

CRITICAL BLACK FUTURISM: AFFECTING AFFINITIES WITHIN CURRICULUM STUDIES

PATRICK PHILLIPS

University of Ottawa

It's the aftermath of several years of rioting in Toronto. The inner city core is filled with poverty, homelessness and violence; while the wealthier suburbs flourish on its outskirts. Everyone is left to fend for themselves whether they are en route to picking up a burger and fries at a cook stand or dodging civilians high on a drug of the future, buff.

Two Afro-Caribbean adults—man and woman—are riding their bikes through Cabbagetown. They are invisible, thanks to a spell placed on them by the girl's grandmother, a healer in the community that uses African spiritualism. They're rushing out of the city, and away from a crime boss who has tasked the boy with collecting a live human heart to save the life of Ontario's premier.

– Samuel, 2021, n.p.

Danica Samuel's (2021) narrative struck me as I was reading news headlines this past March. These headlines have spanned two pandemics: the global spread of a dangerous new virus, and what critical race theorist David Stovall (2020) identifies as the "lingering global pandemic of White supremacy/racism" (p. 2). For better and worse, this second pandemic of anti-Black violence has been embodied in the narrative of George Floyd and his murder trial. During the trial for Floyd's now-convicted murderer, Floyd's own body was put on trial in favor of his humanity (Smith, 2021), while several more Black bodies fell to American police violence, including one within minutes of the trial's conclusion (CBC, 2021).

The judicial outcome of Floyd's bodily trial does not offer new hope for the future of Black bodies who still survive. Many chose not to watch the trial, which offered nothing more than another foreclosed future, "yet another display of Black pain,

Black trauma and Black death” (Henderson, 2021, n.p.). The differences between this narrative imaginary and the one conjured by Samuel (2021) above are many, but one is key to this essay: The judicial cultural narrative interpolates readers into a perpetually unresolved present bound to past agony. In contrast, Samuel (2021, n.p.) amplifies the visions of Toronto *Afrofuturists* and “what it means to visualize a life where space, magic, pyramids and politics intertwine”, offering an opportunity quite rare both in public and academic discourse: An imaginary in which the conditions of the present can be reimagined and reconfigured in the future while in affective relation to the imaginations of those whose futures are in critical need of amplification.

In this concept essay, I attempt to amplify this sense of critical futurity through my reading of scholars and teachers attempting to imagine beyond the past and present of what Henry Giroux (2012) has called the “age of disposability” of students’ futures in schooling and wider society, which could easily be read as also the age of *dis-possibility*. Within such a dystopian moment, I read and write in increasing awareness of my position as a White curriculum studies scholar in a rather White Canadian university—becoming aware that there is a distinct differential to *whose futures* are made disposable by the ways of “beingknowingdoing that strongly contextualize not only everyday interactions but also the understandings that undergird policies and programs” in education. These contextualizing forces remain largely unexamined in social justice scholarship, even as such practices might reinforce marginalization of those they are in ostensible allyship (Gershon, 2020, p. 61; 53). Cultural studies and curriculum scholar Walter Gershon (2020) attends, as another White man in a predominantly White institution, to these ways as inflections of sensory experience, asking, “How can changing media also alter perception and understandings? What happens when one becomes attuned to another?” (p. 54).

While Gershon (2011), paraphrasing Aoki (1991) and Geertz (1983), foregrounds the sense of sound as a necessary and embodied register of curricular meaning-making and asks whether listening to the sonic life of the educationally marginalized can disrupt oppressive imaginaries, I attend to how “in, as, and through” (Gershon, 2017, p.1) senses of futurity might engage curricular imagination if explored as a presently limited capacity for imagination that can be unlearned, yet opened by attuning myself to concepts of the future beyond my own. Although permeating the present of all students, this limited imaginative capacity is particularly felt by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), queer and trans youth, and anyone

whose possible futures do not map onto the imaginative capacity of dominant narratives in education and wider culture.

I begin by retrieving an alternative imaginative capacity from the history of *Afrofuturism*, arguing that this cultural tradition offers an important extra-temporal criticality through which to understand the past and present without foreclosing perception of alternative future social and techno-material arrangements. Thus, considering schooling and curriculum as cultural technology, I seek to perform a situated futurist reading of an emerging body of Black *abolitionist* scholarship that seeks to move beyond the false Western imaginary of emancipation as equivalent to freedom (Walcott, 2021), the complicity of schooling and other systems in re-binding Black bodies into carceral futures (Stovall, 2018; 2020; 2021), and the very limitation of educational imagination to see and feel love for Black bodies in classrooms (Love, 2019).

I write to share with my reader my own exploration of how this futurist amplification implicates my own scholarly future as an affective ally in what I feel as curricular future dreaming. I offer for my reader an example of how such critical futurity represents advancement of concepts of speculative thinking in curriculum studies—in ways that suggest how the “generative possibilities” of speculative thinking might do more than anticipate “genuinely ‘new’ materialisms” in a time that has already come and requires not only “apprehension and comprehension” but also enacting of “as-yet-unanticipated material-semiotic” modes of curriculum as verb (Gough, 2019, p. 7; see also, Pinar & Grumet, 1976).

Afrofuturism as a Critical Educational Futurity: Beyond Lessons in Speculation

Afrofuturism has a deep tradition of both imagining and influencing new socio-material relationships through futurity as a critical mode, but this potential is arguably rarely acknowledged as a scholarly capacity. The most widely recognizable contemporary manifestation of Afrofuturism is probably *Black Panther* (Coogler & Cole, 2018), a multimillion-dollar Marvel science fiction comic franchise superhero action film in which a fictional, technologically advanced African kingdom takes center stage in saving both the universe and an otherwise mostly White superhero community. While the success of the film has contributed to a surge in the popularity of Afrofuturism as a fiction genre (Ito, 2021), its roots span generations of Afro-diasporic cultural production, as I will address shortly. In other words, Afrofuturism as a shared, popular phenomenon could be said to occlude deeper,

'real' histories and tensions behind a 'science fiction' genre. At the same time, however, Afrofuturism as a 'low' cultural signifier is arguably still important in problematizing the potential for a critical futurity, as it is in these genre-specific contexts that the limitations of critical temporality are perhaps most relaxed. Here, I begin thinking through how taking seriously not only the historical depth but also the aesthetic and affective dimensions of an ostensibly genre-fied tradition might advance curriculum thinking towards permeable yet critical concepts of time, self, and intentions, which might bridge individualized futurity towards a shared commitment in the present.

As the name of a cultural genre with socio-political valence, 'Afrofuturism' appears to have been first coined by Mark Dery, an author and cultural critic influential in many early '90s cyberculture genres and movements, including the phenomenon of 'culture jamming.' Although White, Dery engaged with what he saw as an emerging, though marginal, site of counter-cultural resistance to popular racism, and in so doing allowed his own limitations of imagination and history to expand. In "Black to the Future", Dery (1994) sees "a conundrum: Why do so few African Americans write science fiction?" (p. 179). For Dery (1994), this is "especially perplexing" because:

African Americans, in a very real sense are the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassible force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies [...]. Moreover, the sublegitimate status of science fiction as a pulp genre in Western literature mirrors the subaltern position to which blacks have been relegated throughout American history. [...] The notion of Afrofuturism [thus] gives rise to a troubling antinomy: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? (p. 180)

Dery (1994) sees at first "only Samuel R. Delany, Octavia Butler, Steve Barnes, and Charles Saunders" as Black American science fiction writers. However, in interviewing one of these authors, Delany, and Black cultural theorists Greg Tate and Tricia Rose about how they would define Afrofuturism and to check the limitations of his own vision, Dery learns that Afrofuturism is a deeply historical, sociopolitically-active movement that in fact "percolates" throughout African-

American cultural production, from literature, dance, music, visual art, comics, and Black feminisms, even if it might not be recognizable or readily seen through a White lens as sociopolitically (or academically) significant. I propose that present curriculum studies might find a similar invitation and expansion of imaginative capacity through listening to the futurist inflections of contemporary Black scholars. Important for curriculum studies, this invitation embraces the individual vernacular of a genre at the same time that it includes self and other in a shared imaginary of permeable temporality and affect.

Through Black cultural theorists Greg Tate and Tricia Rose, Dery (1994) thus arrives at an important curricular question: where “does science fiction end and black existence begin” (p. 210)? Tate (in conversation with Dery, 1994) suggests that Black cultural imagination retains a philosophical futurism as a socio-spiritual technology dating back to prehistory, continuing now in genre-specific forms such as hip hop, but also any instance in which a Black identity is formed: “Knowing yourself as a black person—historically, spiritually, and culturally—is not something that’s given to you, institutionally; it’s an arduous journey that must be undertaken by the individual” (p. 210). Tricia Rose, meanwhile, looks beyond the imaginary boundaries of genre to show Dery that Black dance and popular visual culture offers a unique perspective on technological futures of ‘funky cyborgs,’ “if we understand the machine as a product of human creativity whose parameters are always suggesting what’s beyond them” (in conversation with Dery, 1994, p. 213).

Rose further suggests that an Afrofuturist lens can unsettle how the signs and images of Black bodies and cultural histories are used by hegemonic cultural production in its own dominant futurity, noting that the often-appropriated surface level of Black culture forgets its critical processes of “creating power and positing new social myths” (p. 215). At the same time, Rose contends that the explicitly futurist genres of science fiction offer unique “building blocks” of cultural imaginaries, “opening up possibilities” and revising what we think we see in the world. The true dilemma of Afrofuturism is perhaps that its futurity is understood as a quality of genre: “Hollywood has to reaffirm the status quo”, but “just by opening [those futurist] gates, they’re creating a rupture they may not be able to suture” (Rose in conversation with Dery, 1994, p. 221).

I contend that this rupture is one of critical temporality, or intensities of future-thinking that hold potential as the building blocks for new imaginaries of curriculum, if we too look to expand our understanding of technology to include

schooling, and the components of its structures as more than reforming machines. The challenge, perhaps, is that Western academic thought—and theory—still insists that history is always past-tense, and future tense is always suspiciously fantasy-like. As I will discuss later, curriculum studies can be said to accept flights of past and futuristic fantasy, but only as far as they are contained in an individual, or an individual as genre. Writing to manifest what he argues is the newest and most promising iteration of Afrofuturism as the Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM), communication and African diaspora, scholar Reynaldo Anderson (2016) puts a fine point on this onto-epistemological dilemma:

In the occidental realm, the epistemic boundaries of speculative design is limited largely to objects, how they mediate the human experience [...]. Furthermore, this occidental approach limits the framework of the speculative to Western philosophy and science [in which] only the present, probable, preferable, plausible, and possible should be zones of concern [...]. (n.p.)

In other words, Anderson sees Afrofuturist thinking as a stranger to the ways in which a Western academic worldview allows imagination of future possibilities. The future exists only as fantasy, the home of fairy tales and superheroes. Crucially, Anderson sees this not only as the limitation for take-up of Afrofuturism as serious critical field, but also suggests it is the dilemma at the heart of any anticolonial/emancipatory project, past, present, or future: This Western temporality erases alternative worldviews and senses of time and possibility, “and attempts to establish a system where Europe assumes the *teacher position* with all others as the recipients and consequently users of this limited perspective” (Anderson, 2016, n.p., emphasis mine). For Anderson, this limited temporality of imagination has fragmented the BSAM from its roots: A unique social activist perception of Black present and futurist attempts to navigate displacement, subjugation, and erasure.

Through Anderson, I begin to see a need to unlearn genre-specific—as temporally-specific or even White-specific—divisions between imagination and possibility. My training as a student of curriculum studies, meanwhile, affords me the tradition of simultaneously embracing what might be hidden registers (Giroux & Penna, 1979) of how I perceive what I know and value in curriculum. My training, however, has also stressed the embrace of my own individual sense of time and belonging, and how this might inform my engagement with other individuals as a public. Yet, as onto-epistemological technology, I feel that curriculum studies has not taught me how to

embrace the futurity of another, and so the futurity of my students as an educator—arguably limiting my own imagination of how a just future might appear.

Indeed, in Anderson's embrace of Afrofuturism as an expanded cultural project of shared critical futurist speculation, the works of scholars from W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) through to bell hooks (1994) become historical examples of Afrofuturism, and so suggest that there may be a futurist perspective latent to critical race theory and critical pedagogies worthy of reviving in a time when visions of alternative futures are most needed. Anderson traces Black futurity back to Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in which, in addition to identifying the socio-historical oppression of Black identity through the imperialist yet imaginary "color-line", Du Bois also suggested that "due to their unique experience, African Americans had developed a metaphysical perspective or 'Veil' that bestowed a certain insight" into Western limits of imagination (Anderson, 2016, n.p.). This veil was "the literary and philosophical translation of the inner life of people of African descent in the Americas" (Anderson, 2016, n.p.).

Later in 1910, Du Bois engaged with Einstein's ideas of special relativity through his short fiction story "The Princess Steel", in which a Black character invents a "Mega-scope" capable of seeing across the boundaries of space and time as a means of perceiving and reimagining the formations of material history. It was this futuristic metaphysical aesthetic thread, according to Anderson, that inspired the "socio-political formulations of the non-white world of the twentieth century", channeled by Malcolm X, including the imaginations of the twenty nine newly independent African and Asian nations at the 1955 Bandung Conference with its futuristic (by jaded 2021 eyes) mandate of promoting a future of cultural and economic cooperation distinct and opposed to the historical harms of colonialism (2016, n.p.). While Anderson laments that this thread of futuristic activism was betrayed to globalizing capitalism, he argues it re-emerged in the works of creative intellectuals such as bell hooks, who were responding to "the increasing deterioration and anomie of Black cultural production and dislocation in relation to the transition to a neoliberal, multi-national, political-economic matrix" (2016, n.p.).

A 21st-century Afrofuturism is thus any active speculation or design for the future incorporating an Africanist approach of the "earthly" (past and present) and the "unearthly" (the future, or what might seem like magical thinking in the present), and so "generates overlapping zones with other knowledge formations when formulating or conceptualizing theory and practice in relation to material reality"

(Anderson, 2016, n.p). Such an Africanist futurism is a unique critical imaginary capacity of “backward-looking and future-thinking at the same time”, where “reverence for the past” is always understood as “reverence for a paradise lost”, allowing past and future to be transgressed and reimagined together (Greg Tate in conversation with Dery, 1994).

However, making a possible symbiosis between Afrofuturist design and education academe arguably requires a discursive reimagining of criticality and temporality. Anderson, Tate, and Rose explicitly reject the most obvious theoretical tradition as kin: It seems a *cultural studies* precedent for wider critical reciprocity with Afrofuturism is an uneasy one, given the former’s antithetical Eurocentric worldview—which is seemingly blind to a more flexible temporal thinking, reducing it to appear as nothing more than magic, “goblins, superheroes, and space opera” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 4). As I later worry, we might have lost sight of curriculum studies as a praxis of shared contestation of power. I suggest here that our tendency to genre-fy theoretical traditions limits our capacity to advance those traditions in the present—and so future.

In contrast, I see cultural studies yet offering the ability to recognize the *extra-temporality* of such speculative objects as an entry point for a critical futurism in education. Critically, cultural studies regards popular culture, historically deemed ‘low’ by most Western academic traditions, as worthy of status as both object and active contributor to theory and practice. While this has ensured cultural studies’ enduringly uncomfortable status in academia writ large, it was a critical imperative for its most famous champion, Stuart Hall. In 1990, Hall explicitly addressed this characteristic as vital for its goals: “To enable people to understand what is going on [in society], and especially to provide ways of thinking, strategies for survival, and resources for resistance” meant that the field should remain open to rethinking its own tenets or forming new connections with theories, just as culture changes across space and time (p. 22).

Hall (1992) further imagined this corollary of cultural studies’ anti-foundationalism as “arbitrary closures,” or the duty for practitioners to enact social agency and stake out positionalities, in time and space, for taking critical stands against social injustice, thus reconfiguring their foci to adapt and address emergent forces of oppression. Writing towards a futurist cultural studies, Devon Powers (2020) argues for a similar intellectual activism through retrieving cultural studies’ latent capacity for futurity, or theorizing “the role of the future in everyday life and thought” at

intersections of “temporality, memory, and the relationship of technology to both” as “crucial terrain for the contestation of power” (p. 452). Without such a critical futurity, cultural critique (and here I would include curriculum studies) is stuck in “a long present” in which the ability to conceive of and so influence just futures is limited to configurations of the present.

Below, I perform a critical review of an emerging body of Black *abolitionist* thinking which seeks to move beyond the long present of what Rinaldo Walcott (2021) has termed “the long emancipation”, towards amplifying the futurity of their project. Through a critical futurist lens, I argue that the latent Afrofuturism of *abolitionist* theory and teaching imbues futurism with a relational kinetics of dreaming, allowing intervention into the past and future of education and schooling as technology beyond conventional structural reform and individual curricular futurity.

Abolitionist Future Dreaming

Abolitionist teaching scholar-activist Bettina Love (2019) implies a futurist lens in her own time traveling with W.E.B. Du Bois to imagine a past and future of education that is based on extra-temporal affinity with “we who are dark”, thus defining the temporal parameters of the *Abolitionist Teaching Movement*:

Abolitionist teaching [is] rooted in the internal desire we all have for freedom, joy, restorative justice (restoring humanity, not just rules), and to matter to ourselves, our community, our family, and our country with a profound understanding that we must ‘demand the impossible’ to affect real meaningful structural change in a society where dark bodies are disposable. (p. 7)

Abolitionist teaching is as much about tearing down old structures and ways of thinking as it is about forming new ideas, new forms of social interactions [...]. Abolitionist teaching is not a teaching approach: it is a way of life, a way of seeing the world [that] starts with *freedom dreaming*, [...] critical and imaginative dreams of collective resistance. (p. 89; 101; emphasis added)

The ultimate goal of abolitionist teaching is freedom. Freedom to create your reality, where uplifting humanity is at the center of all decisions. (p. 89)

This freedom cannot emerge from school reform, which has time and again created an ‘educational survival complex’ in which dark, poor, disabled, queer and trans children are merely taught to survive and so accept as their future the oppressive systems that intersect with schooling. Consequently, to imagine such change is to refuse not only the present constraints of dark identity but also its future conditions—and listen to the voices and bodies whose curricular futures we ostensibly want to make more possible. Through Love, abolitionist teaching implies a futurist imagination able to uniquely intervene on the discourse and practices of ostensible anti-racist teaching, in which historical pain and the limitations of present survival can be reconfigured and mobilized into new grassroots resources and supportive networks otherwise impossible through conventional imaginative capacities of what is possible in schooling.

What Love and fellow abolitionist educators call “freedom dreaming,” this mode of abolitionist imagination, is a unique temporal criticality that offers a precedent for not only moving towards education that values dark lives, but also a kind of nonlinear temporal and kinetic capacity for conceiving of ways forward across education more broadly. Freedom dreaming begins at an apparent impasse. Love (2019) is “certain dark people have never mattered [in the Americas] except as property and labor” (p. 7). This historical re-rupturing reminds us of history’s entanglement with the present as a central concern of futurist thinking, both a responsibility and opportunity. In this mode, the structures of schooling take on a dystopian technological character —the structures that facilitate school change as reform for standardized testing and other capitalist metrics combine into a “superpredator” of dark bodies (p. 40). This sci-fi recasting of schooling as violence amplifies an understanding of the conditions of the real children Love writes for as being caught in a kind of “Hunger Games” in which students compete to simply survive a post-apocalyptic future already promised by the systemic White supremacy of the present. In a sense, we are all caught in an antebellum Matrix in which school reforms continually “reboot” slavery as the physical and imaginative arrangements of schooling and students’ futures (p. 59).

Rather than foreclose hope that teaching can be non-violence amidst such bleak visions (e.g. Harber, 2004), however, abolitionist future dreaming begins to allow the conditions of freedom in imagining possible change otherwise conceived as impossible. Love and fellow abolitionist teaching scholars and advocates use such imaginative capacity to critically decenter present thinking of school change as a matter of changing and creating wider social and cultural relationships rather than

locating the future of educating as the future of schooling reform, as is presently assumed in the imaginary of education discourse (that is, we imagine education work to generally be work that improves or modifies arrangements that already exist, and within the understanding of what is possible in the present).

This critical decentering allows the abolitionist imagination to see the future of schooling as already entangled in the long present of carceral history. Both Love (2019) and University of Chicago's abolitionist teaching advocate David Stovall (2018; 2020; 2021) are thus able to draw on the work of carceral studies scholars and prison abolitionists Angela Davis (2005) and Dylan Rodriguez (2010; cf. Davis & Rodriguez, 2000) to create concrete historical, psychical, and physical links between temporalities. Rodriguez (2010) describes this decentering as an opportunity to in turn re-orient how the relationship between teaching and oppressive systems are imagined:

... [The] massive carceral-cultural form of the prison has naturalized a systemic disorientation of the teaching act, so that teaching is no longer separable from the work of policing, juridical discipline, and state-crafted punishment. Thus, I do not think the crucial question in our historical moment is whether or not our teaching ultimately supports or adequately challenges the material arrangements and cultural significations of the prison regime—just as I believe the central question under the rule of apartheid is not whether a curriculum condones or opposes the spatial arrangements of white supremacy and intensified racist state violence. Rather, the primary question is whether and how the act of teaching can effectively and radically displace the normalized misery, everyday suffering, and mundane state violence that are reproduced and/or passively condoned by both hegemonic and critical/counterhegemonic pedagogies. (p. 7)

Rodriguez describes the limitations of current educational theory and practice to meaningfully address the so-called *school-to-prison pipeline* (STPP). On its surface, the STPP is most visible when schooling practices and reform stream students, particularly BIPOC students, towards carceral futures through normalizing surveillance, contact with law enforcement, and discipline and testing regimes that pathologize and criminalize dark bodies in schools. The STPP thus maps directly onto the historical arrangements of slavery, repurposing them in the technological guises of justice and schooling.

More perniciously, however, the STPP is ultimately maintained through a social imaginary of teaching and schooling which tacitly accepts that this is the future of students, where teachers across all contexts are in daily practice training “the potential captives of the school/prison confluence, whether the classroom is populated by criminalized Black and Brown youth or white Ph.D. candidates” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 10). Rodriguez (2010) is thus adamant that any teaching or engagement with education that does not outright refuse the current reality of schooling while attempting new material, “epistemic and intellectual approaches to meaning, knowledge, and learning” are complicit in perpetuating a long carceral past as future (p. 7). As a White Ph.D. student in a mostly-White Canadian university, I am only beginning to articulate for myself how this presents a profound challenge: How to imagine educational work and research that refuses to confine itself to the academic or cultural boundaries of how education is currently defined—it presents the challenge of possibly writing curriculum *science fiction*.

From Curriculum S(ci)-F(i) to Critical Futurism

Here, I feel it time to make an explicit yet intentionally late acknowledgement of the work of curriculum scholars and JAAACS contributors Noel Gough and John Weaver, positioned by Appelbaum (2019) at the “vanguard in the liminal terrain of Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, and Curriculum Studies” in his introduction to the 2019 JAAACS special section *Speculative Fiction, Curriculum Studies, and Crisis* (p. 1). While my thinking in this essay has resonated with Gough and Weaver in a broad sense, what I am attempting to share here is, I argue, distinct: A shift, or at least the beginnings of a shift, beyond learning from speculative fictions as external discursive objects—including ourselves as external objects—to enacting a commitment to a shared futurist orientation in curriculum as a critical anti-oppressive technology. This is not to say that Gough, Weaver, and other notable curriculum thinkers have not demonstrated important examples of futurist thinking. It is, however, to say that such a commitment to a shared future is yet science fiction within curriculum studies, with all the implications of the language of genre.

Indeed, Gough’s (2019) reflections on the influence of Ursula Le Guin’s writing on his thinking and teaching of science education enact speculation towards envisioning a different future reality of teaching a subject through the mobilization of content-focused thought experimentation. Meanwhile, Weaver (2019) acknowledges that there may be a limitation in our language and so concept of what ‘SF’ means, even if he still argues that we should “use the initials SF to refer more

appropriately to speculative fiction” rather than ‘science fiction’ in curriculum as a way to recognize its discursive evolution away from a lowly and historicized genre. I posit, however, that if curriculum studies and its thinkers are to truly commit to engendering more just futures, what we are in fact gesturing towards *is* science fiction, or beyond the pale (White) bounds of education presently conceived, and so, importantly, limited to how it can be discussed as a future. As Appelbaum (2019) quotes Cathy Cohen (2012, n.p.), “What insights might be gained by centering the work of SF writers, artists, and theorists, by re-thinking curriculum theory from our so-far marginal autobiographical experiences with SF in our scholarship, curriculum practices, and reconceptualization of curriculum studies?”

Like Cohen, part of my intention here is to center the work of Black scholar-activists and so enact an amplification of their extra-temporal dreaming. I am also attempting an expansion of what temporality and individual commitment means for a curriculum studies scholar. Amplifying the futurity of Afrofuturism alongside Black theorists and activists to “re-imagine the politics of intimacy” (Appelbaum, 2019, p. 3) suggests that our field, as practice and discourse, has always been technologically inept, perhaps requiring uncharted flights of fantasy, or, more accurately, acknowledging that our curricular intentions require embrace of a sense of curriculum that reads like wishful thinking.

I am further reminded of the curriculum studies tradition of *currere* (Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Pinar, 2004; Wang, 2010), but feel a “release into movement” (Pinar, 1994, p. 45) distinct from and necessarily flowing from beyond my own sense of temporality and into curricular attunement with pasts and futures I cannot assume to know from within myself. *Currere* as time travel begins to challenge my own individual history. This distinct sense of movement pulls me away from not only the “so-far marginal autobiographical experiences with SF” (Cohen, 2012, n.p.) in curriculum studies, but also beyond the so-far marginal autobiographical responsibilities of curriculum studies and its sense of temporality writ large (or, rather, writ individually). In other words, I must allow myself to be bent backwards, forwards, and in breach of even such temporal constraints by other-wordly dreams that dismantle both notions of *currere* and established senses of what curricular ‘speculation’ might mean beyond self-contained ‘thought experiments.’ As I will discuss in my conclusion, I cannot claim to know what configuration should remain. I am still unlearning the imaginative constraints of curriculum thinking, as I feel through the unbounding of temporality and personal commitment that Black

abolitionist teachers hope for as I also process my own re-examination of past, present, and future intimately intertwined.

Despite the very real constraints of structure and imagination of North American schooling in moving towards a different future for Black bodies in education, Love (2019) and Stovall (2018; 2020; 2021) demonstrate through their abolitionist dreaming, the difficulty yet necessity of creating such a futurity. Stovall (2020) realizes that such a multi-temporal view not only confronts the future and past together, but also offers an opportunity for *movement*—the physical and psychical antibody to historical and present carceral immobilization. This sense of movement challenges me to allow entanglement of my future with the humanity of students and their lives, feeling the systemic weight of history while also perceiving that the toxic conditions of present schooling are “not the fault of the students and families that send them there”, the teachers who teach them, but represent the design of White supremacist state imaginaries as life narratives (Stovall, 2020, p. 10). This realization creates pathways of *fugivity* as the animation of abolitionist thinking:

[We dare call these paths] fugitive, or immersed in the process of realizing that there has to be a detour from the order and compliance of the school. It is not running from something as much as it is running to a destination that is created and determined by those who are experiencing injustice. (Stovall, 2020 p. 4)

Stovall (2018; 2021) further performs his own curricular fugivity from critical race theory (CRT), inspired by Davis, Rodriguez, and Love to see a missing futurity in CRT and so his own work and as a means to escape Rodriguez’s STTP bind. Practically, while “the terminology leaves more questions than answers (i.e., what do we call the places where education happens if we are abolishing ‘school?’)”, abolitionist fugivity as critical futurity affords Stovall curricular and pedagogical opportunities to imagine beyond the established discourse of CRT and social justice education which remain, on a register of imagination, unable to address the future implications of present systemic oppressions (2018, p. 57; 2021). Stovall (2020) thus sees a lack of imaginaries in anti-oppressive scholarship for BIPOC students that do not bind them to a future of suffering. Read as a fugitive futurist, however, Stovall recognizes such alternative imaginaries as alive in teachers who, despite how they were initiated into schooling via teacher education programs, are yet able to challenge the material arrangements of schools through largely unstudied, lateral movements of relationships. For Stovall (2020), the problem is not that we cannot

change the system, but that our capacity to perceive meaningful action limits such change to fantasy:

When we come across [teachers embodying abolitionist teaching] we often think them to be unicorns. We believe them to somehow have this magical ability to do the impossible. It's important to state that this is the furthest from the truth. To the contrary, we have only witnessed the end product of their commitment. (p. 5)

Love (2019) meanwhile is able to teleport beyond the carceral bonds of the American Dream as a cultural narrative—the horrors of presently normalized state murder of Black bodies—and retrieve historical insights from her own life and education that were otherwise latent. Love re-reads bell hooks' (1994) experiences switching from segregated to racially integrated schooling, where hooks felt a pedagogical void of community and human compassion, realizing that hooks' segregated experiences and teaching reflections hold a lesson needed for the future (a lesson I would argue has yet to be learned by most teacher education scholarship). Love realizes that for much of her own early schooling and teaching career, Love did not feel like she *mattered* within her classrooms, nor did the *future* of her dark body, because neither she nor schools expressed love for Blackness. Through fugivity, however, Love travels through hooks' concept of "homeplace" to revisit her past, recognizing the pedagogical necessity of a teacher's understanding and commitment to dark communities' homeplaces, sites where "souls are nurtured, comforted, and fed" towards supportive education across public/private boundaries (p. 63). Such a fugitive futurity allows Love to see Trayvon Martin as a vibrant, beautiful dark life who died despite demonstrating all that his reformed schooling had taught him to be, and even retain compassion for education as a site of hope: "Education can't save us. We have to save education" (p 88). Education thus becomes an activist movement against prevailing structures and ways of conceiving them, rather than the socio-cultural scapegoat for social anomie.

True to futurist form, however, the call to move towards such an educational imaginary implies thinking beyond the presently impossible: Educators being political advocates, community members, and comrades with their students. This is perhaps the most psychically difficult barrier of disbelief, yet through futurist dreaming becomes a critical necessity. Demonstrating the ultimate imaginative implication and possibility of what I see as Black critical futurity and as psychical as well as physical movement, Rinaldo Walcott ruptures the wider implications of a

long present without futurist dreaming as a challenge to all academic compartmentalization of institution, culture, history, and future. For Walcott (2021), our long (academic and wider cultural) present is *The Long Emancipation*, in which we “have mistaken emancipation for freedom and failed to acknowledge that freedom has not yet been achieved” (p. 13). Walcott applies McKittrick’s (2013) “Plantation Futures” and “slave ship logics” to implicate carceral imagination far beyond the STPP and so towards all human futures. This futurist thinking is able to see the transatlantic slave trade, colonization and Indigenous genocide together as both history and present, “more than a political-economic phenomenon; it is more than the history of early capitalist accumulation; it is a seismic human cultural shift in economy, thought, and culture and, thus, in human alterability” (p. 24).

Walcott (2021) draws on Stuart Hall’s (2006) “intervention of history”, allowing these “complicated entanglements” of historical and present conditions to allow imagination of alternative futures:

Because we are not yet free, our slave past haunts and mars our attempt to render the past as past and the foundation for a future to come. The persistence of the past announces itself in discourses and practices of diversity, equity, multiculturalism, and antiracism policies, all of which can be tied to the logics of legislative emancipation’s juridical form. (Walcott, 2021, p. 45)

As freedom is “extralegislative—freedom exists beyond the confines of the law as a mode of experiencing life without bounds” (Walcott, 2021, p. 36)—the present limitations on Black futures become painfully obvious when Black bodies become “non-life” before our eyes. Recalling current legal proceedings around cases such as George Floyd’s, Walcott (2021) argues that the “video-recorded evidence and the body of the dead Black person are not enough to secure belief that what has taken place is, in fact, a murder” (p. 45). The present Black “life-form” is returned through the entangled wormhole of past bondage, blinking out of full human status once again. And yet, it is in this extra-temporal *movement* that Walcott (2021) also sees future hope:

Black life-forms always find ways to exceed the boundaries of capital and other forms of containment as a way to imagine, build, and produce conduits that lead to collective self-referential lives. ... Therefore, ... Black movement is not a surprise but a logical outcome of forces meant to make Black life

impossible beyond the Euro-Western scripts of [future existence] ... It is precisely at the point of movement that African and Black people exercise their subjecthood while encountering the continued constraints of emancipation. (p. 46-48)

For Walcott (2021), this movement has the potential to extend further into “a freedom that inaugurates an entirely new human experience for everyone” (p. 5), where radical re-ordering of material and affective relationships present an entirely yet unseen planetary socio-cultural configuration in which all humanity relates to itself beyond survival.

Walcott, Love, and Stovall all point to future material goals for abolitionist future dreaming, but what I wish to amplify here is the critical futurity of this dreaming itself. Love and Stovall seek to reconfigure the material *and* *psychical* arrangements of schooling for all students present and future through grassroots acts of teaching that exceed the boundaries of past and present entanglement, but this dreaming must not remain the sole burden of dark bodies (Love, 2019, p. 9). Walcott (2021) looks to an even more fantastic future—Black freedom, “as a claim, as a [possibility] challenges us to imagine and to produce new modes of life that might be in accord with some of the most radical global Indigenous calls for a different kind of world” in which conceptions of property and kin are fantastically different (p. 65). For Walcott, Black freedom, a condition necessary for freedom writ global, is possible not only “in distinct opposition to capitalism, historically and presently”, but also likely not without imagination beyond “logics of belonging to place, in the sense of past ownership of or claim to land” or bloodlines if one is to position belonging as “not premised on a history of racist social, political, and cultural gradations and exclusion” (p. 65-66).

It is the critical futurity of what Love and Stovall term Black love and joy, Sylvia Wynter (2003) casts as “the genres of Man”, and Walcott terms Black cultural vernacular, however, that allows Walcott (2021) to himself amplify Fanon's (1961) “wretched of the earth” as a functional imaginary. In fact, Walcott earlier and elsewhere (2014) contemplates Fanon as an Afro-pessimist, a subgenre of Afrofuturism, as a site for thinking beyond emancipation logics (c.f. Mann, 2018). Although he drops the “speculative” from Anderson's (2016) Black Speculative Arts Movement, it is the same “future-oriented” cultural production of the Black Arts Movement and “black fantastic”, denigrated as the low genres of Black life, through which Walcott (2021) is able to glimpse Black freedom in the first place (p. 5).

(in)Conclusion: Critical Futurism and Affinity

What I wish to leave my reader with is a challenge to consider engaging in a kind of critical curriculum futurism, and what this might mean. Writing towards allyship with trans feminists as a cis-gendered lesbian feminist, Sarah Ahmed (2016) demonstrates what I term *affective affinity*, or a means of feeling past imaginative boundaries as well as to amplify and move in allyship (or co-conspiracy, as Love would ask) with abolitionist future dreaming. Ahmed reminds me that “privilege is affective as well as effective”; affectivity is in many ways like skin: “a border that feels” (2016, p. 27). As a queer White curriculum scholar, pushing the limits of and creating openings along my affective borders is thus a critical act. It is also a futurist act. Ahmed (2016) suggests that affective affinity is also a kind of movement between possible, strange new worlds, and is integral to future justice work:

We generate ideas through the struggles we have to be in the world; we come to question worlds when we are in question. When a question becomes a place you reside in, everything can be thrown into question: explanations you might have handy that allow you to make sense or navigate your way through unfamiliar as well as familiar landscapes no longer work. ... [When] we are not at home, ... we experience a chip, chip, chip, a hammering away at our being. To experience that hammering is to be given a hammer, a tool through which we, too, can chip away at the surfaces of what is, or who is, including the very categories [of] personhood ... (p. 22)

Ahmed’s question is how feminists can learn from and so feel the future conditions needed by trans bodies yet which are often not perceivable by cis-gendered feminist bodies and their discourse. My question is: how can curriculum studies practitioners contribute to further chipping away at the categories of the possible in educational justice thinking, in allyship with Love, Stovall, and the future planetary freedom Walcott himself has only glimpsed?

While writing this essay, I have resided in this question, an affectively difficult yet educationally full experience—full of humbling affinitive movement and, I feel, a new register of curriculum thinking. While reading Love’s (2019) nonlinear entanglements of her own educational history, I began to travel back to and forward through my own. As a queer child, I again felt visceral glimpses of surviving non-being, including a childhood of abuse and eventual, traumatic estrangement from my family—a personal emancipation without loving freedom. Instead of projecting

alone a long present for my young self predicated on this history, I have attempted, while making permeable my own curricular skin to abolitionist thinking, my own abolitionist future dreaming. I have learned that the extra-temporality of this dreaming is what moved my own imagination beyond past-present survival, and the challenge of holding onto the resulting futuristic affect (as a thing worth putting into words) to be the most difficult to maintain and retain here, perhaps because it moves me into future dreaming—and love—beyond my own skin. It has caused me to question what my own future might look like—personally, academically, humanely. Yet, it is this critical futurism that also suggests the hopeful possibility to re-imagine even a Western past and present binary as a critically traversable multiverse—what of Western mystical traditions now subordinated into fantasy, or the trajectories of popular queer culture (including contemporary queer science fiction) that may influence how we might unlearn static and individual temporality and so move towards possible futures, even if as marginal as a comic strip?

Perhaps not despite but because of myself, I cannot claim to answer these questions alone. I would contend that asking how strangely possible might new futures in education be, if we imagine them free from the presently probable, implicates more than dwelling in my own questions. Affective affinity, I suggest in closing, calls on the curriculum studies body to think through our own possible—and necessary—fugivities, and to welcome other fugitives as curricular kin. For me, it has begun to mean taking seriously those aspects of curriculum, as both a site of schooling and academic production, that we keep to ourselves. I have begun to consider many of the small choices and actions that I take daily in my own teaching and writing that are not contractual, both in a pragmatic, ontological sense as well as an ostensible member of an academic community.

As a sessional lecturer, I often stretch the temporal limitations of my employment contracts to better understand what my students are trying to express in their writing—I will take the time I feel is necessary to work with a student and their ideas, regardless of my hours. The language of public acknowledgement of such habits, however, tends to miss the point. While I do not mean to say that addressing the neoliberal precarity of academic labor is not important (indeed, I am likely to receive less future work if I suggest that I need more hours), there is something nevertheless lost in my own statement: How I might see my own curricula as acts of human love.

Part of my own sense of love for a shared future, informing yet invisible in my teaching and writing, is always a sense of post-scarcity and spiritual ecology—personally syncretized futuristic concepts of a world in which human relations are not based on exchange and accumulation of material wealth and instead mutual nourishment, balance, and respect for all life. In other words, as a child of *Star Trek*, David Suzuki’s sacralizing children’s environmentalism and other latent futuristic genres, I realize privately that I approach each interaction with students as if money no longer exists as a personal motivator for my presence in the classroom, and that my generosity nourishes future relationships beyond my lifespan. It would be quite fantastic to engage fellow curriculum studies scholars and teachers as to what concepts of futurity underlie their practices and writing, and I invite my reader to do so. My own deeply held sense of the future, however, now includes an impulse towards taking seriously the hopes of bodies beyond my own privileged dreams. Dreaming becomes the critical futurism we need when it is not about my own sense of possibility, but of feeling through a possible temporary and material existence I did not personally know to be possible.

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