

Even if we don't get to see it, we're gonna die trying: Radical organizers dreaming of liberation within a late stage nightmare

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I curate a collage of excerpts from conversations with community organizers about their wildest liberation dreams, i.e. their most expansive desires, aspirations, and imaginings of liberation. This is a part of a larger oral history, archival, and auto/ethnographic research project in which I amplify approaches to community organizing that aim toward transformation and intentionally build connections across fronts of struggle. I make sense of this dreaming process through poetry and prose, attending to the emotional and analytic dynamic and the shifting meaning of the 'I don't knows.' Narrators' responses point to the importance of aspirations in guiding action and remind us that liberation dreaming is not only about or bound to the future. May this curation of responses/dreams(/nightmares) and shimmers of hope continue widening space for 'unimaginably' grand possibility amidst daunting conditions that threaten to shrink it, and inspiring collective action toward the ever-emerging horizon of liberation.

KEYWORDS

liberation dreams, freedom dreams, oral history, praxis, activism, anticolonial, feelings

1 | INTRODUCTION

"Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world – or many other worlds... We're dreaming new worlds every time we think about the changes we want to make in the world" (Imarisha, 2015, p. 3-4).

This paper carefully attends to the complex process and dynamic of liberation dreaming with several community organizers seeking radical, transformative change. I reimagine and weave together short and longer form excerpts from various narrators responding to questions about their most expansive desires, aspirations, and imaginings of a more liberated existence, with some paraphrasing as well as my own questions and responses in poetry and prose. I do this to follow and make sense of an analytic and emotional dynamic that was shared across most of these conversations. I play with form to sit with the experience of being part of/listening to these conversations, engaging with the imagination, feelings, and the very present "I don't know" throughout narrators' responses. With this intention I am continuing conversations from previous submissions and the goals of this section of Awry2 to recognize and engage with not knowing or the unknown as a site of knowledge production (Liebert, Lara, & Carlson, 2021; Carlson, 2021). Furthermore, I build on arguments that dreams and the imagination are valid and important sources of knowledge (Shawanda, 2020¹) and that dreams/envisioning play crucial roles in organizing praxis (Kelley, 2002; Imarisha, 2015; Cahill, 2023). The broader goal of the article is to inspire collective expansion of ever-emerging liberation dreams, as they both fuel and are fueled by transformative action.

The excerpts in this curated thematic collage are drawn from a larger praxis-oriented research project that includes oral history as well as archival and critical auto-ethnographic material. In this project, I amplify radical approaches to political organizing, which go beyond inclusion towards transformation, and intentionally build connections across various fronts of struggle (Sánchez Carmen, in preparation). Between June 2018 and February 2020, I interviewed ten key Lenapehoking²/New York City-based organizers who are either first- and second-generation immigrants of various racial backgrounds from Haiti, México, the Dominican Republic, and Japan or are Mvskoke, Indigenous to lands occupied by the US. Most are women, gender expansive, trans, and/or queer people who have long been on the frontlines strengthening links between migrant justice, Indigenous struggles, Black liberation, prison abolitionist movements. These narrators additionally draw from active involvement in labor, gender, racial, environmental, disability, and reproductive justice (including through doula work), queer liberation, justice for Palestine organizing, harm reduction, and more. I had gotten to know most of the narrators through my own community organizing and networks of affinity groups built over time.

Through this larger research project, I wanted to better understand and share what we can learn from organizers working on migrant justice in intersectional ways and how they 1) understand relationality among struggles and communities, 2) approach the work in practice, and 3) how they imagine possibilities and challenges to come for liberation work. In the oral history interviews, I prompted narrators to share about the lived experiences that shaped their political understandings and inspired them to seek involvement in transformative organizing. I asked about how they

¹While Shawanda (2020) focuses on sleeping dreams and daydreams as a means of receiving knowledge from ancestors and other kin, and this paper addresses dreaming in the context of waking liberatory aspirations, there are affinities. Like the timeless dream world Shawanda (2020) describes, one can sense in the following accounts how narrators seem to travel and collapse timelines, reaching toward collective insight in the time-space of liberation dreaming. Additionally, I hope to stress the importance of attending to the liberation dreaming and striving of historically dispossessed communities and those working toward new worlds, similarly valuing knowledge generated in dreams/desires/envisioning because as Shawanda (2020) argues, dreams offer "the means of putting the vision into action" (p. 46).

²Lenapehoking is the Indigenous, Lenape name for the ancestral home of the Lenape people spanning from Western Connecticut to Eastern Pennsylvania and the Hudson Valley to Delaware. Although the Lenape have historically faced violence of genocide and forced removals, Lenape communities still live in and have been revitalizing their communities, culture, and presence in New York City, especially in the past 10 years. Additionally, New York City is home to the largest diaspora/population of Indigenous people from across Native American nations.

developed tangible organizing approaches that align with their politics. Lastly, I asked about their wildest liberation dreams, or the most expansive desires and aspirations.

This work is premised on an appreciation for how theory/understandings, praxis/actions, and dreams/aspirations are continually co-developing and co-informing; they necessitate each other. Thus, aspirations or notions of liberation influence the way we are in the world. Similarly, our notion of liberation — or our collective striving to get into better relation with each other and the planet and beyond — is an ever-expanding, ever-emerging horizon of desire, experimenting, and learning. As such, I understand, as Robin DG Kelley (2002), Loren Cahill (2023), Rachel Liebert (2018), and others do, that the imagination is a vital site of knowledge production. When I was devising this oral history project in 2015-2017, I realized organizing spaces I was involved in made surprisingly little space to have direct conversations about long term liberation visions/dreams within the work. Thus, I wanted these oral history conversations to create a space to nurture envisioning and begin to bring visions together.

Tremendous radical potential exists in bringing together various dreams of liberation, given the ways that so many contemporary movements and fields of study build in silos (Leroy, 2016), and the way documented history neglects the mutual influence of various liberation traditions and visions across history, at best. At worst, we are told by systems and ideologies of domination that fronts of struggle — such as migrant justice, decolonization, reparations and Black liberation — are in competition or antithetical. Knowing this I wonder:

How can we remember and imagine beyond narratives that 'struggles clash?' If fronts of struggle for liberation do not contradict or clash in the dreams, how can that help us work through tensions systematically wedged between/among historically dispossessed communities? How can we use that in our favor? Because liberation will have to be collective.

How can we instead be working through new tensions, struggles, problem-solving that do not come out of trauma, violence, or logics of colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, racial capitalism?

Since I began this project, there have been exciting developments in recognizing the importance of imagining and fleshing out the worlds we want while building them, credited in large part to growing abolitionist and transformative justice work. This work has involved envisioning and creating the kinds of relationships and infrastructures that build safety and care in community to create conditions that reduce harm and strengthen accountability without state violence. This wisdom has largely been developed by people who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color, sex workers, women and femmes, transgender, disabled, and/or survivors of sexual violence. Some of the people and collectives who have significantly nurtured and shaped transformative justice work—for decades, in some cases — and are gaining wider recognition and interest now include Mariame Kaba, Mimi Kim, Ejeris Dixon, adrienne maree brown, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Mia Mingus, Sonya Shah, Shira Hassan, Elliott Fukui, Whitney Richards-Calathes, groups like the Audre Lorde Project's Safe OUTside the System (SOS) Collective in New York City, and many other organizers and thinkers.³

Additionally, since this project's conception, increased connection-making and conversation between Black and Native communities have deepened understandings of incommensurability as well as kinship. Black communities across the globe are increasingly recognized as Indigenous Africans or displaced Indigenous Peoples (Mays, 2021). Artists and thinkers with both Indigenous African and Indigenous Turtle Island (the Americas) ancestry, such as Black Zapotec and Mixtec poet, artist, and thinker Alan Pelaez López from Oaxaca, Amber Starks (2022)⁴ of Black, Mvskoke,

³Please see the video series featuring many of these thinkers and organizers who have developed understandings of transformative justice in the "Building Accountable Communities" video series created by Project Nia and the Barnard Center for Research on Women. Also refer to various podcasts such as The Emergent Strategy Podcast, and How to Survive the End of the World. Some notable books on transformative justice include *Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement* by Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha, *We do this 'til we Free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice* by Mariame Kaba with other thinkers, *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown.

⁴See also Amber Starks' public scholarship on social media platforms under @melaninmvskoke.

Shawnee, Tuchi, Quapaw and Cherokee descent, and Kyle Mays of Black American and Saginaw Chippewa descent have brought together invaluable perspectives and insights. They tear down silos from an embodied experience of multiplicity, confronting and holding shared histories of both deep wounds and deep kinship, as they imagine and work toward Black and Indigenous futurities and futurities of collective liberation. They demonstrate these futurities are not incompatible even as experiences are incommensurate.

I hope this piece contributes to a process of bringing dreams together quite literally, by curating these dreams emerging from various lived experiences, side-by-side, into a polyvocal conversation. I hope there will continue to be conversation, spaces, retreats, conferences, gatherings, across all kinds of liberation work to bring dreams, lessons, and action together at any and every opportunity.

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Before wading into narrators' dreaming, a bit more context and some suggestions for the encounter:

I share this collage of excerpts not as a list, or final answer to what liberation is; understanding as Robin DG Kelley (2002) does in writing about the Black Radical Imagination, that "the desires, hopes, and intentions of the people who [fight] for change cannot be easily categorized, contained, or explained" (p. ix). Instead, I try to convey this emotionally complex and deeply dialectic process of liberation dreaming, playing with form guided by three main intentions.

The first, was to shape this writing around the oral history narrators' responses. Narrators' words take up most of the space here because I position narrators as co-theorizers in the research; emphasizing their words here centers them in that role. A thematic collage felt apt for highlighting the beauty and poetic quality present in the rawness of narrator's responses. Furthermore, this form allowed for simultaneously retaining some of the wholeness of these conversations while protecting the anonymity of narrators who desired it.

My instinct was to play visually with the transcripts to treat these excerpts as the poetry I felt I was listening to as narrators spoke about their liberation dreams (and daydreams and nightmares). These excerpts are either verbatim or lightly edited excerpts for ease of reading, with a sprinkling of paraphrasing and phrases inspired by the conversations. Varying from the original transcript, I have indicated excitement, tone, emphasis, and turns through elongating words, capitalization, adding different paragraph breaks. Spaces in between paragraphs mark the change in narrator and I note my responses and thoughts with my initials, SS. Dancing stars mark a shift in the aforementioned analytic and emotional dynamic. As I curated the responses, I noticed almost every narrator responded with questions at some point in their account, posing them for either themselves or a general audience. I began to bold all questions, including my own, to highlight the role of inquiry in liberation dreaming.

Second, I wanted to experiment with form to personally commune more deeply with such strong feelings that emerged in myself, and the rich responses that elicited them. Words and feelings from these conversations stuck with me and inspired me to think creatively about engaging with and sharing them. Feelings such as surprise at the recurrent "I don't know" that almost every participant expressed throughout the conversation on liberation dreams. These narrators are people who — as Walidah Imarisha's quote at the opening suggests — are working toward new worlds, yet, when asked about these worlds of their dreams, they often immediately say "I don't know." Furthermore, I perhaps naïvely expected this portion of the interview to help conclude on an uplifting note. I instead found much more emotional complexity, and in some cases (again, to my surprise): the grimmest parts of the interviews. Some of these responses have brought me to tears every time I re-listen to them. Tears either empathizing with narrators'

dread, in awe of the power of their words, the power of their determination and ability to identify shimmers of hope in the face of such heavy work ahead. In this process of dreaming, there is humor and playfulness, melancholia and anxiety— many emotions often cohabitating. There are both straining/slow churning and fluidity in responses. I wanted to convey all these parts of the dreaming process.

Audre Lorde understood the connection between dreams and feelings and freedom. She offered that “our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge” (Lorde, 2004, p. 85-100), that feelings “surface in our dreams, and...our dreams...point the way to freedom [...] I feel, therefore I can be free” (Lorde, 2020, p. 5-6). My gut similarly told me to spend more time feeling. So, my third and final intention is that this window into dreaming provokes and enlivens many feelings for you. Experience the twists within the narratives, contend with expectations for what you would find in these responses. I invite you to sit with the feelings, as I did. Notice them as you read the following words. **What are your feelings telling you?** Become submerged in the waters of their/our spontaneous working through dreams, daydreams, nightmares, and feelings in this process. Experience unexpected turns and seemingly contradictory feelings coexisting. Ponder on the ambiguities. Hopefully our feelings help us to better know freedom and liberation.

This is not a piece to easily skim, to pick through and harvest ideas. I ask you to read this with care, contend with these dreams. I encourage you to pause and be attentive to feelings that come up for you, desires that come up for you. This is an invitation and provocation for you to engage in imagining the world/s we desire, to flesh them out in your mind, and to give them flesh materially, with your actions.

Importantly, I hope this piece can keep you company in your own courageous process of dreaming. Like letting go of gravity, dreaming can be uplifting but also quite terrifying.

What have you been dreaming?

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What are your wildest liberation dreams? What kind of world do you want to live in?

What kind of worlds do you want for your children, grandchildren, niblings⁵ nieces and nephews?

This question is for you

and everybody.

Take your time.

⁵A gender-neutral/gender expansive term equivalent to niece and nephew —usually the children of siblings, cousins, and loved ones of a similar peer generation.



Image description: A taniwhā, a large majestic and fierce creature stands upright. They have a purple, dragon-like face with Māori face adornment/markings. Their long, serpentine body is covered in colorful scales in a rainbow gradient. Their belly is pink and possibly softer than the scales. The taniwhā is showing their teeth, breathing fire, and extending two thin arms with sharp, colorful claws, and sharp elbows. The taniwhā is set against a turquoise background with intricate patterns of colorful zigzagging and circular figures

2 | HE TANIWHĀ, 2023

by Teah Carlson and Wiremu Kingi (Teah's son).

Teah Carlson's words, some paraphrased: A taniwhā is a powerful magic, Māori water spirit, monster, guardian, and leader. Dreaming in monsters is a response to the call to 'feel'. I dreamed eyes wide open while my awa (river) was breaking its banks in the recent floods in Te Tai Rāwhiti (24th June 2023) where I live, love and lay bones. I felt the taniwhā raise their eyes at me and wink with magic to respond. Teah Carlson offered this image as part of her response to this piece as a reviewer. It helps to represent and "honour the fierceness of dreaming in spite of...." May this taniwhā accompany us as we wade in...

SS: I don't know if you imagined what kind of future you would like to build

Oh man. HAHHAHA!

SS: what would that look like or feel like?

Oh man! That's interestinngg.

SS: What would that be like?

SS: What are your wildest liberation dreams?

I'm not sure I'm not sure yet.

[pondering out loud in funny voice:] Phew! **My wildest liberation dreams?!**

[Back to regular voice:] Yeah! I don't know.

Hmm...

I actually don't have a vision of that world yet. It feels like I still need to think what does the, what does the ideal world look like, and I don't have an answer for that. Because I think a part of me questions whether I can think – yeah I don't know what the ideal world looks like yet, because the ideal world in my limited visions I've had about this, it doesn't look anything like what we have now.

SS: But if you were to pretend that anything would be possible—

Yeah [chuckle].

SS: —*anything* would be possible. What do you think you would want this world to look like or whatever universe or—?

NO BAN ON STOLEN LAND
BLACK LIBERATION
LA MIGRA, LA POLICÍA, LA MISMA PORQUERÍA
ABOLISH PRISONS
ABOLISH ICE
ABOLISH BORDERS
REPARATIONS
FREE HEALTHCARE
FREE EDUCATION
FREE PALESTINE
DECOLONIZE, RETURN THE LAND, ABOLITION NOW!⁶

⁶These words were chanted at a 2019 Indigenous Peoples' Day march in New York City, in which several narrators participated. I included it here because it captured the sentiment of several responses.

I understand like what kind of future that I want and what kind of like slogan that I put in my head.

Um but .. making that happen in reality, like materially, is a different.. *thing*.

I wish there was a more concrete way to um collectively express what it means.

Yeah! I want people to feel like they don't have to do shit they don't have to. [narrator and SS laugh]

If they don't want to. You know.

SS: Yeah, yeah. [Narrator laughs again] Yeah.

Like paying the rent. Like why do we pay the rent? You don't have to pay the rent, and just live there. We don't have to worry about like asshole landlords that might report people to ICE or, you know,

we don't have to just worry about being poor, work like shitty job. Where your boss treats you like, you know, trash.

Or like in that kind of society there probably won't be any bosses [SS and narrator laugh].

You get to do this labor for people who care about you and who you love. Not just people with money.

Where everyone currently undervalued and looked down upon, is valued regardless of what they produce.

We want to have human relations, we don't have to have like to boss and to officer relationships or I don't know—we we do this because we care about people, right. I think [laugh].

Um, abolish jails.. Abolish ICE.

Fuckin' borders are whack [sighs]

I mean.. I'm pretty concerned with the prison industrial complex, school to prison pipeline all that shit. I am.. concerned with police in general, in any.. nation. [...] Especially ones with weapons...

Liberation for me would be no war. We'd leave people alone. To regroup themselves. That we wouldn't be second-class citizens.

We wouldn't resort to the state to solve problems.

SS: and, so, like in your wildest dreams [LR laughs a bit], do you have like vision for liberation?

[With a tender excitement] Yes, *I do!*

I, um, in my wildest dreams [...] people continue to make the connection between undocumented Black folks and, just like the diversity of the immigrant community. And everybody takes up the call to abolish ICE . . . in a way that sheds light on other enforcement agencies that are also fucked up, like the *foster care system*.

That in an ideal world, people who abolish ICE also begin to understand the actual reasoning for the border, and understand how much labor control is at the heart of of that.

End the bed quota

Release people *home*

You know what opening the border also means?

It means that you're gonna have to *end* imperialist occupation of *several* countries, right? That

you're gonna have to rethink NAFTA, rethink Plan Mérida, plan Colombia, plan México. That you're gonna have to *defund* the military intervention in all of these countries that's *directly fueling* the immigrant crisis

That immigrants and folks fighting racism and police brutality begin to understand the inherent dynamic of state functions, right? And the low quality of life that they have. It's when you understand that both the police *and* ICE are state forces *meant* to keep capital happy and people take it up in a way that is independent of moderate Progressives that want to control it within party politics and party structures

There's definitely a phase of reparations that has to happen, where people of oppressed backgrounds actually do re-appropriate all of the wealth from capital um, and offer relief to the communities most impacted. So, yeah you direct all of the Pharma money and you put into a single-payer healthcare. Free healthcare for everybody! You take all of that student debt, you take all the money from people who benefit from student debt, and you put into free higher education. Take all of the jobs from enforcement and turn them into administrative jobs, like. It's not actually rocket science!

[...]

It feels like we have a lot of incomplete projects to look back to, which is nice. But I also think that the — what what liberation looks like changes over time. And I don't know.. I think my definition of liberation in the contemporary moment for me doesn't feel out of this world?

[pause]

I actually think all of [what we are demanding in our organizing, abolishing prisons, ending city collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement ICE, funding communities instead of detention]

our *ideals* are very *real* and they feel very [pause]

of this moment, like they feel of *this* era. So, I think like if I really wanted to be radical, I haven't even finished imagining what that looks like. Like what a radically different world looks like.

When I think of abolition, and I think of, you know like the ideals, the things that [we were] pushing for, to *me*, that doesn't— it is not *radical*. Like we're asking for the state to look differently. It's not radical because the state *actually* looks different [over time]!

It's not like it's *impossible*— or it would require..*magic*. Like it really doesn't require that level of... I was like '**how do I describe magic?**'

[SS and narrator laugh]

We recognize it. It's of this world, is what I'm saying. It doesn't require otherworldly... *VISIONS* that we have yet to come up with. These are all visions that are *of this world*, and we've *known* them, you know.

Abolition today has roots in abolition 200 years ago, so it's not, like it's not *new*!

[...More quietly:] I don't know, I wouldn't consider it to be super radical, in that sense. Um [pause].

But every now and then I do try to think outside of that, and I actually don't have a vision of that

world yet?

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What about, like, *really* into the future, if truly anything were possible, what would that world you're working toward look like?

What comes to mind are more like feelings. Maybe abstract.

SS: when you think about collective liberation is it something you feel?

It's more of a feeling. Yeah.

Queer liberation is not a thing. It's a way that I feel. It's safety.

To 100% walk around in a way that felt 100% how I want to express myself and not feel in danger.

To not be alienated from family because of my queerness

queer liberation necessitates removing Anti-Blackness and white supremacist dynamics

just having the freedom to not have this double or triple consciousness.

Free from a sense of danger

being able to never think about whether it's dangerous or a problem to love someone. Just be with these people and it's fine and okay

Liberation means not feeling worried about survival

Feeling less pain and trauma.

People would show up in different ways, but if we're just accepting people and we're doing the work of building community, then it really would never matter how they show up.

Because as long as we're supporting them and they're supporting us and there's no harm, and if there is, we're talking about it. Then, you know? That's that kind of like freedom to move, to exist, to be comfortable, to be happy, to find joy, to find love. Yeah. [Laugh].

So, I am waiting for that feeling where I don't *think*. And I'm just *existing*, and making mistakes, and then getting support [laughs]. When it happens.

Fully automated, queer, space communism!

[..Loudly:] Ah, it's the dream!

Where we use the technology we have to make our lives easier and it doesn't have to be at the expense of anyone else.

We can be free to be queer; no one feels the pressure to conform to any one sort of sexuality or like *expression* of sexuality.

Um. [...]

I want a world where any sort of bad mood or experience that happens to you isn't completely tied to like a terrible livelihood and like a terrible society where your needs are just never met, right?

And I think it makes sense.

And I think it's possible.

We've gotten so caught up in having to do things...in whatever way was established or designed for us by colonization and capitalism's design and efforts, tha..we've lost a lot of what we were doing and what was working for us for so long, you know?

I feel like what I think liberation looks like for us—[slowly and carefully:] for our own communities to be able to, um, practice our traditions and be able to *regain* that knowledge that's been lost.

I want to see fuckin' Indigenous people have revitalization of our language and our practices.

That would be liberation to me..

I want to be able – if I decide to have a child – to be able to really share their identity with them in a *real* way.

I want to see Indigenous people fuckin' building hogans if that's where they want to live still.

We probably got so many answers to solving our climate crisis if they would just [louder:] let us fuckin' *get on it!*

I know that I've been harmed and that I've harmed. I can't take it back. But I can continue to address it. Continue to work on it.

And I think that that's where where our liberation *lies*.

Where we're free of that trauma. We're free of that harm in our bodies, so they don't hurt.

So that the land is healed.

Healing

Where we create our own breathing, living organisms that can radically transform people's lives and minds. I want to heal now.

Space and time to heal..

That's my.. wildest [through an exhaled half laugh:] dream of liberation right now, right [laughing:] here.

SS [empathizing]: Mhmm Mhmm.

[Passionately and with desperation:] Just give me some space to *heal*. Our bodies *hurt*. Our bodies are *tired*.

Exhausted.

And we continue to, you know, *harm them!*

Because.. Five hundred years of this shit.

[Proudly, firmly:] But we still here.

[Brief pause]

SS: Mhm

Healing. Healing the land. Healing our bodies.

SS: when you think about liberation, what would it look like, what would it feel like?

[Deep exhale]

So my daydream..today is like I guess, it's along the lines of like homesteading or something. So

my daydream is like **how do we fucking collect acres and like go ahead and support ourselves amongst ourselves?**

I don't know if it's this greater movement piece, but I guess it speaks to my sense of liberation: that we are free to *have*..like the earth. Like we are allowed to have our *space*. And not have to *pay* for it. In in such a nasty, capitalist fuckin' way. Like I have to send my rent every month. Right? I'm not talking about like that — I'm talking about like we're allowed to just exist in places. And we're meeting each other's needs.

I think it's just really based on those principles. Of like there's enough resources for all of us. We can all live happy and and healthy and the systems we've been talking about that are— these racist, fucking classist systems that are creating this world. **And so like what would it look like to not have those things?**

To me it's not actually about abolishing the state, necessarily. Or like abolishing capitalism, because I think we can just do it. Amongst ourselves. Like I think we *can* just do it!

I think there's going to be some repercussions..to that. But if you were to ask me 'what liberation looks like' today is that: we all have a place to *live*. We *all* have food. That maybe we grow. We're only giving our money and doing things to support ourselves.

I don't think it actually works in the way that it's like we get to a point where [deeper official sounding voice as if parodying:] 'we're going to change the economic system of the United States and blablabla.' And like that's *not* it. That's not what liberation looks like to me. That's not what it's gonna be like.

To be *free* and actually be free of *capitalism* means that my resources are *shared* and valued among — my people. Everybody has a role to *play*.

And like the abuelitas [grandmas] taking care of like little *girls* and *boys* and *kids* is what I'm talkin' about. And like **how many of those are happening in Brooklyn as we speak right now? How many grandparents are watching their kids, right? To do that but not because we can't afford childcare... Right?** Things like *that*. Like actually valuing that as 'no, this is how we support each other as a community.'

Thinking of liberation has brought me like this picture in my head it comes from just like you knowing that people are hungry and we can grow food..

What else do you need? Do people need a place to stay? There's, there's space! Right? The migrant women in the cleaning co-op need a space to ferment green cleaning supplies? There's a corner of the barn for that, right?

What are the things that we need and how do we do them ourselves?

I want to be in a place

— and It's gonna take time and distance and I won't see it in my lifetime —

but, we have to make a new blood memory. I think. 'Cause it's *so deep*. We're still so close to boarding schools, and genocide, and, I mean, whatever: we're still mascots!

Until there's not another *fuckin'* cowboy and Indian movie..*at all!*

Or until someone, generations from now — because it's already written in my blood memory and I'm always gonna continue to have this reaction—but until like someone, if they have to watch a cowboy and Indian movie, can watch it and see the Indians get shot
[almost out of breath:] and that *doesn't* like hurt them in their soul.

[SS tenderly whimpers. Then both laugh weakly]

That's my dream world.

Cause, I tell you what, I didn't have a reaction for a long time. It really didn't strike me until like after Standing Rock, you know.

Watching people having fuckin' dogs sicked on them — and I'm like 'God, that looks like my brother! That looks like my uncle!' And now I'm like watching a John Wayne movie and the Indians like fuckin' get killed and knocked off their horse and brutalized. And now I'm like: 'that looks like my brother! That looks like my uncle!'

They are still doing it to us. And now it's fucking police dogs or bullets, you know.

Yeah, um I don't know. Maybe I just described a weird utopia to you, instead of an actual path to liberation. But [laughs]

I guess if we're living in our wildest liberation dreams, then it doesn't have to be thought of in like a —

well, it should.

The idea would be to think about it in a practical way so we can actually fuckin' get there, but. I don't know. Yeah.

A part of me questions whether I can I think — because the ideal world in my..the limited visions I've had about it, **it doesn't look like anything we have now. So what does that look like?**

It could be a world with no gender potentially. **It could be a world with like — what is a formation outside of one that's recognized as the state?** I think that's light-years away

We would have to all die and come back again to create something else other than the state [laughs].

But it feels like,

it feels,

it feels really difficult to imagine a world outside of

[pause] the state formation or outside of capitalist relations. Um..

The anarchists of the world, um..tickle my *interest* [laughs] because I think that sometimes they *think* they can imagine a world outside of capitalist and state relationships. And I actually think it's, I don't know how we're gonna [laughs]— I don't know if in the contemp[orary]—

like at least until my *death*

I think that we're going to continue to have a *state* and we'll continue to have capitalist relations, so it's not about imagining the alternate world *outside of that*

but *within* it.

But how to, how to live and *create* with, with that still in the world?**So how do we create the**

spaces that we want to see? Encapsulated by but not necessarily overrun by capitalist relations or capitalism and state violence?

But how to, how to live and *create* with, with that still in the world?

I think it's gonna — I don't know what it will *take*. I mean, it would take like war — I don't know.

[Laughs]

[Quickly and in a tone as if finding comedy in such a tall order:] *Lots of wars around the world, simultaneously, and all of us winning at the same time!*

[SS and narrator laugh]

To actually have a world outside of capitalism

and outside of *state violence* and state relations, you know? Like it wouldn't

[Silent pause]

[Quietly:] It feels... I can't imagine it.

I both envy and I *dismiss* the anarchistic ideal of imagining [more quietly:] a noncapitalist place *because* I don't think we can escape it. Like, we — I dunno

it sounds really dark [laughs sharply]

[higher pitch as though simulating screaming:] but I don't think we can escape it!

I know this is where we can turn to the Indigenous traditions, for example, to show us a different way,

but even Indigenous societies live in relationship with capitalist..societies. So, it's like there's no..*out*.

So, it's only about..how to create [exhaling] an alternative within the world that we live in.

[More loudly:] I feel like I only get as far as 'maybe if we move to the moon' and then I start thinking [optimistic tone:] 'okay!' [SS and narrator laugh].

But even then! outer space has been overtaken — like the ocean! The place that hardly any humans have been: the ocean bottoms, themselves are ripped through by the lines of the telephone. Which all *follow* colonial routes! You know? So even, places where people have never lived, like the ocean, [more quietly:] are already marked by like this colonial history.

I dunno.

SS: So, when you think about like living — or creating our own alternatives within this system, like what does that look like for you?

Um so I think, I mean, I think..it looks like [states carefully and slowly paced out]..a community of folks, whether distant or near, who make decisions and live life based on principles ideas or beliefs that, um, we need to treat each other differently.

So it's it's a world of compassion, of, of understanding, of patience.

A world of abundance.

I think it's possible.

It would require a lot of labor [narrator laughs]. And a lot of intentionality

None of this stuff happens on its own.

I think.. I think that any world — even the ideal one, has contradictions. But it's people being aware of of the..contradictions of and within the alternative spaces people are trying to create that allows for it to be a little bit morree..

expansive.

Or feel a little bit more real and material versus like living in someone's head [laughs]

SS: Mm, mhm mhm

Like to constantly be thinking about how to treat each oth[er]— like not just thinking of treating each other differently but actually *doing* it.

And I think that folks are gonna be participating in different ways. [...]

But I think this is where — the question is **how do you scale up those relationships? The relationships of compassion and empathy and sympathy and all that good stuff? Like how you scale up the relationship so they're not just interpersonal but something that exists amongst a group of people?** And I don't, I don't know ..um. Yeah! That's the part that, that makes it hard [laughs].

The part that's just like [emphatic pondering] '*Hmm?*' Hehe.

SS: So, can you imagine a world without prisons? Even if in your lifetime you wouldn't be able to see it?

I do! And I actually think it's possible in my lifetime.

SS [excited surprise]: Oh!

I actually think we're moving towards a world of less physical confinement and more electronic confinement and perpetual custody.

(SS internal monologue, somber surprise: Ohh..*not quite* the prison abolition of my dreams)

Rather than thinking about how to really let people go from prison, the reformist conversations are literally thinking about how to hold people under custody, on parole for a lot longer. Tied to like a rehab center or whatever, but basically being in a constant form of custody.

In large part, because the state can no longer afford these multibillion-dollar *massive* capital projects of building prisons, but still wants to keep their custodial power over people.⁷

So it could be that in the future the form of imprisonment doesn't actually happen in a cage, but it happens in our home, electronic monitoring, or happens with like people being in some form of custody *while* supposedly being out in the world.

I mean and I think that really questions people's ideas of "what is freedom?" Similar to what Assata Shakur says: I don't know what freedom *is*, but I know what *unfreedom* is. So that's, I don't know.

When you asked me '**what does your version of the radical future look like?**' I guess like the radical world would be freedom.

But I don't know what that looks like [laughs].

Yet!

SS: What would it *feel* like?

Well, like I said, feelings of compassion and — but even the opposite of that.

I don't know, if people want to be left alone, [quietly] they should be left alone.

I dunno.

The Zapatistas talk about multiple worlds living in one.

Freedom looks uh like and feels like living in a world where you could choose to choose to..live how you want to without..feeling like you're being [laughs]

— it's like the absence — I'm trying to describe it not in the absence of oppression, but I don't know [laughs]. I am having a hard time! [Laughs]

SS: Can you imagine the abolition of borders?

⁷Building on the bodies of work of Ruthie Gilmore, James Kilgore, Marlene Nava Ramos (2023), and Mariame Kaba.

Will we be able to abolish national borders and the territories of the United States and Mexico and all of the other countries that are that are below that?

I don't, I don't, I don't know what that —

I think that environmental devastation is gonna [brief nervous laughter] creep up on us faster than we think [laughs].

I think that before we can fight national borders, climate catastrophe is gonna help [interviewer and narrator laugh]

erode some borders and some territories.

[More serious tone:] And I think it's gonna cause a lot of devastation to these very same people who are looking for liberation. I don't, I don't think it's gonna be a pretty scenario.

[Pause]

Do I think we'll get to see fully automated queer space communism? I think we could get there!

I just hope the planet doesn't fall apart before we do.

That would be nice. It'd be nice..

It'd be nice to have automated queer space communism in like *not* the post-apocalyptic reality.

Like that would be *awful*.

SS [laughs]. Like: we were so close!

If we got to that kind of system,

but there was like no fruit. [Laughing mixed with sad, grieving vocalizations]

It'd just be like [with relief and ease] 'ah no capitalism.

[Despairing tone] But, no fruit!

SS [somber tone]: no chocolate, no avocado...

Like. Girl. I would *die*! A slow death. A slow comfortable death [SS laughs harder].

That would be the worst. That would really, really be the worst.

* * *

Is there anything you feel we have going for us in these times?

Living outside of these institutions and these systems, is something that we can certainly do.

At any time.

And that's like my clearest vision of liberation right now. Because I'm not going to be alive or get to feel like the end of a system necessarily.

When I'm kinda describing what I see liberation like, if we can live without all these oppressive systems, in our lives and create systems amongst ourselves, then they'll die. They'll have nothing to thrive on. Because we'll all be happy..and living our damn lives. Right?

And like I'm sure — not to be too naïve: forces will *come down* and try to stop that from happening as soon as it's successful.

Like, as simple and fair as it sounds to just like, you know, have land—but they'll come after it. There's no doubt.

And it would be probably pretty violent toward the end, I would think. But by not giving it life and attention and — giving life and attention to the things we *want*, I do think eventually— maybe not in my lifetime, maybe not in my kids', but if we're not feeding those *monsters* then like maybe

they'll just be a story people are telling to each other someday. Of like when people used to do that, right?

I think that.. I think in some ways, people's collective memory and intentionality in drawing out the continuity are helpful and and it can lead us in certain directions. But I also think we're out of *time*.

[Somberly:] I feel like were out of..time. Like there's storms every, every so often.

We're out of time.

I don't know. [Sadly:] That's how I feel.

[Pause]

[With the tone of gloom:] maybe we don't ever escape it. But yeah.

[More loudly and energetically, quickly:] But I don't necessarily think that this should make us sad and we should stay in bed all day! Even though that's a really nice thing to do every now and then. That's not the —

I don't think people should be disillusioned by the darkness of [brief pause] um [loudly:] how *small* the spaces are! I don't know.

[Pause.]

[Quietly:] Yeah.

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And after the revolution

there's still a lot of work. And that work is longer work.

If tomorrow we wake up and we have free healthcare, we have housing, we have free education, we have those basic human needs, we have to deconstruct millennia of conditioning.

The conditioning around individualism. The conditioning that told you that capitalism is the right way, aim to be rich! Who's beautiful, who's not; who's fat and who's not.

Language! That we have been forced to have that's not our own. All of that has to be unlearned.

And that's heavier work!

When people talk about liberation work, you gotta talk about mental slavery work too.

It's not just – yes, it is building a whole new economic system, freeing Mumia⁸ and all our comrades, but that it's also starting that work to make us care about each other again.

Half of organizing is making people care. So, there's like...work to be done that has nothing to do with any of those things, but literally, like getting people to be collective and care.

⁸Mumia Abu-Jamal is a journalist, activist and political prisoner who has been incarcerated the past forty years. He was active in the Black Panther Party as a teenager later becoming a radio reporter who was arrested while covering an organization's confrontation with the police. Originally he was given a death sentence; he is now serving a sentence to life without parole despite decades of organizing and support for his release. He continues to write and engage in activism from inside.

* *
* * *
* *

What I know is that liberation is not a state or thing. And we really need to redefine “wins” I use this a lot when I do harm reduction stuff, because we don’t talk about success. Because success is fluid and changing. And changes as you change, the circumstances change, the world changes.

And so, it’s not like we’re going to get *here*, and then we’re free.

And I think that something that being poly⁹ has *taught* me.. is that it’s kind of this, *coconstant* work. Because we know people are going to fuck up, we know people are gonna do harmful things, we know people are going to use drugs, people are going to get hurt, people are gonna misunderstand each other, blah blah blah.

Um. And so, it’s not like there’s a point where we’ve gotten to everybody, and everybody has this framework, because the framework will shift

as the world shifts,

and we’ll need a *new* one.

I also have learned that, I think about things in the way that I *can*. And it’s limited! And so, somebody might come along and say something to me, and open up whole new possibilities for me.

So I feel like.. I don’t *know*. If I think about it for *me*, it’s not going to be applicable to everybody.

I mean I think the questions about the future ‘what does a world — a liberated world or world of freedom look like?’ I think those are *really good* questions [laughs]. I want to know what other people think!

Just because my — I **don’t know if I’m like pessimistic or.. realistic or..not imaginative enough?**..I have dreams of one day, like I *want to write* a science fiction..book or novel or story [SS quietly: that be so *amazing!*], except I feel like I don’t have the skills to do it [MM and SS laugh]. But I want to do it on *aliens*! [SS: mmm] And I want it to be like a satire of of like the very *real..stuff* that I deal with in my research [policing, detention, and deportation] [SS: mm] And the world that we live in. I want it to be a *critique* of this world. Kind of like Octavia Butler’s critique..of race or sexuality using vampires¹⁰. Anyway, I think there’s a lot of creativity and out-of-worldness that comes out of the insecurity that people live in.. [...]

But I actually don’t believe in..

I dunno. I don’t think that I actually *can* do it on my own. I think I need someone else to help me write that book.

This is where I think my visions of the future are in conversation with other people. Like I don’t think I’ll have the capacity to ever sit on my own..and *write* something. I think I will always need to be in conversation with *people*. Of what that world looks like. So, when you asked me ‘**what**

⁹Meaning polyamorous, or having more than one romantic relationship/partner at one time.

¹⁰Referring to Octavia Butler’s (2005) *Fledgling*: A novel.

do you want me to ask people?’ I think I really [half laughing:] I really want to know what they have to say about the future. Yeah!
I think that that’s the — [more loudly:] otherwise it is a science fiction story instead of a real story! Yeah.

There’s not enough space to talk about, like **what are we creating together**, right? And, I think that’s where the tensions come. Because we don’t have – we’re not listening to each other. Um. And we don’t – we’re not imagining a world, where we’re all together, necessarily, intentionally [laughs].

We need these spaces to think and imagine with each other and
Not only seeing each other’s wants and futures, but seeing each other.. um, *in that* seeing each other supporting that

* * * * *

SS: what gives you hope? Or what might be some unique possibilities of our current moment to move toward justice that considers and values all?

[narrator as if straining to reflect:] **What gives me hope?**

SS [slowly]: Uh-huhh. (did I start to feel unsure about this question given all of our previous conversations? Hahaha)

[narrator exhales loudly]

SS: But I mean, it kind of is folded into what you have already said.

Yeah, I think that that’s really it.

Um. Yeah.

The thing that gives me hope is like the things and the actions that reconfirm like hundreds and hundreds of years of *struggle*. Right? Like that’s what gives me hope that that — whatever, even if we don’t get to socialism, like we’re gonna fucking *die* trying.

That is *not* what makes me think [animated/inspired:] “like, oh my God, yes!”

[SS laughs]

But, just the idea [pause]

the *idea* that people, *as a whole*, are *not* going to give up on trying to end inequality.

I think it’s not *hope* but it’s an impetus.

It’s like a sense of *duty* of like.. Right! **Like other people are not gonna give up and so why should I? Or why can I.. disengage from this?** Um.

And when there’s a vindication that happens — like there was a moment where I was demoralized that the group didn’t continue. Or couldn’t achieve certain goals. And then three years later, Abolish ICE is what people are talking about, and it’s just sort of is a moment of vindication of like ‘okay, right! I was on the right side of that.’ And it is gonna come back up.

I don’t know that I have the bandwidth for hope at this point, but [half laughing:] some sort of *motivation* is okay! [Interviewer and narrator laugh] like, I’ll take that!

Like, what even is hope? [Under breath:] At this point. Millennials do not know the word.

What gives you hope?

If anything?

I mean people are able to see how fucked up our life can be. And..not just like something happening far away or anything, but like our everyday life and—to our neighbors and um..how hard it is to get away,

how hard it is to pay the rent that keeps increasing. And uh..yeah how hard it is to pay for subway ride and um those things are getting more real and it's like a logical consequence of capitalism and because it's scraping down people's wellbeing..um—and then—it's like not able to make so much profit now. So that's coming down on people by like you know contracting, welfare, and health insurance, and benefits and social reproductive element of, you know, the idea of taking care of employees who have a right..

It's not like we are living in a great time..but at the same time we are able to understand the world more clearly. At least I feel that way. More clearly than, you know, early two thousands maybe.

SS: Yeah. That's a good point. Yeah.

Yeah. So that's useful. It's not a great time but it's useful to like—that we can talk about so many common problems in our lives, you know, not just migrant organizing but like 'yeah, the landlord is shitty. We don't trust him' and like it brings up so many commonalities within ourselves I guess, you know, like living a shit life [laugh].

SS: Yeah, yeah [laugh].

So we can fight back together.

I think we're in a place of a lot of opportunity, actually! [interview occurred in October 2018]

There's a lot of devastation

but we are in in a moment of a lot of — I think for a lot of folks —a lot of realization. So, I think it's up to folks to *organize*

and make linkages for people

and choose an alternative

There are always openings for exposing oppressive contradictions and arriving at different conclusions that change the course of those contradictions.

Hope is a very big part of my work [both laugh. SS: Mhm, mhm].

So..and what I aspire to is like, you know, moving beyond the nation state. Which is like.. I think about Indigenous movements who have been able to organize and like do things — like the Zapatistas — create something different.

The *earth itself* gives me hope. I've always been around plants. And just how much abundance and power there *is* there, you know?

And if we really change and shift the way we talk about what power *means*, then we can really see —[more tender tone:] then you can really see *hope* there, you know?

Yeah, I have a lot of hope. In terms of, in terms of helping people to find things *different*. I think that's where it starts.

[Pause]

And I've seen people have hope. And that's like..very, like..it just gives you [laughs] *a lot* of it too. And I've also seen a lot of people have a lot of despair. And that, that can be very *heavy*, you know? Yeah..

But, I think people have more hope than they think they do. I *think*.

But I don't know. I just think we need *share* ways..of *identifying* it.

People give me hope. Even if they're oppressive sometimes..actually.

Seeing people come together gives me hope. more people getting involved means I don't have to be the one to do everything. It feels more possible

SS: What do we need now for the future?

I don't know. I feel like like not forgetting is very important. I don't — I think first and foremost not forgetting..is very important. Like it's important for folks at a young age to learn history. To have a very strong collective sense of historical memory. Maintaining traditions and the ideals of liberation are very important.

That, I think, helps us get to a different place.

This is good exercise

—cause I don't talk about like what I think — how I face this thing that often, you know.

It's really important, it's like, I feel like it's part of self-care almost.

So, I really appreciate that.

3 | REFLECTION (POOL):

Thank you for taking a dip in this infinite ocean with me, with these radical thinkers. Below, I offer some lines that trace the dynamic of the conversation above, mixed with my own responses and interpretations, as well as my own shimmers of hope, picking up a narrator D's call to share ways of identifying hope for each other.

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We open with "I don't know"

"I don't know"

then space expands

then constricts.

I nudge encouragingly

And there is a bit more air

but it doesn't last long before the tether pulls us back to a more suffocated reality.

Spirals of overwhelm, fear, joy, dread, hopefulness and inquiry.

some calculations of the hard work it'll take

to be free

together

The 'I don't know' was also
an I don't know,

yet

They said 'I don't know'
but offered visions. Maybe they really didn't know,
in the moment

But these questions created a space to sketch,
add some color
on the spot.

Go somewhere new in real-time

To be clear, this is just what came up *today*.

Neither they nor I could predict where our thoughts and words would go or
where plots would twist

Maybe they managed to retrieve the hopes and desires they keep
tucked away in places they feel are safer to keep them than in their mouths
or running freely

Perhaps hesitant to dream because
Hope feels naïve
and naïveté feels dangerous

My surprise
that I asked about *wildest dreams* for the world they want
ready to travel to entirely new futures,
but the imagined worlds still had settler nations
and this US government
in their *wildest dreams*!

then,
landscapes birthed from dreaming of an absence
of what we no longer want from here and now
What we want to be free *from*

A barrier to dream of full liberation
is that it doesn't feelprecedented.
when colonial impact marks all the space on earth
and has made its way to outer space
so maybe not even the moon...

Grounded in the past and present

hesitant to stray too far from the pragmatic,
 because what it would take to materialize better worlds feels daunting...
 An optimism that wants to already tear for the weight of consequences.

An irony

that radical organizers — so often dismissed as too idealistic, as asking for too much,
 Told to just support the muffling reformist options
 that make spaces smaller, more deadly — but are sold as the **only possible**
 Yet, these radical organizers find it hard to even *dream wildly* outside of the pragmatic.
 dreaming turns into forecasting.
 calculating the trajectories from the past through the present into the future,
 as if pressing a ruler up against the known coordinates to calculate the probability of the next plot
 the probability of so much (more) death and violence ahead
 spiraling
 down and spiraling up

nightmares within dreams, and dreams within nightmares¹¹

believing we will see the end of prisons
 but because of expanded cyber custody
 Believing in a future with no settler borders
 but because the earth will erode them , devastating those who most suffer already

“So, it's not about imagining the alternate world outside of that but within it”

Realizing

What seems radical today
 May not be radical for tomorrow
 Remember, a world without borders, but also without prisons, without patriarchy is PRECEDENTED (to build on Tourmaline's (2020b) words¹²)

realizing

we're not asking for *magic*!
 Not even rocket science!
 Even as we jokingly ask if ‘hope’ is some kind of archaic slang
 “millennial's don't know the word.”
 neither pessimism

¹¹ Loren S. Cahill (2022), in her transgenerational oral history work with two radical Black male activists-organizers similarly found an oscillation between and coexistence of pessimism and optimism as well as many other varied feelings in their liberation visions. Cahill argues this is due to the ways narrators' situated knowledge and their Black radical imagination are in continuous conversation; and in this context, due to the inevitable dialectic between Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism (p. 33).

¹² Tourmaline, trans abolitionist activist and filmmaker, tweeted June 2, 2020: “The police have not always existed. In fact this slave patrol 2.0 is a relatively recent invention. So a copless future isn't only possible, it's precedent. We can dismantle systems designed to kill us. It's happened before. It's possible. It's precedent.”

nor the possible end of the world
 are reason enough to stop fighting.
 The future is unknown, but freedom-fighting
 gives life meaning.
 If need be,
 "we're gonna fuckin' die trying"
 that people won't stop, offers hope.
 the land offers hope.
 what gives me hope is
 that borders cannot contain liberation movements
 So borders already
 don't exist
 Struggle has taken down and transgressed borders since their fabrication

Remember, a world without borders, but also without prisons, without patriarchy is PRECEDENTED

*Knowing that time is not linear gives me hope.

That things don't need to progress in one specific way.

Things can be **entirely different**

Tomorrow

if we want it*

The oppressed, the looted have experienced their worlds ending. many times.
 Not everyone survives. And there is much to grieve, but also:
oppressive forces have not won!
 They cannot win.
 They rely on the oppressed
 but we do not rely on them!
 This gives me hope.
 What gives me hope is that
 we face the unknown while
 we are also the unknown. [Inspired by [this artwork](#) "Unknown"¹³ by Yumi Sakugawa]
 We are beings perpetually emerging and becoming. Capable of more than what we can imagine.
 And tomorrow, or five minutes from now, after we have done more things, spoken to another person, reflected some,
 our answer will be different. Our dreams will be different.
 These organizers' responses
 The 'I don't knows'
 the ambiguous dreams of *liberation as a feeling*
 wisely leave openings,
 portals,

¹³Image description of Yumi Sakugawa's "Unknown": a multimedia black and white, mostly line drawing of three beings ankle-deep in fluid looking toward a blurry dark portal floating in space in the upper right corner. This portal has a white/bright spot in the center. From left, the three beings are: a bigger being with an exterior that looks like it's melting, a naked human with long hair, and what appears to be a big spotted cat, perhaps a leopard. Below is simple text in all caps "THE UNKNOWN DOES NOT INTIMIDATE ME BECAUSE I TOO, AM THE UNKNOWN TO WHATEVER IS HEADING TOWARDS ME AS I HEAD TOWARDS IT."

a i r S P A C E

What gives me hope is that people will continue liberation dreaming
 Everyone who has ever been oppressed, exploited, looted
 has dreamt of liberation
 and their dreams inspired movement to materialize them
 (an impetus: a driving force toward action)
 They will continue to do so

And if we find ways to connect liberation dreams
 the way that mushrooms connect and communicate underground,
 dreams could grow
 become more vast,
 wiser
 more tangible
 deepening, becoming more possible,
 becoming
 reality
 over
 and over again

Robin DG Kelley (2002) proposes that dreaming must be collective. When offering thoughts about a dream world, he writes "I won't propose much more since the design and realization of such a space ought to be the product of a collective imagination shaped and reshaped by the very process of turning rubble and memory into the seeds of a new society" (p. 197).

These experienced, radical organizers similarly seemed compelled to add that
 we need/will have different forms of participation
 there are different needs
 (The need for open spaces, compassion, but also room for the opposite.)
 one framework will not work for everybody, including the same people for whom it works
 for some time.
 we'll forever need new understandings, new desires
 They change in/through conversation.
 We *need* to dream collectively
 because, otherwise, envisioning a future world alone
 means that world is likely to stay a science fiction story,
 trapped in one person's imagination,
 instead of becoming a real story.

Land

is a big part of this collective. various legacies of Black and Indigenous (again, not mutually exclusive) self-determination dreams are rooted in and are in relation to place, space, land (Cabnal, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Karuka, 2017; Daigle,

2016; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Mays, 2021; see also [The Black Land Project](#)).

What are the possibilities of liberation dreams intersecting at relationships to land?

How might we improve our relationships with each other through improving our relationship to land and vice versa?

How do we practice relations where consent and bodily autonomy are precious? — this includes bodies of living beings, bodies of water, terrestrial, celestial bodies.

And how do we not only coexist, but mutually thrive with all our relations? What is it like for reciprocity and generosity to come with ease?

*

4 | PRAXIS AND THE IMAGINATION

“Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless. (Imarisha, 2015, p. 4).

The dreams people shared kept shifting and growing, and would have continued to do so as long as the conversation went on. This active engagement with aspirations was an opening.

Taking action makes new paths,
action finds and builds new realms of the imaginable

Impossible things happen ALL The Time
that redefine what is possible
sometimes — often, we *make* those impossible things happen

There's no liberation without action, but action without imagination, just the same, cannot lead us toward liberation. Borrowing Robin DG Kelley's (2002) words one last time, a liberated space “[w]ill never happen without a struggle. Struggle is par for the course when our dreams go into action. But unless we have the space to imagine and a vision of what it means fully to realize our humanity, all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation” (pp. 197-198).

Giving shape, breath, and life to our liberation aspirations is a critical part of the praxis of fighting for liberation. what and where our Northstar is *matters*
it directly informs our actions, our understandings, and our sense of possibility.

Sitting with these narratives with a close look/listen/*feel*
my sense of temporality shifted.

Responses challenged my vague assumption that the conversation about liberation dreams would mostly take place in the realm of the future. However, narrators are bending time and timelines speaking through lessons from history, grounded in the present, while reaching for something they've “never seen” to bring it closer to the now. To get closer to that which has already happened tomorrow. They reminded me in a visceral way that liberation is not (only) a future affair. We are not waiting for liberation. It has lived and can live at any time.

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5 | MY FINAL OFFERING: PROMPTS REVISITED

Reflecting on the experience of asking people about their wildest dreams and sitting with the responses, I know this open question was generative, but such openness can exacerbate the overwhelm. So, I offer some more questions and prompts below that may be better able to scaffold this process of dreaming. I hope you/we keep reflecting on these and deeply listening and learning from each other's dreams.

In the future we keep learning _____

When do I feel safest? What does safety feel like?

Times-spaces I have experienced feelings of liberation, or moments I have felt full of life alongside others are:

Can you imagine feeling so much meaning and fullness and laughter in your life? And being supported in your goals and desires as well as in the moments where you inevitably do harm, or are harmed? But there is no more horrifying harm. Or at least not as prevalent as now. And our nervous systems are regulated and supported so they know only to be on red alert in emergencies.

Can you imagine the ease

And joy

Not only in little pockets between worries and stress and arduous work?

Can you imagine relationships with family and community members no longer negatively impacted by oppression?

What monsters of today do you want your children/niblings/grandchildren to only learn about secondhand, as history they will be appalled at and think unimaginable, but a history they will learn so that it will not repeat?

What would it feel like to live in a dream space?

What do I need to keep going?

Whose liberation dreaming do I need to listen to and learn more from?

I water my imagination by _____

I nourish these aspirations by _____

Following the provocation/invitation of narrator EJ that "we can just do it", what it is one thing you can work on today to materialize dreams or move closer to them?

Remember, there are already many other worlds within this world (from Indigenous worlds to worlds of struggle and

prefiguration).

Which ones are you creating?

What are two unimaginably¹⁴ beautiful and liberating things you can turn imaginable?

What can we *understand, imagine, do* differently to get somewhere else?

6 | CONCRETE

Contributing to the conversations in Awry² (Liebert, Lara, & Carlson, 2021), rethinking how we know, giving critical attention to knowing, unknowing, and knowledge production; playing with form in this way allowed me to better understand unknowing as site of knowledge production. To perceive the changing meaning of “I don’t know” throughout the conversations, and to understand its necessity and inevitability more deeply, especially with respect to desired futures. A liberation dreaming praxis necessitates leaving space for the things we do not yet know, and the things that need to remain open-ended, not rigid, not already fully formed. (I hope I have also left some pieces open to interpretation).

This form allowed me to explore the question: **what do these liberation dreams — originally envisioned and recorded in one-on-one conversations¹⁵ — look like and do together?**

Just as with the oral history conversations themselves, I didn’t know what the shape of this piece would take when I began forming it. It became this collage of excerpts that attempts to follow the dynamic, dialectic flow of the conversations. With information about tone, laughter, pauses, elongated words, volume, emphasis to convey how deeply emotional and unpredictable (to all involved) this part of the oral history conversation was. Sitting with the overwhelm of so many of these narrators also inspired me to continue crafting more specific prompts and questions that I hope we keep asking ourselves.

Looking forward to a less rigid future, less rigid dreams
 keeping them as fluffy and dynamic as the clouds
 as constantly transforming as water through all its states.
 May the conversation and action be never-ending
 May our spirits be nurtured, and relations healed through the cycles

7 | ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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¹⁴Donald Brown Jr. (personal communication, March 4, 2019) pointed out in our discussion of Rachel Liebert’s (2018) *Psycurity: Colonialism, paranoia, and the war on imagination* that in an online search, ‘unimaginable’ often has the connotation of extreme horror, and ironically, specifically horrifying realities we do not even need to imagine because they have existed; they have been *experienced*.

¹⁵With the exception of one oral history recorded with two people who organized together.

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