritual sequel to his debut *Do the Right Thing*, in their frank discussion of racism in everyday America. BlacKkKlansman would be best viewed with Spike Lee sitting across from you giving you the look that resembles the look on a mother's face when their child deliberately disrespects them. He intercuts his film with celebration amongst members of the Ku Klux Klan and filmstock from the highly racially charged films *Gone with the Wind* and *Birth of a Nation*, the first film made in America that was even shown at the White House under the administration of Woodrow Wilson. He has some very hard-hitting scenes where the actors themselves should have simply looked plain faced into the camera to recite. In these scenes our hero, Ron Stallworth, the first Black man hired onto this small-town Colorado police force, is being comforted by his white fellow officers on the reality and danger that still exists in racist America. This movie also takes place in the 1970s/1980s. Ron utters such phrases as 'We would never elect someone like that as President of the United States and leader of the free world!', referring to attributes that are shared by the current President Trump. There is something striking in this image of a hopeful black man and the realist strike back of white police officers. Lee speaks to something higher in this film. A general comment on the racial debate in America.

The discussion of race in the West is, simply put, exhausting. Emotion has over taken logic and stubborn refusal to question one's educational or cultural up bringing has brought the dialogue to a dead halt. Everyone has appeared to have made up their mind on the issue. This frustration is expressed in Reni Eddo-Lodge's book summed up by its own title, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. Since the discussion of race has continued to go on, seemingly regardless of whether or not progress has been made, white people seem to want to forget about the dark mark of history and move on. The problem lies in that if the institutions that run our every day are endemically racist, then we can't move on. When historians aren't busy trying to figure out which historical figures were or weren't homosexual, there was a major push to say that the Civil War wasn't about slavery. This was a major shift in the discussion that drove Ta-Nehisi Coates into the American dialogue.

Ta-Nehisi Coates entered the lime light when he began writing for *The Atlantic* just before the election of Barack Obama as President. His main crux was to explain how while the Civil War may have been driven by economic and political factors, at the end of the day, the conflict came down to the issue of whether or not it should be allowed for one person to own another. His career continued as he continued writing as a sceptic of Barack Obama, fearing he was not 'black' enough to make much of a different as the country's first black President. In his most recent book *We Were Eight Years in Power*, aptly subtitled 'An American Tragedy', Coates takes the pulse of black in America and watches as the Obama presidency becomes, even for him the sceptic, a beacon of hope for the black future. As the subtitle denotes, Coates also traces back from the election of Donald Trump, how the well-intentioned rise of black self esteem also laid the groundwork for the rise of nationalistic and fear driven white supremacist attitudes in dangerously subtle shades. By the end of the eight-year gig, Coates learned to love his black President, but could not help but watch, in that slow-motion fashion we come upon disaster which we cannot prevent, as Donald Trump became, in his words, our first white President.

All progress that was made during our first black presidency so awoke a fear in a forgotten America, that a perceived imbalance had to be corrected and America's whiteness again needed to be displayed in case anyone had forgotten. Clad in Sperry's, wielding tiki torches, the march on Charleston

brought scary images of memories past to the forefront of 24-hour news's view. As someone who gained his formative education under the auspices of the Bill Clinton administration and the intoxicating calm waters of the 90s, I'm not surprised. The theme was fairness (oddly enough one half of Fox News's claimed tagline). Every day of the week attempted to recognise another's culture and the struggle of the past. P.C. was law. No derogatory language, no putting others down. It was the great equalisation. Racism had been defeated. We can forget the past now, yet we had catch phrases like 'forgive, but never forget.' The impossibility of dissociating these emotions essentially sums up America's attitude up to 11 September 2001. Unfortunately, this equalisation meant that as of whatever day we all agreed on this in 1996, we assumed everyone was on even ground. We assumed our institutions were not racist. Yet housing and residential zoning clearly shows racist origins that are perpetuated to this day. Prisons are still holding unprecedented numbers of blacks, forced to work, for pathetic wages to pay off unsurmountable debts birthed in ridiculous fines driven mad by the passing of time. Vicious cycle does not even begin to give the situation justice. Yet, America felt it was unnecessary to even discuss reparations, let alone consider them. America felt that maybe even affirmative action was a bit unnecessary halfway through the second Bush administration. After all racism is done and everyone is equal.

All of this nonsense is observed year by year through Coates's writing during the Obama years. And all of this occurs with the backdrop of Trayvon Martin's being gunned down for wearing a hoodie in front of the wrong cop. As hell breaks loose in Ferguson and ripple rush out throughout the historic Southern United States. As other forms of xenophobia from homophobia to Islamophobia overtake the headlines. But this is not the end of the story.

Coates is not currently writing for *The Atlantic*. Coates has gone from fly-on-the-wall to actor, but in the most peculiar way. Through Afrofuturism. Coates has authored Marvel's most recent run of the comic *Black Panther*. Through his pages assisted by the beautiful images of Brian Stelfreeze, Coates moves from observer of racism in the world, to offering ideas for change. Coates' T'Challa offers us a portrait of what the film *Black Panther*, and Afrofuturism in general can offer. Through his run, T'Challa is challenged to both be a world superhero with the Avengers and the ruler

of his nation, Wakanda. He must compromise his people for the greater good of humanity, likewise, to maintain order he must partner with vicious and evil men, dictators of other African and even Western nations. All along terrorists and enemies attempt to dethrone him. At first glance, Coates' *Black Panther* beckons to post 9/11 America under George W. Bush, fear, and the Patriot Act (the one that allows the government to spy on its own citizens). Upon a more sophisticated lens though, perhaps he be giving sight to the world of Trump's America and whatever might come beyond that.

In, *We Were for Eight Years in Power*, Coates uses his thought of each of the four years of the Obama presidency to retroactively deconstruct the road to the unthought election of Donald J. Trump. This partnered with his continued work on Marvel's Black Panther Comic can provide a framing for how the Three Tomorrow's method of analysing and providing policy recommendations for postnormal times can be put into action. What Afrofuturism tends to lack is the ability to move from the familiar future of traditional sci-fi into the unthought third tomorrow of postnormal times and the taking of power in one's own future. As Coates continues now into the new run of Captain America, a character who was just revealed to be a sleeper unit of the Hydra organisation, a team of racist and white supremacist badies in the Marvel comic universe, we will continue to see what power lies awaiting an awakening within Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism has a strong potential for being a navigational tool to action in postnormal times. First, Afrofuturism, whether or not is it aware of it, is an ideal incubator for ignorance and uncertainty. Both in visual and audio forms of art, Afrofuturism's grappling with the concept of the other works to both expose ignorances held by the audience and to analyse the ignorances held by the creator or the perceived self. Irony and narrative are masterful ways of bringing uncertainty under some shade of light. Thus far, Afrofuturism's heroes, caught between past tradition and futuristic technology, confront uncertainty in away that is often left out of the day to day hustle and bustle. Science fiction is a genre built upon consequences and in those consequences, uncertainty must be not only a constant struggle for the characters, but an internal struggle within the thinkers and writers as much as it is for the sugar-coated minds of the audience. Maybe as the old Sun Ra mantra goes 'Space is the place' to deal with the anxiety

and nausea that cripples so many caught in postnormal times. Yet the challenge for postnormal times, where Afrofuturism could gain some ground, is in seeing through tomorrow.

In postnormal times, it is important look at the future as a multi-potentiated concept. Commonly we break this up into three tomorrows. They are not strict, rigid definitional entities, but rather descriptors that allow us to conceptualise and move beyond the limitations of our own biases. Each tomorrow has within it, the preconceived notion of the other tomorrows. Perspective is critical. Movement from self-reflection to commiseration with other's worldviews advances the horizons attainable in unravelling the three tomorrows. Creativity and flexability are one's precious commodities. First is the extended present. The not-so-distant-future. The revelation of trends and the status quo. Beyond this first tomorrow lies the second tomorrow of the familiar future. The flying car. It is futuristic for it is a cool, space aged way to get around, yet familiar in that we are still, supposedly, using cars to get around. This is the pitfall of science fiction. The all too human tendency to remain within the safety of sobering sanity. Robots, but humanoid, and we fear their emotions and sentience, for then they'd be like us. Smart societies driven by automation and social networking, cool, slick, yet beholden to our contemporary structural flaws of being misogynist, racist, consumerist, and overall standing on the classic foundational theme of unifying us by dividing us into various classifications. Afrofuturism and the rest of Science Fiction do a brilliant job of getting us to this point and even in explaining the postnormal creep that lies within each step, but can it get us to the third tomorrow.

The truly unthought is a new frontier. As Ziauddin Sardar and John Sweeney tell us, 'collaborative creativity and 'ethical imagination[s]' are not simply the best tools for constructing scenarios in this tomorrow, 'they are the only tools'. Furthermore, the unthought future(s) is not simply something that is not expected or anticipated; rather, it is something outside the framework of conventional thought—something that does not allow us to focus on or think about it.' The unthought is not unthinkable, but might be usable from a certain vantage point. It is the marriage of complexity, chaos, and contradiction. Distortion of scope, scale, speed, and simultaneity are common place here. Blackness and white supremacy can vanish in the unthought. Race can be uncreated. Slavery and Jim Crow are ideals to be

aspired to in this realm. Xenophobia is the tyranny of the minority and historical narrative need not apply. Afrofuturism can unlock its true power by tapping into the unthought. But, as has been explicitly stated in postnormal times analysis: power is seldom given; it is usually taken.

Now, caution should be advised here. A drastic jump from the ethereal fiction of thought to the reality of the present is jarring and action without moral reflection and continued futures thought can be dangerous. A fearful association can be drawn between the creative and the destructive. This is the rationale used for the banning of certain artistic expressions. It lies at the heart of John Lennon's assassin toting along his person a copy of J. D. Salinger's *A Catcher in the Rye*. Also, in former US President's Ronald Reagan's would-be assassin's motivation to win over the heart of Jodi Foster after seeing Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. The debate will continue with each new example of youth and violence, from the pop cultural influences on the young shooters from Columbine High School in 1999, to the 2012 shooter, dressed as Heath Ledger's character The Joker, at an Aurora movie theatre on the opening night of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*. Afrofuturism in being a truly futures study must keep its potentialities open to all possible outcomes. This means that it can be hijacked and used for the ulterior motives of the militant and fascists. Yet in all the bad, an equal, if not greater, multiplicity of good lies within the potentiality. A sound morality is as paramount as a respect for mental illness and other social ailments that can bastardise a policy or a movement.

Afrofuturism provides for us a mode of reflexion as well as insight for navigation of postnormal times that need not only be a way forward on the issue of race in the United States or the West, but can be a cowl put on by other disadvantaged communities or group who find themselves in postnormal creep or looking to prevent postnormal lag. As the film *Black Panther* speaks to and Dyson echoes in his writing, we can all be Wakanda. In the comics of Coates, our hero T'Challa is caught between being the King of Wakanda and a super hero for the world. There is a fine balance to be maintained there. For even in the throws of PNT, there are constants such as home and family that need tending to, yet the demands of good acts and the pursuit of navigation are needed in these troubling times. In looking towards policy in postnormal times, we can take a page from T'Challa's book.

At the conclusion of the film *Black Panther*, T'Challa decides that it is time for Wakanda to come out from hiding. That the risk of continued threats of attack can be tackled by giving back to the world. He does what his cousin-turned-enemy wanted; much as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X wanted similar outcomes, but differed in method. T'Challa would not arm his disadvantaged African diasporic brothers and sisters, at least with weapons, but share the benefits to humankind that Wakandan thought and innovation delivered through the use of its secret element, vibranium. In the closing scene of the film, T'Challa and his sister Shuri are undercover, visiting Compton where Killmonger, the enemy of T'Challa, was born and raised. T'Challa reveals that he has bought a large block of land there to build Wakanda's first outreach centre. The first steps towards walking through postnormal times should be small, short term, with long term ambitions, constantly monitored by specialists and always revised.

A group of kids are playing basketball on the land T'Challa has bought. They stop as T'Challa uncloaks their flying jet to the kids' amazement. One of the young boys walks up to T'Challa. Echoing the deeply needed self-reflection of politicians and policy makers. The powerful. The boy asks 'Who are you?'

Echoed in this closing question, Afrofuturism from the funky grooves and electronic sounds improvised by Sun Ra and George Clinton through to Beyonce and Missy Elliot and even to this day with Childish Gambino and the credit song, Kendrick Lamar and SZA's 'All the Stars', that follows the question's posing. 'Maybe the night that my dreams might let me know that all the stars are closer.' The world is lived out between stanzas, both the existence and absence of sound weave together to create a soundtrack of our lives. It appears to be escape, but in reality, it is the passage onto something higher, into something unthought. Random combinations of notes can evoke emotion, retrieve a lost memory, and even provoke a person to action. Such a mysterious force demands the austerity of intellectual rigor.

Now can you hear it?