Afrofuturism, Womanist Phenomenology, and

The Black Imagination of Independent Comicons:

A Liberative Revisioning of Black Humanity

by

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ABSTRACT

The world of speculative fiction infuses the soul with the hope of the imaginary. My dissertation examines Afrofuturistic liminal imaginary space and the ways it is experienced as life-giving spaces. The imaginary and the aesthetics it births are formularies for art forms that speak to the hope of a transformed future. Speculative fiction, although in the realm of the imaginary, is an enlivened approach to express in the present collective possibilities and hopes of the people within those very imagined futures. During the past three decades, particularly, Black speculative fiction has been increasingly at the core of the new cultural productions of literature, film, horror, comics, fantasy, and music which tell the story of African descendant people. Afrofuturism is an analytic for exploration of the liberative revisioning of Black humanity in the face of persistent practices of structural injustice. My project presents the phenomenological exploration of Black Speculative Thought (ST) as it comes alive through artistic liminal spaces of Afrofuturist comic and science fiction conventions. I argue that Black imaginary liminal spaces such as Comicon Culture offer respite, renewal, and locales for creative resistance to thwart persistent alienation and nihilism of Black humanity. Furthermore, it is within these spaces where intersubjective agency can be taken up as a countermeasure to the existential realities and dominant hegemonic existences of everyday life. I examine the process, events, and experience of Black imaginary as it comes alive as potentiated hope for alternative futures. My intention is to marshal the theoretical specters of Critical Afrofuturism, Africana Philosophy, and Womanist Thought in this task.
DEDICATION

To the Ancestors and all the “Children of Those Who Would Not Die,”

living and yet to come.
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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION: LIVITY\textsuperscript{1} FOR THE SOUL

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

-Howard Thurman

“It’s Alive! It’s Alive!”

-Mary Shelley

“I have waited almost all my life to be able to come to an event like this and bring my grand babies.”

-2017 BSAM comic convention Attendee, 67 years old.

“This right here! This is Woke and What life is about!”

-Millennial Attendee at MECCA in Detroit 2017

The world of speculative fiction infuses the soul with the hope of the imaginary. The imaginary and the aesthetics it births are formularies for art forms that speak to the possibility of a transformed future. For people who live under conditions of oppression, the possibility of a transformed future is a necessary condition for personal and collective well-being. Speculative fiction, although in the realm of the imaginary, is an enlivened practice that expresses a sense of collective future possibilities. It embodies the hope of a livable future. During the past three decades, particularly, Black Speculative Fiction and thought has been increasingly at the core of the new cultural productions of the genres of literature, film, horror, comics, fantasy, and music which tell the story of African Descendant people.\textsuperscript{2}

This project is a phenomenological exploration of Black Speculative Fiction as it comes alive through artistic liminal spaces of comic and science fiction conventions. It is

\textsuperscript{1}The term “livity” arises out of the Rastafari spiritual belief system and practice of living to the fullest of one’s ability. I use it to connote the force of Afrofuturism as a way of life. From the start then, I am asserting that Afrofuturism provides livity to the African Descendant soul to come alive and thrive with a goal of living toward their human potential. See Bamikole, Lawrence O. "Livity as a Dimension of Identity in Rastafari Thought." \textit{Caribbean Quarterly} 63.4 (2017): 451-66.

\textsuperscript{2}Black Speculative thought is an inclusive term that incorporates all the multiple genres. However, Afrofuturism and Black Science Fiction are most prominent in Black Speculative Thought. Thus, despite the multiple genres and nuances that are alluded to, by both creatives and scholars alike, they each retain African descendant life at its center.
based on field work I conducted between 2017-2018. During that time I attend the following conventions: 1) The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) convention events, 2) the Black Age of Comics conventions, and 3) the Black Comic Arts Festival (BCAF). Prior to each convention, I did extensive research on the primary artists and works that would be present. During each convention I took extensive field notes, collected informational and artistic materials, and spoke with convention planners, creative artists (authors, poets, comic and graphic artists, producer of material culture etc.) and attendees.

**THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: AFROFUTURISM, BLACK SPECULATIVE FICTION, WOMANIST AND FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY, AND AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY**

The present work is grounded in Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Fiction. While these two terms are frequently used interchangeably, they are dual components of the same creative force. My interest is in understanding how Afrofuturism functions to create liminal spaces that create possible futures that make the present more livable for African decedent people who experience anti-black racism and white supremacy as a normal condition of their everyday life. I am interested in understanding the liberative potential of Afrofuturism. My goal is to examine the experience of engaging Black Speculative as it comes alive and is experienced as potentiated hope within Black independent fan conventions specifically (Henry; J. A. Gordon). My work utilizes the theoretical contribution from Critical Afrofuturism, Africana and Womanist thought (R. Anderson; Cannon, Townes and Sims; L. R. Gordon; Maparyan).
It is important to note that this study cannot be reduced to cosplay comic convention whimsy. While cosplay is an important aspect of comic convention activities and spaces, it is a single dimension that receives a great deal of paparazzi attention (Womack). My project examines the connection between the space and the experience and reaches far beyond the basic blinding glam of cosplay. I have found that these spaces provide a philosophical poetics that are life-giving. The public performance of cosplay is part of that, but the experience of attending these conventions cannot be reduced to the mere public performance of cosplay. Rather, a deeper analysis of the experience and motivation of fan space reveals how Afrofuturism functions as a catalyst that opens greater possibilities for livity.

African descendant people in the twenty first century are a part of ongoing speculative arts conversations that extends throughout U.S. American history. These conversations are intersecting dialogues that envision the future world in which African descendant individuals are full participants (Womack). African descendant people working in speculative fiction create a present that within the dominant culture is erased (Nama). The traditional canon of speculative fiction has often excluded any future for Black Folks. The arc of traditional science fiction was carved largely by White, Western, and male figures. These hegemonic patriarchal figures became icons and voices of speculative fiction for generations, with utopias sustaining whitewashed structural erasure of people of color. The

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3 Cosplay is Costume Play. When an individual plays out a character in dress appearance as performative art. There is great joy and fulfillment in cosplay. It is a significant part of fan culture at Comic Conventions. Cosplay Culture is an under researched lucrative and creative aspect of comic conventions.


5 Male dominated world of science fiction is interrupted by glaring exceptions to include classics such Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* or the groundbreaking Black Science Fiction writings of Octavia Butler in the twentieth century. However, the presence of women creators and other diverse identities that are prominently present in the early trajectory of science fiction and speculative literature are indeed rare.
imaginary landscapes in the genres of science fiction and comics, in the publications and films, were also curated by White men and a dominant hegemonic cultural narrative. The result were futures void of race and gender “problems.” The imaginary landscapes created through traditional science fiction not only erased the “problem of the color line,” but frequently any presence of African descendant people as well.6

The late twentieth century had a response to this elite imaginary dilemma: Critical Afrofuturism. The term “Afrofuturism” is a critical construct coined in the mid 1990’s by Mark Dery. Notwithstanding the recent coinage of the term Afrofuturism, Critical Afrofuturism as a construct within speculative fiction has its nascent beginning as early as the turn of the twentieth century.7 At that time, African descendant writers, both continental and in the diaspora, penned fiction to imagine a world where Black life was present and fully part of all that came alive. They imagined a world where they were present and reimagined historically vibrant African life worlds. These authors were the first to deploy Afrofuturism (though not yet named) as a critical analytic for social transformation. These authors utilized and a critical standpoint for creativity that arises out of the Black lived experience (P. H. Collins).

Critical Afrofuturism is an interdisciplinary approach to scholarly thinking that centers the worldview and lived experiences of African descendant people. The distinction of a Critical Afrofuturism lies in its focus on the examination of the Black experience of alienation and colonized subjectivity across multiple genres and practices (R. Anderson, 6See W. E. B DuBois’ Souls of Black Folk. This seminal work documents the narrative of the social constructions of race and the impact of racial formation as an entrenched social problem for the perspective of the “problematized” perspective as a Black being. See also early works which predate DuBois such as Martin R Delany’s Blake, or, The Huts of America published in 1859. It poses a creative contradiction to the White narrative absent of a Black presence.

7While “Afrofuturism” and “Black Speculative Thought” are often used interchangeably by scholars, this is not always the case and new differentiations are being made by contemporary scholars in an evolving and dynamic landscape.
Critical Afrofuturism: A Case Study in Visual Rhetoric, Sequential Art, and Postapocalyptic Black Identity; Bould). In the present work, I employ Afrofuturism as both an analytical hermeneutic and epistemological theory that informs the phenomenological analysis. Employing Afrofuturism in this way, I take into account the continuing evolution of the Afrofuturist artistry and scholarship, in order to explicate past, present, and future trajectories of the Black human experience.

Theoretically, I place Critical Afrofuturism in conversation with Womanist and Feminist Epistemology, and Africana Philosophy. My goal is to examine ways of knowing and being as embodied in the experience of attending Black comic conventions. I develop a Womanist phenomenology that brings to bear Critical Afrofuturism as a liberating hermeneutic for analysis of Black lived experiences.

In the remainder of this chapter I provide an overview of four key aspects of Critical Afrofuturism: interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, temporal and critical fluidity, and liminality. I then identify the research questions that guide this project, and a brief conclusion.

FOUR KEY ASPECTS OF CRITICAL AFROFUTURISM

Interdisciplinarity of Critical Afrofuturism

Black Speculative fiction and thought, Afrofuturism, and Critical Afrofuturism are all interdisciplinary projects. Each of these areas of scholarship has significant breadth and depth across several disciplines. Scholarship in the academy on speculative fiction has increased the larger discourse on Afrofuturism. Because Afrofuturism writ large examines the human condition of African Diasporic people, it provides a common basis for conversations by scholars of film and media studies, critical race theory, philosophy, cultural
studies, and others (Brooks, Addison and Morris; Quan; DeJuliis and Lohr). Critical Afrofuturism allows traditionally disciplinary conversations to be extended across disciplines in ways that feature the experience of African descendant people.

Critical Race Theory most significantly engaged Afrofuturism in the work of constitutional legal scholar Derrick Bell. His early creative work delved into constitutional law, race, and gender. Bell’s *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (1989) examined the historical injustices developed in the U.S. American legal system. In this creative work, Bell sends a time traveling critical race and intersectional theorist lawyer modeled on Kimberlee Crenshaw back in time to investigate racial injustice as it unfolded in the American legal system. One of Bell’s most impactful works is his collection of short stories entitled *Faces at the Bottom Well*. This work inspired multiple interdisciplinary conversations that included science fiction literary scholars, social science, and Africana Studies is Critical Afrofuturism. Bell’s work demonstrates the development of Critical Afrofuturism as a field, and also the importance of the Black Imaginary in addressing issues of social liberation and institutional injustice. I. Bennett Capers names this interdisciplinary scholarship as “futurist scholarship” focused on the serious engagement “with nascent and yet-to-be technologies with the goal of imagining the distant future, and law’s role in that future” (Capers). Capers further develops the connections between Afrofuturism and its commitment to African Diasporic reclamation, usurping structural alienation, and the critique of the American criminal justice system. Thus, Capers offers a vision of the future shaped by both Critical Race Theory and Afrofuturism.

Critical Afrofuturist projects that are in conversation across disciplines have produced several anthologies. Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman anthology entitled *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism, and the Speculative* (2011) entered the growing
conversation on the contours of race, gender, and identity in science fiction. This anthology brings together multidisciplinary voices to consider the genre in the contemporary context and its implications in science fiction. The collection further places Afrofuturism in conversation with pressing aspects of social issues such as ecology, queer theory, embodied representation of blackness in film, and politics of technology. While simultaneously keeping constant the pulse of the Black fictive imagination as a driving force for consideration, this anthology pushes disciplinary boundaries to engage in discourse which cuts through contemporary concerns in modern Black life.

The partnerships of academic spaces and artist convention spaces moves beyond the academy toward the production of space where Afrofuturism comes alive. These new linkages are an important step in the evolution of scholarship. John Jennings and Reynaldo Anderson are exemplars of occupying multiple locations of the conventions and the academy. They both had significant roles in co-founding conventions such as the Black Comic and Arts Festival (BCAF) and Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) Conventions respectively. They developed these events while publishing and teaching in the traditional academy. John Jennings is a professor of Media and Cultural Studies and a Cooperating Faculty Member in the Department of Creative Writing at the University of California, Riverside. Jennings collaborated with Damian Duffy to produce a graphic novel of Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred*. This work recently won several awards, including a Bram Stoker Award.8 Reynaldo Anderson is an Associate Professor of Communication and Chair of the Humanities department at Harris-Stowe State University in Saint Louis,  

8The Bram Stoker Award is a literary award given by The Horror Writers Association (HWA), the premier organization of writers and publishers of horror and dark fantasy for "superior achievement" in horror writing. It is presented at a mainline comic convention. In this case, it was presented in 2018 at StokerCon in Providence, RI for *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* (Abrams ComicArts) by Damian Duffy and Octavia E. Butler.
Missouri. He is the co-founder of the BSAM Comic Conventions along with grassroots activist and producer Maia “Crown” Williams of Detroit. Anderson’s prolific scholarships and anthologies in Afrofuturism have invigorated the emerging and highly interdisciplinary conversations within the academy.

These interdisciplinary projects create contexts in which Critical Afrofuturism can be taken up as a specific standpoint. Thus, Afrofuturism is an inherently interdisciplinarity project that creates innovative lenses for the creation of art, literature, and music. This creative work then generates a critical and interpretive lens for scholars. Afrofuturism is ultimately situated as a movement that creates convergent contexts for different art forms and scholarly work. These multiple forms of Afrofuturistic expression allow both practitioners and scholars alike to interface through diverse modes of expression and production that become demarcated as Black spaces.

Organized efforts to gather scholars across disciplines have increased since the turn of the twenty-first century, and this is another exemplification of Afrofuturism’s interdisciplinarity. Over the last decade there has been a marked increase in the number of conferences and colloquiums focused on futurism generally, and Afrofuturism in particular. Concerns for the potential futures of diasporic peoples have created a convergence of scholars across disciplines. Academic professional organizations such as the American Academy of Religion, the Caribbean Philosophical Association, and the National Women’s Studies Association are only a few that have directly deployed calls for papers featuring Afrofuturism over the past five years.

Critical Afrofuturism and Intersectionality

In Critical Afrofuturism individual historical situatedness, culture, identity of race, class, and gender converge. As a result of these intentional convergences, intersectionality is
sometimes taken for granted or presumed. However, an intersectional analysis of science fiction and speculative fiction makes way for multiple axes of analysis to be pursued. Intersectional analyses include a focus on gendered racial coalitions, psychosocial behaviors of women, sexual representations, feminist masculinities, political economy of race and gender, and/or racialized hyper-masculinities (Ginn). Afrofuturism engagement around gender affirms sexual identities, disrupts destructive gender norms, unmasks heteropatriarchy, and debunks ecclesiastical patriarchy in creative ways. Afrofuturism offers not merely the insertion of the presence of gendered issues, but re-visions them in novel ways through active reconsiderations of race, class, social location or other identities that are operate collectively within society to negate the humanity of African diasporic people.

Gender is often where the conversation on intersectionality begins, however in the sphere of Critical Afrofuturism and fan culture, themes of personhood and identity move into new areas of inquiry such as racially gendered complementarity, economics of gender and race in the art world, liberative sexual practices, and/or access to convention experiences as limited by biases and bigotry in the science fiction and comic convention industry. While these may appear as specific, they can also be taken up as broader issues of intersectional power dynamic forces that arise (are alive and well) within or shape the existence of Afrofuturist spaces.

Afrofuturism pushes back on the pervasive negation of personhood and offers a revised paradigm for one’s identity. It does this through an analysis of the power dynamic operative upon Black lives in Black Speculative Fiction. An intersectional approach allows for an analysis of the persistence of cultural, racial, ethnic, and social inequalities. It also allows one to delve deeply into the complex human power dynamics as they are revealed through the imaginary and temporal. An intersectional approach moves beyond questions
of representation in film and media, and also questions the adequacy of simply offering diverse images. An intersectional approach to Afrofuturism shifts the focus from merely additive efforts to substantially altering the landscapes where structures that exclude and marginalize African descendant people are maintained (Nama). Through revealing these complex power dynamics, an intersectional approach empowers individuals by allowing them to situate themselves within the narratives or art forms.

The focus on the intersectionality of Afrofuturism shows how the practices and art works produced within Afrofuturism wrestle with and is fueled by the matrix of social and cultural power. (Collins and Anderson; Crenshaw). Intersectionality reveals how participants respond oppositionally when the pressures exacted by dominant social and cultural dynamics create the experience of dissonance. This is important because for those who live daily in contexts of oppression, their own experience of dissonance and belief in their own humanity is frequently deemed invalid. Afrofuturistic spaces are spaces that provide respite from dominant culture’s complex tensions, while celebrating the intersectional identities, character, and representation within Black Speculative Fiction productions.

Intersectional Womanist “ways of knowing” allow for distinct epistemological engagement with Afrofuturism (Floyd-Thomas). Afrofuturism often works in concert with the Womanist ideals of community care (male and female), the consideration of matrix of identity, temporal situatedness of personal and collective histories, and an emotive expression for music, arts, and star gazing. All of these are all generative aspects of both Afrofuturism and Womanist epistemology (K. G. Cannon; Maparyan). One of the greatest contributions of Womanist scholarship to Afrofuturism is its critical analytical mode through which it analyzes the historical impact of power dynamics in society. Womanist epistemology
also offers intergenerational emphasis that envisions a past, present, and future that is untethered to White dominated definitions of the Black self (Sanders; M. A. Coleman).

Womack and Nelson argue that Afrofuturist space is Black Feminist space because it demands a future where race and gender are both recognized as mechanisms of oppression. This is important because the biases of the dominant cultural world can be at play within Black liminal spaces. Yet they are often accentuated with cultural norms, mores, and historic residues of oppression all pruned by the tensions inside and outside the spaces.

The socio-economics of independent convention culture is an important feature to feature in an intersectional approach, especially in the context of fan culture. For example, financially, attending conventions is an ongoing personal challenge for individuals with limited financial resources. The costs of travel, housing, and meals are deterrents to attending national conventions on any level. However, the increase of local conventions and grassroots pop ups allows for a decrease in many expenses. Therefore, local families, who may otherwise not attend, can go to a smaller ingathering or popup event in their city instead of a convention hosted in a major metropolis such as Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, New York, or San Francisco. Local independent comic conventions are important because they make attendance more economically accessible. There is more yet to be addressed in the area of finance and economics of conventions.

Economic considerations are also at work for independent artists who must maintain primary careers, often awaiting their “big breakthrough,” while on the convention circuit. The personal expenses, struggle for sponsors, and family considerations are aspects of the

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9 All too often gender biases are given a pass within Black spaces as to make allowances to not “Bring the Black man down.” This causes harm to the entire community, male and female by enabling masculine oppressive behaviors to be bypassed or accepted. Providing room for misogynoir to thrive in what is already a systemic hegemonic world for Black women.
artists and producers that have yet to be explored. Lastly, there is a high cost and personal time commitment involved with cosplay. The personal and financial resources required to formulate, create, and attend conventions can thwart participation and expression of the Black presence in science fiction and comics, but can also simply deter attendance at conventions altogether.

Temporal Dynamism and Nonfixity of Afrofuturism: Past, Present, and Future

Afrofuturism is fluid and dynamic, both in definition and deployment. It is fluid in that it expands and contracts along with the ebbs and flows of Black diasporic life. In this ebb and flow, the narrative of a Black speculative imaginary in science fiction and literature becomes an interpretive marker for generations of new writers. Afrofuturism allows for this imaginary to reclaim lost or erased voices, histories, and artistic forms, and enables the construction of new ones that constitute the fullness and dynamism of Black life.

Early in this task there were literary artists, musicians, and cultural savants of the Twentieth Century who retold the African narrative from this lens. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe’s trilogy of novels attacks the history-less Africa narrative prevalent in Eurocentric thought. The collection cut through the historic erasure of Black Africa prior to imperialism and colonialism and re-members Africa in all its complexities (R. Anderson). Things Fall apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960), and Arrow of God (1964) sequence of novels are Afrofuturist voices in that they are reclaiming the past, deploying an African centered voice in the present.

Another place to see the fluidity of time is in films that take up the challenge of temporal flux. The dynamism of critical Afrofuturism can unmistakably be seen in the film Sankofa (Gerima). It has been critically acclaimed as a historical piece of identity and connection to heritage. Moreover, the film lays bare the importance of the journey through
time in efforts to ground one’s personal story and comprehend collective memory of the past. Other films such as Daughters of the Dust, Roots, and Django Unchained have all operated as epics of historical retelling of the African narrative through time and spatial constraints of Western impulses (Dash). Time shifting and re-memory are significant factors to reclaim cultural history through storytelling and artistic forms (Morrison).

Sharee Renée Thomas argues that Afrofuturism is “having a moment.” In “moment” she is suggesting that the current release of cultural production such as films, texts, and music in the public sphere, has made defining the character of Black Speculative Thought as a social movement, one which is dynamic and fluid in that it is beyond space and time (Fitzpatrick, “It's Not Just Black Panther”). The concept of Afrofuturism for everyday people is more pliable and now easier to access in today’s cultural climate. Not that it is a new convention or critical perspective, as articulated earlier, but that there is a current quickening, and with it comes an opening to the lives of on the ground folk. Anderson in his edited interdisciplinary anthology, Afrofuturism 2.0, argues that the current quickening in technology, in addition to other forms of digital arts, is giving Afrofuturism a new vibrancy overall. In this sense then “Afrofuturism 2.0” is a readily developing, shifting, emerging technology of expression as a modality for interpreting of the current times. John Jennings identifies Afrofuturism 2.0 as a form of “technologies of storytelling.” He contends that Afrofuturist storytelling is itself a technology of social change holding potential to rescript future narratives of everyday life (K. A. Brooks 238). Jennings further makes an argument for Afrofuturism as a method to temporally correct past narratives and historic atrocities, in

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10 Anna Julia Cooper points to the concept of Sankofa in the dawn of the 20th century when she speaks of going beyond mere memory and the recovery of the past. The perspective of Sankofa, according to Cooper, compels a present consciousness and action for future lived actualization of the past and future hopes.
In its critical form Afrofuturism, advances from merely a merging of technology and Black life as it was in the emergent 90’s quickening impulse of the digital age, to an interpretive storytelling form of technology that has the potential for social change.

A notable example of a new mode of Sankofarration is Jennings recent work with Damien Duffy on *Kindred* (Butler). Duffy and Jennings retell the neo-slavery time travel novel by Octavia Butler as a graphic novel. In doing so, they offer new accessibility to contemporary readers, while redeploying an important work in the Afrofuturist canon (D. O. Duffy). Critical Afrofuturism, in this vein, is a platform to express counter stories of race, gender, and other forms of oppression. It offers a critical lens framework to reimagine the past, in the present, that foments a future with a commitment to social justice and challenge to hegemonic ideologies.

*Liminality: Afrofuturism, Black Spaces, and Places of Joy!*

The many ways in which set aside spaces, affinity space or third space manifest are legion. One distinction I am making is that the Afrofuturist liminal spaces I am asserting are not mere gathering spaces, but functional spaces that hold an intentional purpose of fueling life-giving endeavors in the face of the death-dealing reality of dominant culture. Also, the liminal space is neither a confoundment of the dominant culture, nor does it offer the possibility to set up a new existential reality for long term living. These spaces are temporal and necessarily so. Participation in these artistic spaces is a choice to deliberately engaged without the pretense of not returning or residing in an imagined world, but rather with the

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11 Jon Jennings refers to this temporal Black thought and praxis as an act of as Sankoforation. He is combining the West African philosophical notion of Sankofa, reaching back into the past in the present to secure a better future with narration and story as a technology for social change. Panelist, Tucson Book Festival 2018, Tucson Arizona.
possibility of gleaning hope of finding new ways to navigate the larger negating dominant world more effectively (Herman).

Not to say that these are not also the result of making space in the face of the myriad of dominant cultural external forces. Indeed, they are. They are the result of consciously chosen spaces that Africans in the diaspora have forged over centuries for self-preservation and communal affirmation. These have taken the form of gatherings, events, activities, or meetings that are set apart out of necessity. Examples of these vary (Lerner; Shaw).

One such example, the hush arbor rituals were sacred hidden midnight gatherings by enslaved Africans. They were examples of gatherings to subvert the power and domination of the church structure in the slavocracy of the American South. Many enslaved Africans held worship and ritual gatherings to affirm their personhood and craft their own spiritual agency apart from the White gaze of oppression (Raboteau).

Another example of hush arbor type liminal space were the community meetings during the Modern Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century. These meetings were often strategic planning meetings for protest or activities to fight a given injustice. They happened in church basements, lodges of Black civic organizations, or perhaps in private homes. The goal was the same—to gather in space away from the White gaze and in safe solace from threats of intimidation or harm (Garrow). They met in liminal private spaces to procure a sense of safety as well. The constant physical threat and intimidation of violence toward black embodied participants present were real and palpable (Fair Burks).

All Black spaces today are not private, and not all Black spaces are safe, and not all Black spaces are life-giving. Absolutes are not the driving agent here. These factors are however, possible outcomes and elements that are experienced in liminal spaces. It is the possibility of those outcomes that hold potential to reshape the potential purpose and utility
in future context to operate as sites of agency and intracultural agency for the empowerment of Black life, individually and collectively.

The articulation of liminal space as sites of renewal and resistance is a critical theoretical trajectory toward the development of the self in relation to human experience. Reflexive inquiry of the self within liminal spaces, which augments the rise of personal awareness and liberatory experience, is an operative affect of Afrofuturist phenomena (DeIuliis and Lohr). The individual experience of liminal space that focuses on the empowerment of the individual’s own affinity community directly addresses the internal residual nihilism and systemic oppression (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*). By offering an alternative to nihilism, it offers an emotive affect which affirms the self in relation to community and culture. In short, it enhances Black joy and awe within spaces of affirmation of the Black embodied self.

The work of Ortega is important to the conversation on the liminal space as self-aware space. They are not, according to Ortega, sites of resistance singularly, but require movement past what is gained to do the work of resistance (Ortega 134). I contend that the temporal nature of liminal Afrofuturist spaces and projects therefore allows for this type of self-awareness that pushes the moment of consciousness toward personal joy and awe (Yarbro-Bejarano 11).12

The development of Afrofuturist spaces necessary to engage in discourse and dialogue among artists and academics alike resurfaces in the early 90’s. Practical beginnings of Afrofuturist space occurred in formal and informal spaces for intellectuals with the rise of

the digital age. Alondra Nelson’s early work to carve out alternative Black space provides an excellent example. In 1998 during her graduate years, Nelson initiated a cyberspace Afrofuturism dialogue which was comprised originally of a listserve and developed into a rich community of artists and scholars. This effort led to the launch Afrofuturism.net in 2000. The project culminated with a special journal issue of *Social Text*, demonstrating the shifts of locale, and import of innovative scholastic inquiry for Afrofuturistic work (Yaszek).

Another important contribution of Afrofuturistic spaces is that they are not merely a convening of community dialogue and collaboration, but also one that is unapologetically Black. Black spaces then allow for a creative of ways of knowing and being that are pliable and unbounded; that is, in fact, lived fully Afrofuturistic (Yaszek). Afrocentric literature, scholarship, and production locales become mediums to unapologetically articulate the experiential reimagining of racism, heterosexism, or classism and other “ism schisms” into new formations and possibilities in the present age for people of African descent (Anderson).

Sociologist and Afrofuturist scholar Alondra Nelson writes that “public discourse about race and technology, led by advertisers… was preoccupied with the imagined new social arrangements that might be made possible by technological advance (A. Nelson).” The new social arrangements favored here are the insidious White dominant desires void of Black bodies and the race problem (DuBois; Morrison).

The race problem is not erased, rather it is embraced. The persistence and survival of the race is certainly another point of cohesion where theory comes to life. Afrofuturism flips the script on nihilism and the persistence of racism, an issue which certainly is not resolved (Bell) It is an important shift in the creation of multiple sites in order to fuel resistance and liberation.
Liberative experiences, within a temporal context, are what Afrofuturist liminality offers to those who dare to enter these distinct spaces. It is within liberative spaces that historically subjugated bodies and psyches thrive in new milieus of personal hope with a vision for a better future (Bourdieu and Wacquant). Hope in the unseen can offset the duress of the persistent personal lived experience as it grinds at the intersections of gender, race, and socioeconomic disparities. These types of affirmatively life-giving experiences are where liminal spaces act as a counterbalance, and in some cases, counter memories to the personal and collective climates of nihilism. In sum, in the dissertation, I will unpack this key tenet of my project, Liminality of Afrofuturism. There are historical, theoretical, and practical experiential implications for consciousness and meaning making of the existential Black self I contend that these spaces offer.

TWENTY FIRST CENTURY BLACK CONVENTIONS: CULTURAL INGATHERINGS AS ENGAGED PRAXIS

My project focuses distinctly on the experience of being in Afrofuturistic spaces. I am concerned with Afrofuturistic literature, art, music, and film to the degree that they fuel those Afrofuturistic spaces. The influence and impact of these art forms within the Afrofuturistic spaces I am studying is substantive and creates a common context for the experience of these spaces (Hunter). These contexts create a space for the vibrancy of Afrofuturism to engage the individual and the community in connections with Independent Comic and science fiction conventions.
There is a long tradition of Black Arts in the Americas, the Diaspora, and on the continent of Africa. The comic and science fiction conventions were birthed as spaces where are artists, fans, and other creatives could convene and share in the fullness of Black Speculative Fiction (Collins and Crawford).

One of the earliest in the 21st Century is The East Coast Black Age of Comics Convention, Incorporated (ECBACC, Inc). The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) is said to have emerged after the groundbreaking exhibit, *Unveiling Visions: The Alchemy of the Black Imagination* co-curated by John Jennings and Reynaldo Anderson at the Schomburg Center for the Study of Black Culture in New York City. It ran from October 1 to December 31 in 2015. These two scholars along with several others have done much to build the broadening bridge between the convention arts community and the now significant scholarship emerging in publication. The Schomburg Center’s Black Comic Book Festival continued into its 6th year this January. It was augmented in 2015 by the historic exhibit. The second part of this convention developed in San Francisco in 2013. The 4th Black Comix and Arts Festival (BCAF) was the final site of research for this research project. The two consecutive events are held on the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday weekend as a part of an intentionally linked event between New York and San Francisco.

Intentionally crafted spaces such as speculative art festival can include, but are not limited to, comic conventions, digital spaces, or science fiction reading circles. They are places of engagement and praxis. These events help to shape critical theories focusing on the importance of not only shifting theoretical cartographies, but also creating spaces where

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13 The Black Art movements of the Twentieth Century from the Harlem Renaissance, to the global Negritude Movement, to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s and 70’s, to the Afro Punk and Pop culture shifts of the 1980’s and 90’s were all undercurrents of social movements of the periods and manifested those social issues and concerns in the creative productions of their times. Afrofuturism is no different.
the artistic and academic can flourish (Birt; L. Westfield). These specifically culturally crafted spaces emerge outside of the dominant gaze of the hegemonic culture in which anti-black racism flourishes (McKittrick). These spaces enable the advancement of potentiated hope. They are both real and imaginary and they create spaces of livity for those who dare to dance in the *Black Imaginary* (Gates, Diedrich and Pede; Russell).

Black Imaginary spaces are the result of intersections of the identity of fan, the fandom, the artist, and the intentional creation of a space to ruminate on the potential of the Afrofuturistic ideal. These spaces inform and reconstruct cultures and histories as liminal spaces that are more than spaces set aside in the face of dehumanization. Rather they create new cartographies of culture, race, and gender that take up the challenge to envision a world that moves from the liminal to the concrete world experienced in our everyday lives. Afrofuturist Comic conventions function in this way. The private, everyday life of individuals vary greatly, and no one person will come away from an Afrofuturistic convention with the same experience. However, these interstitial imaginaries of Afrofuturistic conventions offer safety and healing for personal expression and wounds of the mind, body, and spirit that inevitably go along with living within an Anti-black world (Copeland; Henry).

**Research Questions**

This dissertation addresses on the following questions:

1. When and how is Afrofuturism a salient perspective through which to critically examine contemporary conditions of lived experience for African Diasporic people?
2. How does Afrofuturism create, and utilize liminal spaces? What is revealed in the liminal spaces created by engagement with Afrofuturism?

3. When and how does race and gender in speculative fiction shape the lived experiences of those who engage in temporal imagined worlds?

4. How are Afrofuturist spaces life giving in the face of the existential social oppression experienced daily as embodied Black people? In what ways do these liminal spaces offer livity and meaning to survive and thrive with joy and anticipatory hope in the face of persistent systemic human indignities of everyday life? How do these spaces promote futurity and cultural sustainability for African descendent participants? (What happens when the thrill is gone?)

Addressing these questions helps us to better understand how Afrofuturistic spaces create opportunities for cultural, social and personal well-being that are in direct contrast to the constant stressors that people of the African descendent people face by living within the dehumanizing norms of anti-black worlds. Afrofuturist spaces offer strategies of life-giving and affirming personal identity not available elsewhere, and they offer tools to navigate pathways of personal and collective liberation when Africana people leave these spaces and enter the daily lived world again.

**RESEARCHER AS PERSON: MY BIOTEXT**

In order to do a phenomenological project, one has to examine the self and engage in deep reflexivity. Radical or “deep reflexivity,” as I am calling it, forces the writer, researcher, or scholar to abandon objective lenses and acknowledge their biotextual worldviews and the complexities they bring to any project or discourse they are undertaking.
A deep reflexivity on one’s biotext or life narrative, situates the individual within their research not as an objective participant observer, but as a self-aware informed participant in a study. Moreover, I find personal reflexivity on my intersectional ontology helpful to not universalize my own experience, but rather as an exemplar of other similar Africana women striving for a lived future with themselves at the center.

My biotext as a scholar starts like many others I grew up with in my community. I come from an African Diasporic working-class family. My maternal family were Virginia sharecroppers who came up North during the depression (Wilkerson). My mother was a domestic by the time of my birth and had several “hustles” to survive in the inner city of Newark, NJ. My paternal family were Caribbean American hustlers and musicians that migrated to the US long before I was born. Yes, I’m an UpSouth girl who was raised in urban blight of the 80’s (Griffin). For many it was a hopeless time. Hopelessness and a cycle of poverty ruled the crack filled streets of public housing, reinforced by redlining and economic disparity. Community elders, librarians, and those unique mentors or teachers who saw a spark in me kept me safe and sane. I learned to dream and hope as a way of life. The iridescence of hope was ingrained in me through spheres of education, women’s mentor organizations, and faith communities. It was a Black radical imaginary, before I could name it, that sustained my survival (Kelley). My journey has led me to Afrofuturism as an analytic of hope and a multivalent vehicle of expression. And so, I look back, fetch what I need, to yet begin, again.

**CONCLUSION**

Afrofuturism comes to life as it travels across multiple kinds of practices and spaces. Afrofuturism functions like conceptual compass that extends from the academy to artistic
practitioners, to the everyday life of the fan, and the experience of the casual convention attendee. The spaces create at comic conventions, art expos, and culturally themed conferences create a space where liminal Afrofuturistic experience manifests. Afrofuturism as a phenomenon cultivates meaning for those who enter social milieus where it is the central context. It is not marginal. It then offers an opportunity to examine the embodied impact upon individuals who have otherwise been at the margins of the society they live in (hooks).

This work is situated within the Black radical tradition of critiquing racial capitalism, social inequity, and the various modalities of opposition linked to vestiges of slavery. It is a counter force to neocolonialism in scholarship, and it is a commitment to Womanism and my coalition of feminist foremothers who taught me to do “the work my soul must have” both as a confessional Womanist Theologian and a Black Feminist scholar (K. G. Cannon; Cannon, Townes and Sims; A. G. Johnson; Quan). Critical Afrofuturism is that work. It is a revolutionary approach that taps into our imagination, and “at its core values the power of creativity and imagination to reinvigorate culture and transcend social limitations” (Womack 24).
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The plumb line I am drawing through the notion of liminal space and comic con conventions is Afrofuturism. A review of the genealogy of Afrofuturism is important groundwork for my project. It allows me to unmask the Eurocentric dominance and peculiarities of science fiction and futurist thought. This excavation work additionally lays out the historical situatedness of the current artistic practices and rapidly emerging scholarship in the speculative thought by African descendant artists and scholars. Although the present project is not a historical project, it remains important to identify the historical thread of critical scholarship, which has woven the current fabric of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Thought in our current age.

In what follows, I review key works in the areas of Womanist Epistemology, Africana philosophy, and the emerging Afrofuturist canon. My goal is to provide a brief, but robust, understanding of previous work and show how this study fits into the ongoing conversation in current scholarship. In addition, this review important points of confluence between semiotic phenomenological and Womanist Africana Philosophical work. This confluence features the knowing, being, and doing that occurs in the midst of Black liminal space.

The term Afrofuturism was officially coined by Mark Dery in the 1993 essay “Black to the Future.” However, like many other nascent constructs within public discourse, the concepts were long present in the continuum of theorizing about the Black lived experience (Dery). Dery defines the complex thickness of the Afrofuturism as a lens. He writes:

14 Womanist ways of “knowing, being, and doing” is most recognized as a part of the tradition developed by Ethicist Katie G. Cannon. Epistemology, Ontology, and Ethical Praxis are core to Womanist thought.
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
impassable 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 (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee
experiment, and tasers come readily to mind). (1993, 736)
The twentieth century “problem” of embodied Blackness for White hegemonic dominant
culture is compounded in complex ways when understood in the modern matrix of power
and the resulting oppression. The problems of the twenty first century are, in fact,
problematized personhoods considering their constant negation of by them social structures
and systemic inhibition of progress. The unseen “force field of intolerance” is the layered
power pushed back by an Afrofuturist worldview and experiences. Central to my argument is
the significance of phenomenon which allows for worldviews to be re-shapped a new through
Afrofuturist engagement by individuals of the African Diaspora.

It is important to note that this study centers on the impact of Black Speculative
Fiction and thought as it comes alive through experiential engagement in comic convention
culture. Therefore, this study requires a multi-disciplinary approach that includes literary
criticism, work in film and media studies, pop culture, and theater studies. All of these areas
of scholarship have made significant contributions to the cultural analysis of literary works
of speculative fiction (Bould; Burnett; DuBey).

Along these lines, Sherryl Vint offers a discursive literary analysis in her reading of
Beloved and Kindred as fantastic neo-slavery texts. Vint examines disembodied personhood
and time travel as Afrofuturist tropes which challenge the existing antebellum slave
narratives (Vint). Another example of this approach would be Lisa Yaszek’s Afrofuturist
examination of the historical trajectory of Black Science Fiction. She examines Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* as a central text in Afrofuturist literary history. As such, she further takes up the task of situating literary history of science fiction and the distinct works which depict Black life and Black alienation, found in early seminal work such as Martin R. Delany’s novel *Blake or the Huts in America* (Delany). Delany’s publication of the 1857 novel and the later 1904 speculative novel *Light Ahead for the Negro* by Edward Johnson are certainly the earliest articulation of Afrofuturist texts which take up time travel, racial hierarchy, revolution and the potential of a racially egalitarian future (Capers).

Another North American genealogical starting point for Critical Afrofuturism could perhaps be traced to a recent historic find. An unpublished short story “The Princess Steel” by W.E.B. DuBois’ was unearthed at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst’s archives. Written in 1908, it poses as one of the earliest short story speculative fiction pieces of fantasy. It is an example of writing embedded with historical futuring of the potential for Black life in America (W. Du Bois). Prior to the unpublished draft of “The Princess Steel,” Du Bois published the short story titled “The Comet” (W. Du Bois). The latter is a long-recognized piece of early speculative fiction grounded in the Black imaginary, which addressed the lived conditions of Black life and the struggle for equity and liberation; a trademark operative in DuBois’ literary works.\(^\text{15}\)

Other significant early writers took up the challenge to depart from merely musing of fictional ethnography and shift to an imagined world of speculative fiction. These writers

\(^\text{15}\)My use of two distinct spellings here, DuBois and Du Bois, though minor, is important to at least take note given the significance of scholarship of the author. Early manuscripts use a space between “Du” and “Bois,” later texts and contemporary usage do not. The space, or lack of, is indicative of the source and not of my own input.
include Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Chinua Achebe, or Richard Wright, to name only a few.

An important voice in this growing speculative fiction canon are the significant works of Samuel Delany. His award-winning speculative fiction novels spanned four decades and consistently stared into the lived reality and complexities of Black life. Moreover, late twentieth century critical legal theorists, such as Derrick Bell and Patricia Williams, delved into imagined futures based on the negation and nihilism of Black humanity.16 A new generation of artists, filmmakers, authors and cultural visionaries have begun to forge new ground. Film makers such Ava DuVernay, Ryan Coogler, and Jordan Peele are each giving voice to possible worlds and re-visioned worlds of African descendant people. A cadre of Black female authors such as Nnedi Okorafor, N.K. Jemison, Tananarive Due, Nalo Hopkinson, Nisi Shawl, Karen Lord, and others, including Octavia E. Butler (often considered the mother of Black SF), have made significant literary contributions to the new emergent landscape of the early twenty first century.

The Afrofuturist music trajectory cannot be underestimated in its sustained impact and evolution. It is through music that Black life gets narrated and imbued with themes of cultural reality and horrors. Jazz artists such as Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix, and Sun Ra carved new pathways for other Black sonic futurist musicians such as George Clinton, Erykah Badu, and Janelle Monáe to take up themes of possible worlds that are decidedly, technologically Afrofuturistic. These sonic techno-artists each offer challenges to the narrative of funk and cultural production (M. Fisher). Moreover, artists such as Monáe offer a new generation of discourse to the genre by shaping a contemporary Queer

Afrofuturism, where positions of race, gender, and sexuality or desire are celebrated within a Black discursive identity and are not easily separated one from another (Colmon; Valnes).

Mark Bould’s contribution to the discourse on early Black literature is a critical voice on Black Science fiction and speculative fiction development. Adding to the conversation on literary exposition of speculative fiction, Bould’s essay “Come Alive by Saying No: An Introduction to Black Power Science Fiction” deciphers “the cycle of African-American novels from the 1960s and 1970s concerned with staging a black revolution.” In a subsequent essay he extends this examination of Science fiction novels as instruments in the struggle for Black life by looking at Delany’s Blake (1859), Pauline Hopkins, Of One Blood, or, The Hidden Self (1903), and George Schuyler, Black No More (1932) and Black Empire (1936-8), among others, as “precursor texts” In them he contends they lay out the early Black voices of the struggle or agency and autonomy. He writes:

In such moments, space-times enfold, knot, become strange, resonant, pertinent. Memory and anticipation become entwined in the present moment. The future, shaped by recollection and anticipation, rewrites a past that reshapes the future. And these precursor texts, even if it is impossible unquestionably to establish lines of influence, thus play a part in the black power sf cycle, as memories, rumors, tributaries, possibilities… (20)

Isaiah Lavender’s edited literary anthology, Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction in 2014 brought together voices on contemporary issues of colonization, race and political economy, biopolitics, genetics, technoscience, migration, indigeneity, and pedagogy (Lavender). Reynaldo Anderson’s deconstruction of Sylvester James’ racial queer

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17 The original article shortens “Science Fiction” to “SF” in the title.
performativity as Afrofuturist spectacle brings together an examination of cultural critique of speculative fiction and a salient voice on the queer culture (R. Anderson). Anderson’s approach moves past Yaszek in that he is emphatic on the import of the digital age as a paradigmatic shift in Black Speculative fiction. Anderson’s collective works and BSAM projects and exhibits, I believe, represent a shift from the literary to the lived material culture.

These are paradigmatic examples of important examinations of literary or cultural critical approaches to Afrofuturist contexts. Central here are the embodied experiences conveyed through these works. Their impact as Afrofuturist sources inside of science fiction liminal space moves beyond discourse to lived engagement. While cultural and literary critics certainly have paved the way for scholarly discourse, I believe we must also wrestle with theoretical and philosophical questions of experiential significance and praxis.

The human dimensions of space shaped by Afrofuturism extend beyond the literary examination to the very transformative human nature of the subject at hand. The impact and lifegiving aspects of an atmosphere driven by the presentation of literature, artistic productions, and varied contextual contours makes the material culture living legacies which come alive.

A prominent voice that speaks to this in the contemporary conversation on the experience of Afrofuturism is Ytasha Womack. Womack defines Afrofuturism as “the intersection between black culture, technology, liberation and the imagination, with some mysticism thrown in, too,” that can be expressed through film, art, literature, or music and essentially helps to “reimagine the experience of people of color” (Womack).

Similar to Womack, sociologist Alondra Nelson situates Afrofuturism as an emerging critical perspective which tethers technology, popular culture, and scholarship
distinctly through Afrodiasporic histories (Nelson). Likewise, according to Yaszek, over the past three decades Afrofuturism developed into a “coherent mode of critical inquiry” as an art form and intellectual project (Yaszek). Thus, it is both a generative mode of production and an emergent tradition beyond an aesthetic or subgenre of science fiction alone (Yaszek; Anderson). It is through this emerging perspective, Nelson argues, that new cultural productions can open space to craft critical social reflection through multiple art forms.

**On Cultural Productions**

Material and cultural productions are the material outcomes and the social capital produced and exchanged at Science Fiction and Comic Conventions. Simply understood, it is the speculative productions and the tangible items created from them such as music, books, comics, films, television shows, posters, or art. Fan paraphernalia multiple genres of speculative fiction are components of the material culture found at comic conventions. What shapes the materials are the genres of Black Speculative Fiction which has become a world unto itself. The Afrofuturists subgenres are similar to genres other of dominant speculative fiction, yet they are nuanced and recenter the focus on the experience of people African descent. Genres do not define the project, yet they shape what is “in the room” for any gathering or event. Genres ultimately aid in understanding the environmental parameters to cultural materials and production within these unique spaces.

Venturing into the ever-evolving genres of the Black imaginary is a journey that is far from finite. The depth and breadth of the canon of Black Speculative Thought (ST) continues to expand, constantly absorbing, then naming new genres, and creating new modes of expression. As a broad umbrella these include, but are not limited to, literature, music, art, performative arts, comics, horror, fantasy, and science fiction. Additional
subgenres within these that are specific to the Black experience can also include Diesel and Steam funk, Blaxploitation, Blacktastic, Black tech, Sword and Soul, or Afropunk (Haynes). Marcus Haynes lays out effectively the growing subgenres in Black speculative fiction and thought.  

The basic framing of genres is based on thematic and artistic content. An example is the genre of Rococoa. The term, coined by Brian L. Barron, is a subgenre that focuses on Caribbean pirate historical fiction. Its perspective is from the experience of those of the African Diaspora rather than European conquest and plunder narratives. All genres that deploy Critical Afrofuturism, therefore, are not all science fiction based, but rather have the Black experience at their center.

Afrofuturism, I contend is the driving the material cultural construction of Black ST overall. Hence, it is an operative force in the fusing of atmospheres and places of artistic production into which it breathes life. While subgenres are ever changing and expanding, what is important are not the nomenclature or categorization, but what is produced to expand the conversation on Black life. The debates on subgenres and where they fit in the larger landscape of speculative fiction and thought rage on. The significance for my work here is how they come together in shared spaces to convene and give life to the Black imaginary; how they come alive.

For example, one exciting genre evolution to note is the growing Afrofuturist horror genre at comic conventions. From horror novels to new film productions, Afrofuturist Horror was an unexpected and regular presence at the independent

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18 It is important to note a few scholars place Afrofuturism as only a subgenre to Speculative fiction. I contend instead that it is the driving theoretical construct of Black ST overall. While, White science fiction writer, Robert Anson Heinlein coined the term, the fluidity of its use by Black scholars and artists in the twenty first century is broad and culturally grounded in their own context.
conventions. The genre critiques the social realities of the horror present in daily Black life. They address and imagine the horror of the macabre in Black life in new innovative ways (Brooks, Addison and Morris; E. Young).

Another mainstay genre that takes its role as an alternative to the convention room is Afrofuturist film festivals that frequently, but not always, accompany the lineup of events at the conventions. For example, at both Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) conventions and the Midwest Ethnic Convention of Comic and Arts (MECCA) convention film festivals were simultaneously running to the exhibition of vendors, artist activities, panels, and workshops. *Array* films, an imprint/line of Ava Duvernay, was the film festival production series at MECCA for 2018. This is important to note given MECCA is the only convention hosted by a female convention producer, Maia “Crown” Williams.

Overall, the importance of the project here is how the genres “show up” and are present specifically at comic conventions, science fiction ingatherings, and other experienced events such as film festival or popup conventions. The spaces where the genres show up and are means by which they are experienced play a nuanced but critical role, more than focusing on the genres themselves.

**Womanism and Womanist Epistemology**

Womanist *ways of knowing* or Womanist epistemology takes seriously the primacy of lived experience as the theoretical basis of knowledge and research. Emilie Townes foregrounds this in her research on Black women in social movements and ethical praxis. She contends that their lives function as social witness to the history and knowledge that it bears (Townes).
Womanist epistemology contributes to the ways of knowing through lived experiences that uphold communal care and support the well-being of “entire people; a male and female (Cannon; Walker). Womanist “ways of knowing” perceives and knows from the standpoint of the experiencer. It then further takes into consideration intersectional gendered lenses of experience as an act of communal care.¹⁹ My study is an examination of the world African descendant science fiction and comic conventions from a womanist standpoint of the experiencer. More specifically, it troubles the racial and gender dynamics within convention space as a liminal space demarcated as cultural affinity space (L. Westfield). They are convened with affirming ethnic and cultural interests in mind. As a self-professed Womanist, I take up the task using womanist ways of knowing which critically examines the ways that race, gender, social identities are operating within the spaces I occupy (Cannon). It is in line with the concept of epistemic privilege or epistemology of the oppressed (Gutiérrez).

**Philosophical Literature Review**

The most prominent influence on the project from this canon are Lewis Gordon, Franz Fanon, Paget Henry and Jane Anna Gordon. Philosopher Lewis Gordon provides a foundation in existential phenomenology that interrogates and relativizes the lived Black experience. Moreover, in concert with Fanon, Gordon’s scholarship unpacks Fanon’s construction of racialized alienation, the two provide both a contemporary voice and historical contextualization. Both thinkers build the scaffolding to fully interrogate and dismantle White Supremist Patriarchal Capitalism’s insidious cleavages in culture and

remnant on the lives of African people. Temporal theoretical space and physical space are components in my analysis. Theoretically Africana Existentialism offers temporal escape or liminal marronage for those who want to resist and seek freedom away from the neo slavery and neoliberal context of the twenty first century’s White gaze (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*).

This longing for escape from sociogenic reality of oppression is what drives the need to tell a different story and narrate life in a way that is affirming in a space that does the same. It confirms that in the African narrative of history there are narratives of elation rather than only negation that must be brought forward. Thus, it expands the conversation the Sankofarration, a distinctly Afrofuturist mode of analysis that which confronts the White social imaginary by creating its own narrative through a Black Imaginary.

In contrast to daily encounters of Black alienation and colonized subjectivity, I argue that Black comic conventions provide Counter Spaces of affirmation in contrast to the persistence of daily demeaning White gaze, present both in larger society and mainline comic convention culture. Merleau-Ponty aids in expanding of the Africana conceptualization of place and space, while also upholding the import of embodied experience to the complex cleavages of a person’s situatedness in society. One must experience these alternative spaces of elation in the context of the intersubjective share African Diasporic history.

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21 John Jennings in his private interviews and public lectures articulate an Afrofuturist usage of the West African, Ghanaian Philosophical concept of Sankofa. San-ko-fa which in Twii, a language of the Ashanti, literally means "to go back and fetch it." In philosophical terms for people of the diaspora it refers to a return mental, physical, or cultural return to that which was valued in the past. It is an active re-memory act of restoration in the face of the struggle of life.
Although there is debate on assertion that the White gaze in spaces of dominance and degrading subjectivity, in liminal Black space, the subjective gaze is shifted (Yancy). Alcoff articulates this precisely when she identifies the importance of allies and instead affirms the importance of communities with common identities, coexisting experiences, and shared concerns where the focus is on intra-communal rather than external (Alcoff). The common experiences allow for epistemic transmitting of information and wisdom in order to survive and thrive in environments that otherwise negate their very being. Afrofuturist spaces galvanize the shared wisdom and knowledge. In small and large ways, it thwarts the presence of the White gaze and replaces it with a communal gaze and an internal awareness of the self (Alcoff).

Individuals and communities seek out spaces, real or imagined, created apart and away from the daily onslaught sociogenic cultural and racial alienation. The reality of socially weaponized space is what drives the desire for space which possess the possibility to create an internal corrective to sociogenesis potentiated hope (Henry). Not all Black spaces are forged with well-being in mind. Rashad Shabazz reminds us that institutionalized and structurally bound spaces limit and negate Black ontology and well-being (Shabazz). As respite from these types of institutional and death dealing spaces, Afrofuturist carved spaces emerge. They are only temporary. They are not to be understood as fully utopian. They can be marred with cultural imperfections that are residuals of dominant cultural reality. However, Afrofuturist imagined spaces offer temporal life-giving hope to weary travelers in a world that attempts to decimate hope through real experiences of racism, sexism,

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22 I am giving a nod here to the struggles of the production teams that must fight for resources and funding to host such events. Additionally, the dearth of gender should not pass as an understatement this remains a challenge in the business overall and the convention production leads specifically.
xenophobia, neocolonialism, and capitalist heteropatriarchy (to name only a few of the) structural social demons weaponized against Black bodies.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature relevant for the present project. Critical Afrofuturism is in conversation with these thinkers and concepts related to the struggles of Black life today. Bringing these three areas in my research offers distinct approach to the study of Afrofuturism. My research is grounded in Womanist and African Philosophical traditions that explore the embodied Afrofuturist experience at the independent comic conventions as a phenomenological research project. This is an innovative way to study a space that has the potential of operating as an agent of social and individual affirmation and transformation.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PHENOMENOLOGY, AND WOMANIST AND AFRICANA LIBERATIVE THOUGHT

This study uses phenomenology as its research methodology. Phenomenology is both a “theoretical perspective concerning the nature of human existence and an applied research procedure for explicating the features of human existence” (Martinez, 2000, p. ix; see also Lanigan 1988). Edmond Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the modern founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2000). Over the past century, phenomenology has developed greatly both as a philosophy and as a research practice. Over the last three decades in particular, scholars of color have made important contributions to phenomenology. The work of Linda M. Alcoff, Lewis Gordon, Sarah Ahmed, Mariana Ortega, and Jacqueline Martinez are notable. The work of these authors, among others, has expanded phenomenology beyond its traditionally Eurocentric rootedness (E. Husserl; Merleau-Ponty; Zahavi).

In the present work, I combine phenomenology with Africana philosophy (Gordon, 2000, 2008) and Womanist epistemology (Cannon, Coleman, Floyd-Thomas). Taken together, these three approaches provide a coherent theoretical and methodological grounding for my study. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the complementary relationships among these methodological perspectives.
In what follows, I begin with a discussion of phenomenological methodology. Next, I discuss the theoretical groundings of Africana philosophy and Black Feminist thought philosophy as they dovetail with phenomenological methodology. Last, I discuss how Womanist Epistemology contributes to my methodological approach.

**Phenomenology as Methodology**

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience. Phenomenology focuses on lived experience because it recognizes that anything that becomes meaningful in the world of human beings happens directly through our experience of it (Martinez 11). Phenomenological methodology offers a formal and systematic process through which to investigate meaningfulness as it emerges in lived-experience (Lanigan; Van Manen 77). At its most basic level this involves a three-step process of 1) description, 2) reduction, and 3) interpretation.

Meaningfulness is a consequence of consciousness. How we come to make meaning is dependent upon what appears within our conscious awareness. In order to study this
directly, phenomenologists study “intentionality,” or the “directedness of consciousness.” It is important to note that “intentionality” is a technical term and must not be confused with our ordinary understanding of “intent.” “Intentionality” is a function of consciousness that occurs at a pre-consciously and/or unconscious level. It “directs” our consciousness toward things that we then come to experience, and then come to awareness of. Husserl’s famous dictum, that “consciousness is always consciousness of…,” means that consciousness is always directed toward a “what,” that consciousness always has a content, or that toward which it is directed. It is this “directed towardness” that phenomenology studies.

Afrofuturism provides a very specific “directed towardness” that is otherwise not available.

The first step, phenomenological description, involves describing experience as it is experienced. The goal here is to describe experience in its immediacy without embellishment. In order to do this, one must bracket or set aside one’s taken-for-granted presuppositions about the thing being studied. This process of bracketing or seeing aside one’s taken-for-granted presuppositions is called “invoking the epochē.” Phenomenology recognizes that it is never fully possible to set aside all presupposition, and recognition of this fact must be formally taken into account in the research process itself.

For the present project I performed the descriptive phase of phenomenological research by describing what I experienced in the convention setting itself in as much detail as possible. My effort was to focus on what I experienced as it appeared to me. This requires description without explanation of what appears to me as I participate in the conventions. It requires detailing my experience without laying on additional meaning. This record of descriptions is extensive. It includes my experience during the pre-conference planning, and the actual conferences. It includes my engagement with the digital world of advertising and information gathering, and all of my experiences in planning and then attending the events.
During the events themselves, I took copious field notes related to my experience of the space, the people, artifacts, and the many conversations I had. I collected and studied the work of the many artists whose work was featured at the conferences. Taken together all of this constitutes the “noema,” or the “what” of the study. It is my research “capta,” or “that which is taken (and is distinct from “data,” or “that which is given.” (Lanigan, 1992). The full set of capta used in this research is beyond presentation in this document. It includes several notebooks of field notes, over two hundred images, and a collection of “loot” or cultural production materials that take up nearly ten cubic feet of space. Therefore, Chapter Four details the “reduction” phase of the research, and Chapter Five details the “interpretation” phase of the research).

The “noema” or “what” of experience is only one part of what constitutes phenomenological intentionality. This is because for every “what” of experience there is a corresponding “modality of experience.” This “modality of experience” is known as the “noesis,” or the “how” of experience. For example, every participant attending a comic convention will experience roughly the same “what” of experience. The venue, the artists, the lectures, the products displayed and sold, all constitute very similar contents of experience. But not everyone will experience the “livity” or “potentiated hope” that I am studying in this project. Afrofuturism isn’t merely a content of literature, art, or public display. Rather, Afrofuturism creates the potential for a modality of experience that can radically alter one’s sense of self, others, and the world. The Afrofuturist liminal space offers a unique potential for experience. It is that unique potential that I have focused on for this study.

The second major phase in phenomenological research is the reduction phase. The reduction phase explicates the noesis, or the “how” of the experience described in the first
stage of research. As I reviewed and re-reviewed all of my research capta, it became clear to me that my experience emerged through a structure like that of a liturgy. There is no doubt that this structure arose from my own perception as a womanist ethics and Black churched woman (Frederick). It therefore made sense to use the formal structure of liturgy as a way to explicate the features of my experience attending the Comicons. Using the structure of the liturgy during the reduction phase of the research provided an intermediary step through which I could examine the experience itself.

The third stage of phenomenological research is the “interpretation” phase. This phase involves explicating the “essential structure” of the phenomenon under study. The word “essential” here must not be understood as invoking an “essentialist epistemology.” Rather, phenomenological “essence” has to do with the potential for experience as it is enabled through consciousness. For example, I may come to identify an “essential” structure of “potentiated hope” and “livity” for participants in Afrofuturist Comicons, but that is not to declare that everyone in attendance will actually experience these phenomena. Instead of predicting behavior or experience, phenomenological research investigates the conditions through which particular experiences become possible. Thus, the third stage of research provides a deeper understanding of how experience comes to emerge as it does. It does not declare the existence of a particular reality.

The key to the third phase of phenomenological research is explicating the relationship between the noesis and noema. Figure 2 below provides an illustration of the relationship between the noesis and noema. It shows the basic phenomenological
construction of the correlation between the noema, what is being experienced and the Noesis, the way or mode of the experience.\textsuperscript{23}

Figure 2: Basic Correlation of Noesis and Noema

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Basic Correlation of Noesis and Noema}
\end{figure}

In this figure we can see that the noesis is “the light,” and the noema is “the lit.” We can imagine that if the noesis or modality of experiencing was “feeling,” then the noema would be “the felt.” In this case, “feeling” could be tactile, as in texture, hardness, temperature, etc., and “the felt” would then be a physical object in the world.

Phenomenological intentionality, then, is the correlation between the noesis and noema. This correlation constitutes an essential structure of the phenomenon. Afrofuturist Comicons provide a “light” that enables much to be “lit” for all of those who attend. But when those participants are African descendants, the Afrofuturistic Comicons create the potential for

very different kind of “lit” that is unique to this cultural group attending these cultural events. Afrofuturism operates as phenomenological intentionality.

Another crucial aspect of phenomenological methodology is “imaginative free variation” (Ihde 23). Using imaginative free variation involves switching various aspects of the experience around in order to see it anew from different perspectives. It was this use of imaginative variation that led me to use the liturgy as an initial structuring device for my capta.

Phenomenology is dynamic and synergistic. Each stage of the three basic steps in the research entails the other two. It is impossible, for example, to describe experience without it already being in the past. And, the moment we attach a linguistic description to a lived experience, that experience becomes structured by the language we use. Because it is impossible to escape this predicament, phenomenology uses each of its three steps recursively. Although the research presented here shows distinct steps in the process, in actuality, the process has involved a tremendous amount of going back through each of these steps in a dynamic and synergistic way.

The application of phenomenological methodology is thus also recursive. It is not a linear process. The recursive aspect of the methodology helps bring focus to the ways in which Afrofuturist experiences ebb and flow within the immediacy of the lifeworld. This allows for a focus on the interconnectedness of the many moments within the experience. A phenomenological analysis of these interconnected moments helps reveal the modalities of engagement at work during the convention events. As the phenomenological analysis proceeds from the reduction to the interpretation stage, it shifts from a focus on the noema, or the what of experience, to the noesis, or the “how” of experience.
Phenomenology allows for a qualitative subject of one: the researcher herself. It is driven by the experiencer’s consciousness as socially, culturally, and historical situated (Lanigan). In this project I am the “interpersonal agent in a social context” that will take up the task of thematizing and interpreting my experience of Afrofuturist spaces of comic and science fiction conventions. The phenomenological process itself, guards against the idiosyncratic or solipsistic. It cannot, however, completely eliminate them. It can only be by virtue of my careful application of the research procedure that I arrive at a phenomenon that is truly shared across a given cultural group.

Phenomenology alone does not in and of itself seek to usurp or disrupt hegemonic colonial structure of oppression, but it can be used to explicate hegemonic structures of colonial oppression. More importantly, however, phenomenology can be used to explicate how hegemonic structures of colonial oppression are being usurped in the experiences of particular people attending Afrofuturist Comicons. In this way, phenomenology can help expose both how those colonial structures are at work, and how they are successfully usurped.

In my view, phenomenology is what Christie Dotson calls a “survival rich” methodology.24 It offers ways to see circumstances that stifle the survival and livity of African Descendant people and reveal aspects of what are shared phenomenon. It also allows to see how African Descendant people have been able to move past simply surviving to thriving, past the blight of the larger dominant culture that is plagued by vestiges of

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24 Kristie Dotson is a Black Feminist Epistemologist. The notion of an act or method as “survival rich” allows for it to then operate to impact the lives the subjects being studied. She articulated this while on a panel at the National Women’s Studies Association Annual Conference in 2016. “Re-Introducing Identity Politics: Notes on a Decolonial, Black Feminist Praxis” She explains decolonial projects in a U.S. settler colonial society and the roles identity plays in imagining decolonial futures.
subjugation and dehumanization of the raced and colonized, and toward ontological wholeness (V. Anderson).

**Africana Philosophy and Black Feminist Thought**

Africana Philosophy and Black Feminist Thought makes important contributions to studies on gender and race in historical and contemporary contexts. These areas of study are crucially important in revealing how White-supremacist patriarchal hegemony are maintained across generations. The present study of Afrofuturism is situated within the dominant culture that has retained a White-supremacist patriarchal hegemony across generations. From within this general cultural context we find the specificity of liminality of Black space and the potentiated hope it fuels. The project here is situated within this understanding of liminality of Black space and thought (L. R. Gordon).

The fact that this study is located in Black space is critical in that the space itself is shaped by individuals who have been subjected by the dominant culture, and who have sought to actively alter the knowledge created in that dominant culture. In the case of the African descendent subject who participates in comic and science fiction conventions these are spaces anchored and shaped by *their own* engagement and lived experiences. The participants not only are a part of the creation of knowledge, but the fueling of their own experiences of *livity*—life giving experiences that makes them come alive. Black science fiction and comics conventions are spaces where producers of new knowledge created. By engaging these spaces with a keen awareness of how they have been subjected by the dominant culture, many African Descendant participants use their own experiences and worldviews to produce cultural artifacts (i.e. comics, art, film, etc.) that reflect a very
different cultural world. It is within this decidedly Afrofuturism context of science fiction and comic conventions that these possibilities for new cultural worlds are created.

**Womanist Epistemology**

Womanist epistemology is a liberative project that features a first-person perspective. I combine Womanist Epistemology African and Black feminist philosophy with phenomenology to create an Afrofuturist critical lens (Oduyoye; Turman). This lens augments my movements through the three major steps of phenomenological methodology. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the total body of capta I collected for this project is beyond representation in this document. But, as I reviewed all of my capta, I saw patterns emerging that looked and felt very much like a Womanist liturgical ethics. It seemed obvious, then, that I should use this liturgical structure as my initial phenomenological reduction. Doing so allowed me to present a “narrative” of my experience that was faithful to the totality. I used a Womanist liturgical ethic to articulate a phenomenological reduction of Afroturist liminal space.

**Sites of Study: Black Speculative Arts and Comic Conventions**

My field research was done at three central sites. They included three branches of the Black Speculative Arts Comic and Arts Conventions. These are culturally specific conventions where multiethnic fan, producers, and artists intentionally gather. The digital and personal spaces generated in the lead up to these conventions are also components of my experience and research. I address these digital spaces first, and then describe the physical spaces of the conventions themselves.

Digital spaces operate as spaces for artists to share and promote their work year-round. These are important to discuss, not as research sites alone however, but as a part of
the ongoing connections cultivate within the Black speculative arts community worldwide. They act as relatively safe spaces for fans, artists, and producers to share ideas, debate and collaborate on projects. Funding for many creative projects are a constant pursuit, so digital spaces are one way for independent artists to see funding kick starters and go fund me efforts.

The digital age allows for a support network of artists and fans alike. The digital networks allow for an ongoing exchange of ideas. They are the locales for communication of talks and lectures, conferences, conventions and pop up one day events. Facebook, Instagram, Tumbler, and YouTube are primary instruments of digital communities that have powered the wave of the early twentieth century. Now two decades of digital venues connect the Afrofuturist community on the podcast, video series, or weekly Facebook watch parties to name a few. The digital sites are points of connection in my research and provide me with ongoing communication of events, pertinent notifications, almost daily updates of new projects, events, and articles on current developments in the field.

Digital spaces can exist outside the mainstream also fit the constructive understanding of community. They include web forums, blogs, social media sites of Twitter and Facebook where participation and community building occurs. These are more than posting and sharing locales, but mentoring and professional development occurs across level of advancement in the industry. Collaborations are developed, mentorship, grooming and critical evaluations occur, and new projects are developed within these digital spaces (Lackaff and Sales).

The three major conventions for this study include 1) The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) convention events, 2) the Black Age of Comics conventions, and 3) the Black Comic Arts Festival (BCAF). Each of these convention branches are ethnic and racial
affinity conventions that are curated by artist and producers from the African Diaspora. Each have grown in the past decades to have multiple sites and convention dates throughout the year. These events host vendors, have subject specific panels, and promote the art and new productions.

The Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM) has several branches that host conventions around the globe. The first of these branches, in a global city tour for 2017, was the Midwest Ethnic Convention for Comics and Arts (MECCA) held in its based city of Detroit. The other events under this same banner are now in Toronto, Montreal, St. Louis, Washington D.C., Berlin, Houston, and Atlanta. I attended Detroit and Toronto. BSAM takes a broad perspective of Afrofuturism. They describe Afrofuturism as “a creative aesthetic practice that integrates African diasporic, metaphysics, science, and technology.”

As I attended each of these conferences, I focused my interactions with others on their engagement in alternative spaces of Afrofuturist conventions and the effect of experience. I was able to talk with the founders and leaders of the conventions I attended (BSAM, MECCA, BCAF, and Motor City Black Age of Comics), and asked questions about their motivations for the creation of these spaces, and how they first conceived of them. I also asked them what these events meant for them personally and professionally, and about their future plans for projects.

In this chapter I have identified the methodology used in the project. I have described the three basic steps of phenomenological methodology, and I have identified how it dovetails with Africana Philosophy, Black Feminist Thought, and Womanist

Epistemology. In the next chapter I turn to the phenomenological reduction, which uses a Womanist liturgical ethics as a structure to organize my research capta.
CHAPTER FOUR

PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION USING WOMANIST LITURGY

Community Accountability: Womanist Ethics contends that what you write has to matter to the Black community and contribute to “the well-being of the entire people; male and female.”

-Katie Geneva Cannon

“What She Say? Afrorwhat… Oh Wakanda Forever”
-Church Mother at Tanner Chapel AME Church

The Cultural Context of the Phenomenological Reduction

The last months of my field research for this project coincided with the months leading up to the opening of the Hollywood blockbuster film Black Panther. For months prior, during academic elevator speeches and community conversation around my dissertation topic, I stalled when trying to make plain the phenomenon I was studying. I struggled to explain what it means to talk about Afrofuturism and liminal space as an experience. Afrofuturism was often a little easier for the folk to grasp. News clips and articles on National Public Radio (NPR), and segments on mainstream television increasingly discussed Afrofuturism and its impact in everyday life (Glass). I received notes from colleagues and family friends asking me, “is this was the Afrofuturism stuff I was talking about?” I appreciated the clips and articles they sent. I soon realized that we were in a vibrant time in pop culture occurring across America.

During this time there was an acceleration of science fiction projects involving writers, creators, directors, and actors from the African Diaspora. These included projects such as Star Trek Discovery, Get Out, Hidden Figures, and A Wrinkle in Time to name only a few. There was, it seemed, a collective public cry for Hollywood to depart from racially tokenized representations of Black folks, and marginal presence in artistic production. Activism within the film industry created greater inclusion across all levels of production from costume
design, to actors, directors, and musical scores (Mandell). Despite all this, in the months leading up to the release of Black Panther it remained a constant struggle for me to explain the importance of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative fiction. However, after the release of the film worldwide the challenge to explain the phenomenon changed.

When I was asked by someone in my own cultural community what my dissertation project was about, I would simply ask “Did you see Black Panther?” If they said, “yes,” I’d quickly follow up with “Did you see it with other Black folks?” As soon asked that question a sense of knowing quickly followed. Frequently, the person I was speaking with would take a deep breath full of the feelings that came with their viewing of the film. Then, they’d go into a description of their experience watching it. I came to identify these descriptions, no matter what part of the movie they described, as a shared “Black joy” in the midst of the film. In that moment I would stop them and say, “That’s what my dissertation is about, that feeling of awe and affirmation.” They would light up and instantly get it. In that moment they understood the affective aspect of the liminal experience affirming Black space, and an Afrofuturistic journey. In the case of Black Panther, that Afrofuturistic journey was a journey to the fictional Wakanda.

The experience of “Black joy” fueled by the engagement with the Black speculative arts of music, science fiction, fantasy and more is what my project hinges on and is all about. “It’s all about” the life-giving nature of entering into spaces that center and affirm one’s humanity. So, journey with me not to Wakanda, but to the twenty first century of Black Speculative Arts Conventions. Perhaps, just maybe, the Black Joy will be contagious.

It was during this period following the release of Black Panther that I began the reduction phase of the research. In what follows below I begin by discussing a Womanist liturgy in general. I then use this liturgical structure to present the reduction phase of the
phenomenological research process. This reduction constitutes the “noema,” or “what” of the experience.

**Liturgy as Structure in the Phenomenological Reduction**

Liturgy is the communal order of events in public worship within a sacred community. The Greek origin of the term is *leitourgia.* It is a secular act of communal accountability for those tasked with civic responsibility to the populace. The sacred meaning of liturgy, worship and ritual practice are particular to religious communities. There is a chasm of time and culture between the Greek origins of liturgy and the modern Black Church. In general, the sacred rituals found in Black mainline worship experiences, in predominantly, but not limited to, Protestant Christianity have distinct cultural practices (Floyd-Thomas, Floyd-Thomas and Duncan). These have retained Africanism in the United States and other parts of the Diaspora, and this allows for crossover among a larger range of African Diasporic Religious traditions (Murphy; Pinn). For my purposes here, liturgy is a sacred communal gathering which promotes the practices as necessary for an embodied sacred experience and inspire an imagination of the soul.

I use the term “liturgy” in a secular sense, as a communal cultural practice that has familiarity and can create experiences that are transformative. The structure of the liturgy can therefore be seen in secular cultural contexts. Today, there are Black cultural liturgies within secular rituals that bind the community in ways that provide individual uplift, cultural inspiration, and affirmation of humanity (Kirk-Duggan). This is the kind of liturgical practice I am using to structure my capta into a set of experiences from which I can explicate the noetic and noematic correlations that constitute phenomenological intentionality.
A Womanist Liturgical Ethics

The shape of Black liturgy in the secular practice parallels that of the sacred. The communal aspects of liturgical rituals are familiar to the participants. Liturgy becomes a way of processing the familiar components of cultural spaces, while simultaneously, transformation of the individual occurring. Black independent comic conventions are liturgical liminal locales that create a commonly shared experience. This commonly shared experience offers new possibilities for seeing and understanding that are carried back into the everyday realities of one’s life.

This understanding of Black Comicons as liturgical spaces allows for a new way to conceptualize the space from a Womanist perspective. Womanist thought asserts as imperative the importance of separate space for the health of communal wholeness (K. G. Cannon; Walker). Liturgical space in this sense is set aside from mainstream Comic conventions. It is a unique site that creates well-being for the entire community; it is liminal Womanist space.26

Womanist embodied liturgical theory offers the possibility for the alternative practices which promote communal wholeness and justice. Alternative activities in worshipping communities are not limited to traditional religious ritual practices. Embodied liturgies are enfleshed where people are and extend to practices within gatherings where spirit, hope, and faith converge (Copeland). The body or flesh that participates within a liturgy connects to spiritual experiences that are life-giving and Divine. As such, in the context of a

liturgical experience, embodied experiences offer the potential of a transformative experience, for both the individual and the community (M. W. Costen).

Black religious scholars assert that liturgical experience extends beyond the religious and also moves into the community, both sacred and secular. It is important to note the prevailing discourse of Womanist scholars, such as Katie Geneva Cannon, affirms the sacredness of life generally, and the sacredness of Black Women’s lives in particular. Therefore, acts of ritual within the lived experiences of Black Women are read as sacred practices (Cannon). I extend this to all Black life as sacred text to be read as everyday experiences possessing sacredness in their humanity (White). Liturgy, in this broad definition, can then occur anywhere in Black life, not just in the confines of brick and mortar edifices.

I am focusing on in the communities in the United States that are comprised of African American people of Black African descent and of the African Diaspora. I focus on these communities because they are shaped by what historians call the peculiarity of their experience into a peculiar people (Creel). African descendant people’s cultural practices are shaped by multiple factors of their historic experience. Bellow argues that prominent factors which shape the distinct and peculiar experiences include 1) African traditions and retentions, 2) Black Church - Biblical God and God’s people), 3) the U.S. experience – Middle Passage, Enslavement, Island/Latin influences, segregation, integration and struggle for liberation; and 4) everyday life within a dominant culture that persists to situate them as a “problem” in society (Bellow; DuBois; Rabaka).

The elements of liturgical practice I am using for this project are general components in sacred worship. In traditional Black liturgy there are points in worship which signify movements during the church service. Liturgy should be “flexible as to provide richness and
variety of content” and yet standard enough that participants can identify common elements (Granberry). In a standard Christian liturgy, there are basic components in the order of events. The segments of the liturgy have varied nomenclature across traditions. I will review several of these in the order they occur in a ritual liturgy.

**Liturgal Process and Structure**

The first stage in the liturgical process is the opening musical prelude and meditation components. In contemporary contexts they may be named the *Praise and Worship* or *Testimony* period or a simple musical processional. The opening is followed by a *Call to Worship* or *Call to Community*. The *Call* is a recognition of commencement of the ritual and the affirmation of the gathering to move forward. Next, is an *Invocation* or *Prayer* that can take the form of a traditional prayer or call and response litany. Most frequently a *Musical response* to the *Invocation* occurs followed by a reading of *Biblical Scripture* or *Sacred Text*. Another musical movement occurs and is often identified as *a Hymn, Song, or Anthem of Praise*. There are, then, indeed *Communal announcements, Welcome of Visitor, and a Passing of the Peace*.

The centrality of music becomes evident in liturgical practice as it is used to transition from one component to another. Here then, in a liturgy the focus of the experience becomes the *Preached Word, Sermon, or Sacred Sayings* followed by a suitable music interlude that leads to an *Invitation or Altar Call* where a commitment to conversion or membership in the community takes place. Without fail, the collection of monetary gifts and tithes is the *offertory*. Other gifts are offered here such as gifts of music, art, dance, or poetry during the *offertory*.

The Benediction is a final blessing and summary statement of the worship moment. It is the closing of the of the liturgy and the dismissal of the gathered people. The
benediction also serves as a charge to go forth and fertilize the seeds of hope, faith and love scattered in the hearts and minds of the congregants.

*Coffee Hour, Gathering, and Post Event Communion*

The post worship period is followed by organized gatherings time to be in community one with another. It is time to fellowship, develop informal relationship, and community building through coffee hours, potlucks, and post worship meals at a local restaurant. On occasion, never always, there maybe what’s can be called “meetings after the meeting” or what I call Sacred InGatherings. These types of set aside meetings are frequently, intergenerational among Elders who share their wisdom with younger members of a community. They are synergistic and leave an indelible mark on all involved.

*The Experience of Liminal Liturgy: Reduction of Capta from BSAM-MECCA/BCAF/Motor City BACC*

My convention experiences are clearly mediated by my own worldview and past experiences which inform it. In a phenomenological sense, each experience brings the past into an accentuated present that engages with the phenomena. My liturgical interpretation arises out of my standpoint as a Womanist and ordained clergy woman. It also arises out of my experience as a Black woman in America with a yearning to confront and seek respite from the onslaught of daily “ism schisms” of White hegemonic patriarchal structures which press upon my life. So, I seek moments of renewal, joy, and hope as life giving practices. Entering into the liminal liturgy of convention space became one of these practices. I will explicate each of the liturgical practices as compared to traditional Womanist Liturgical Ethics outlined above. I will also delineate the movements from one stage in liturgy to another.
As I detail the stages of the liturgy and the movements between them, I will identify the “what” or noema of the experience. The stages of the liturgy are linked to the noema. The noesis, or modality of experience, shall be explicated in Chapter 5. It is important to remember that he noesis and noema exist in a synergistic relationship and the goal of phenomenological research is to discover the “essential” or “invariant” structure that binds the noesis and noema in their synergism (Martinez; Lanigan).

Enter Into The Liminal Liturgy of Black Comicon Culture

*Call to Convention: Call to Convene and Preparations*

The *Call to Convention* functions as to a *Call to Worship* or *Call to Community* in a liturgy. It is an affirmation that an event is scheduled to happen. It affirms that planning has begun and that the community of participants are to get ready. It is more than a general “save the date.” It is a notification that “We will indeed gather again.” In some ways it acts as a promise. The call to convention operates as a clarion call sent out to all who are plugged in to listen. It is the African drum to come, see, hear, and experience.

Basic event information such as time, place, and location are in the call, but also specifics for vendors, artists, panels and workshop proposals; cosplay competition information, film entry submissions, and registration costs are also included. There are also the digital links, advertisements, and media hype that are necessarily a part of the call. The importance of digital media cannot be underestimated. It plays a significant role as the technological grapevine getting the word out about new projects that are forthcoming. The calls go out in multiple forms even beyond primary digital sources, such as Twitter, Tumblr, even some on YouTube. It fuels the announcement of forthcoming conventions, pop-ups, comic shop openings, book releases, and anticipated conventions.
Flyers and posters are commissioned by the organizers. Each event has its own personality and theme. The commissioned posters are evident of these distinctions. They are often uniquely designed by one of the artists who will participate in the event. The notices are artistic teasers of anticipated excitement that lure the individual into a sense of being caught or drawn in to the possibility of their presence. They are inviting. They have a heart pounding excitement that pulls one in, as if yearning to be there, in the room. They move beyond mere marketing. They prick the undertones of hope appealing to an affective desire to be present. The images speak as Afrofuturist alternative visions of past, present, and futures. They inspire.

Another form of the Call to Convention is designed to target exhibitors. This part may go out separate from the information to the public. This component is focused on recruiting the creatives. They include artists, but also potential other vendors, panel presenters, crafts persons who will do demonstrations, or even musicians and performers if the convention intends to have a music or concert component.

Over the past two decades the posters for the Call to Convention for the Black Independent comic conventions have been artistically breathtaking. I have collected them in digital and print form as I have been able. At the Black Comic and Arts Festival (BCAF) in San Francisco they had multiple posters for the event. On the day of the event they were able to give those away to attendees. The number of sponsors and larger community involvement in BCAF allowed them to print in higher quantities and give them away along with the event program at the actual conventions when participants enter. I have several of
them signed by the artists and convention headliners. A collection of these event posters can be juried and made into an exhibit of their own. I can only hope.

_The “Call to Convene” as Experienced_

I first experienced the artistic activity, flurry of writing and creativity, the ongoing work of the artists and writers digitally. I received notices and announcements. I joined groups and liked pages that were connected to Afrofuturism, science fiction, and Black Arts. They are voluminous.

When I opened my Facebook and emails finding notices of conferences I was exhilarated. I immediately went to the sites to peruse the notices, check the dates, and identify locations. Some of the artists and workshop line ups also were listed. The art grabbed me. Often, I get caught up in the “squirrel” effect with just the art and photos from the archives posted by an organization of previous conventions. The maze of beauty and Africana art held me at times grabbed mesmerized me. In that moment time stood still. I was hooked.

I needed to be there. I took in the possibility of attending these events and convention activities. Despite not being able to attend them all I perused the wide range of gatherings and began to plan my attendance strategy. The number and variety of venues were much more than I anticipated, and more than my schedule would allow. Some of the events that I wanted to attend that are a part of the major U.S. scene are **East Coast Black Age**, **Blacktasticon**, **Oryxcon**, **Solcon**, **Blerdcon**, **Pocketcon**, and **the State of Black Science Fiction**. These

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27 The possibility of an exhibition of the posters have been referenced once already during a digital conversation. The community may be abuzz with anticipation and call for submissions simply for this collection.

28 For the notion of the “squirrel effect” see Sarah Bakewell, _At The Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails_ (New York: Other Press, 2016).
did not make it into my field study simply because I could not attend them all, although truth be told, I would have liked to.

The impact of seeing these images permeated my entire day. They sucked me in and I stopped. Everything stopped. Despite going through my daily filled to the brim calendar, I wanted to attend. I wanted to be in a space that celebrated Black life. In contrast to the mundane reality frequent microaggressions of snarky comments, bigoted rudeness, isolation, and gender biases that are normative life in Arizona. I wanted to shut out for a just a moment the emotional isolation that can pierce one to the core when in a room full of others that render you invisible despite or because of your clear visibility of being embodied Black in the same space. I wanted to experience being out of that space and into an imagined space of joy and hope. Yes, these images were invitations to be apart from my mundane and a part of something I could not yet name. I wanted to just… go!

Images of Convention Call Posters 2017-2018

Figure 3 BSAM Atlanta

\[29\] I limit the images here to only the year of my research and to the conventions I attended leading up for my field work. They span over three decades they continue to be filled with awe inspiring artistic allure to beckon one into attending and a true yearning to be in the room for a convention. See Appendix 1 for a list of the conventions in this study, but also for other conventions that I was not ultimately able to include in this project but deserve recognition for the 2017-2018 convention year.
Figure 4 BSAM Montreal

Figure 5 BSAM Toronto, Canada

Figure 6 BSAM, Washington, D.C.

Figure 7 BSAM St. Louis
Figure 8 BSAM Cover Image

Figure 9 Midwest Ethnic Convention for the Comic and Arts (MECCacon), Detroit 2016

Figure 10 Motor City Black Age of Comics Convention
Introit-Doxology: Pre-Conference Preparation

The preparation for the arts festivals take many forms. Months before one event there is planning and preparation on multiple levels. The many sides of preparation depend on your role within the sphere of the convention. Each actor and participant in the event has different roles and goals, as they prepare for convention day. As a stakeholder in Speculative
Arts and Fiction what role do you play? If you are a panelist, presenter, or keynote speaker preparation takes the form of research and writing, sketching out remarks, or designing the workshop. However, the artists, cartoonists, and graphic designers are enveloped in artistic preparation leading up to the convention.

The artists and creatives are busy. The artists prepare and accumulate creative pieces. Kickstarter projects, GoFundMe pages, and other alternative financial benefactors are solicited to fund projects. When new projects are in progress these new funding source gets them to the publication stage. There is a wide range of pathways a creative idea gets to the page for print editions. Comic projects span the whole range from graphic novels to simple book length comics with only a few pages or panels.

For the production teams they have the details of logistics and event planning in the forefront of their preparation. Logistics necessary such as a ground teams, tables, volunteers, electric source needs are a part of the preparation for producers and event planners. Internet access negotiation for vendors are necessary to make purchases. The day of the event logistics must be in place. Moreover, planners are geared up for the logistical quirks and glitches that naturally happen at any event. They are prepped and ready. They dot the “Is” and cross the “Ts” and make sure the venue is ready to open its doors.

Prelude, Preparation, and Planning as Experienced as an Attendee

Upon deciding to attend a series of conventions. I went into travel mode. I was planning my strategy for how to find transportation, hotel arrangements, and registration. I was between funding cycles and pulled from my savings to book plane tickets, hotels, and pay for small registration fees. I contacted the conference planners in advance. All were open to talking to me and gave me pointers for conference attendance.
I felt a sense of community that was being built. I would be a part of it. Detroit and Toronto were the first MECCA/BSAM events I attended. For both I stayed at an AirBNB. I discovered that many of the attendees were staying at Bed and Breakfast locations or bunking up with other local artists. I reached out to the convention organizer and she graciously told me where to stay and where to eat. Her hospitality was legendary.

I registered online and the fees were minimum, under ten dollars US. I pulled two luggage bags; one for my personal travel and packing and another for the anticipated loot and materials I would bring home. I preprinted my conference materials, made event folders, and waited for each event, giddy with expectant delight. I was going.

*Welcome to Wakanda!: Registration, Entry Welcome, Invocation, and the Passing of the Peace*

In liturgy the *passing of the peace* serves to both welcome new visitors and to greet one another in community as if family. The welcome and passing of the peace at conventions happens at the entry. A distinct point of welcome is created and staffed. Here there is registration and check in, if the convention has a cost. Digital registrations of attendees are checked and used to collect fees and donations if registration did not happen in advance. In some cases, there is a table of giveaways and keepsakes if there is no formal cost to the event.

When the doors of an event open, the setup is complete, the logistics are worked out, and the show begins. The clock is ticking for staff and volunteers. The event producers are making sure the exhibit hall has been set up properly. They are running through lists and doing a final walk through before the doors are opened. Organizers were caught up in troubleshooting. When start time was off attempts were consistently being made and communicated that “more was coming” and things would be set up soon.
My Experience of The Welcome Entry Into Convention

The entry into the space at the first convention for me was like a prayer. It was an invocation, an entry into conversation with a Black worldview. I was surrounded by first the beauty of the Detroit Public library, rich in African American history of Detroit, Michigan. Surrounded by images and murals the library itself was breathtaking. Upon making my way to the large hall in the upper levels, by way of a small elevator, as I stepped off, I was greeted by volunteers and staff. The Great Hall of the library top floor was a rotunda filled with vendors and exhibitors. I needed to pause to take it all in. There was a sense of arrival, a sense of finally getting to my first Black comic convention that swept over me in a wave of unexpected glee. There was an imposing presence of black artists taking up the space with culturally unapologetic authenticity. The atmosphere was aflutter with engaged conversations with soulful Motown music occupying the air. All the encircling aspects collided to invoke a new cognitive consonance that I had not experienced prior. In one moment there was an unnamed alignment of mind, body, and spirit. It felt right. I was anchored in the moment. I felt home.

Workshops, Panels, and Praise Breaks: Anthems, Sacred Texts, and Music Interludes

A praise break is a moment to rejoice in the liturgy. They can take the form of sacred texts being read to affirm or transmit wisdom. They can be musical interludes between other movements in a liturgy that allows for reflection and joy to be expressed by participants. Finally, a praise break can be a disruption of the order of the day to pause and celebrate or revel in elation of spiritual experience. In the African American context for example, they can be a “ring shout” done collectively, a praise shout by an individual, or a simple wail of deep expression by an individual overtaken in the moment by the depth of emotions (Creel).
In the conventions praise breaks also have multiple forms. They can be workshops that educate attendees on the connections of everyday life to comics and science fiction. They can be panels of speakers that creators, artists, or writers who speak on provocative topics or simply share their professional journey.

As the day progresses at conventions key presenters share their wisdom on panels and workshops. Sometimes these are big headliners; sometimes they are local community sages with wisdom to share. For example, I attended a workshop on ancient connections to science fiction at the MECCA convention in Detroit. The workshop was given by a local Africanist Baba Kilindi Iyi. He gave an enlightening talk on ancient wisdom of mushrooms and their psychedelic impact across the ancient cultures. While not what I was expecting at all, I realized it served a purpose and gave him a space to voice years of research and personal musings. His workshop brought his spiritual views and practices into a new space with potential new adherents.

Another panel workshop I attended at the Motor City Black Age of Comics was the “African Origins of Superheroes.” This workshop held attendees at the edge of their seats. They wanted to know where they fit in and what the connections were to the mainstream superheroes they grew up with such as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The connections between ancient Egyptian pantheon of gods and the superheroes of today provided repeated epiphanies that kept us on the edge of our seats. We had the opportunity to not just imagine connections, but see that actual ways our Africana past was connected to the superheroes of today. We could see that even the European mainline superheroes were creatively whitewashed versions of African deities, legends, and myths that date back thousands of years. We were a part of the story. It was another reason to rejoice, to praise break.
At the smaller conventions, as well as the larger convention, this time to praise and show expressions of gratitude for their labor was just as welcomed by the presenters. At the San Francisco event after one of the larger panels for example, there was an intimate time built in to not only engage in pure “fan worship” praise breaks, but also intimate time of signing books and conversation. The presenters had a gallery set aside by the planners where books were signed and artists took time for pictures and additional questions.

*My Experience of The Panels and Praise Breaks: Mind Blown, or to take apart as if one’s mind is unreconstructedly broken.*

To say folks were “mind blown” is an understatement. I was also so blown away. I tried to hold back my expressions of glee and fandom glow as I met authors that I’ve read and artists whose work inspired me deeply. One set of panels I attended had perhaps this effect on me the most were at BCAF in. The first loaded with artists such as Joe Illidge, David Walker, Nilah McGruder, and Brandon Thomas. The next was a panel with Nnedi Okorafor, Victor LaValle, and Matt Ruff. The final panel was Tony Medina, John Jennings, Stacey Robinson, and Damian Duffy. These authors and comic icons filled my shelf and put stars indeed in my eyes.

They spoke not only in plain ways about their journey but also about what challenged them. They shared in very honest and frank ways the challenges of being a person of African descent in literature, science fiction, and comics. Their journey were not easy ones. I was moved by the intimacy of the moment and the openness with which they shared. After the panels, I had time for conversation, to talk directly with the presenters, a snap few solicited selfies, to shake their hands, and thank them for their work.

There is a saying that “once you know, you can’t unknow.” Knowing their personal stories gave depth to their work. I had just completed reading Victor LaValle’s comic series
indirectly based on a Black Frankenstein. I was also just starting Nnedi Okorafor’s *Binti*, an Africanfuturist novel. I found it refreshing and historically rich. They each shared in detail their stories and the powerful motivations that inspired them. My intellectual desire to learn more was sedimented by their motivations and inspirational stories, but also spurred on my simple hunger to “know more.”

I was amazed at the ways in which the Black past and the present showed up in the writing of mainstream comics. More importantly, I felt a sense of relief and assuredness at the writings and creative productions of the cadre of Afrofuturists who were making their mark today. It felt as if they were making what was wrong, right. They were corrective story tellers. So, while their fiction was not fact, it was a mode of reclaiming of culture and identify that for millennia. Simply knowing that, that there were folks out there trying to correct the Africana story gave me hope and elated joy. These are what inspire and provoke *praise breaks*—expressions of elation or uncontrollable joy!

*Sermonic Moments and Sharing of the Gospel(s): Artist Stories and Good News*

For many in traditional Black liturgy the sermonic moment is central to the worship. It is a communal moment where stories of faith from sacred texts are told in efforts to transform and uplift individuals. Sermons are moments to share the Gospel or “good news” of the faith as individuals deal with their very real lived everyday challenges.

The creators of narratives, comics, and projects are all telling a story. They are offering mini versions of their “good news” from their story or creative universe. When set up in the convention halls they are swaths of imposing exhibitors. As attendees walk and

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30 I take note of the term “Africanfuturist” rather than Afrofuturist, as deployed by author Nnedi Okorafor. Like the term Afrofuturist, African and African Diasporic lives remain at the core, however her choice of Africanfuturist is a point of the dynamism and fluidity of the meaning and the intensity of the cultural undercurrent in her work.
traverse through the exhibit hall each booth and artist becomes a homily for the soul. They share their stories and motivations. They definitely pitch you with their own gospel as the source of joy and truth, and hope you take it home—in the form of a purchase.

*My Experience of Sermonic Moments and Sharing of the Gospel(s): Artist Stories and Good News*

The large overwhelming exhibit hall became small and personal, as I went from booth to booth to hear the different stories and see the materials they produced. At the MECCA Con in Detroit I encountered one story after another as I went from booth to booth. Learning the different stories as I personally met artists and creatives helped me to see past the glamor of the booth and the beautiful art they produced. I got to their own personal “why” their personal story, sacred truth, what gave them passion and motivated them to continue the pursuit of independent comics, arts, and actively participating on the convention circuit.

I found some were driven by a long urging over the years. They just needed a venue to motivate them to produce their vision and make it real. For example, one artist constructed life size and statuesque figures from his comic universe. He was there with his childhood friend who he said urged him to create new comics and a line of 3D figures. The statuesque figures gave visual concrete meaning to his passion. They were enormous. They must have taken a great deal of time to transport from the loading dock, bring up in the small elevator, and then reassemble in the exhibit hall. The life size 3D motivated me to purchase a small one to take home, to have a small part of his story.

One father of Asian descent was with his daughter at his booth. He shared that he was there because he created a comic called *MESS*ed with Asian characters for his daughter. He wanted his daughter to have a set of comics and superheroes that looked like her. I found the inclusion of this artist was important in the convention. Space was made for other
ethnicities and artists that did not fit in other mainline comic conventions. His “truth,” his “why” was motivated by creating a future and a world for his daughter. This was powerful to me. It spoke the value of representation and the importance of the development of the individual person’s self-perception in the world. For his daughter, she would forever be changed by her father prioritizing her development and personal self-worth by making a comic that reflected her experience and possible worlds she could inhabit. I was moved.

The Invitation(s)

The Invitation to become a part of a faith community often happens at altar call or after the sermonic moment. There is a saying “The doors of the church are open.” It means that one is welcome to join the church and you are welcome to work out your faith as a part of the community. The invitation can also be a call to come to the altar to confess one's faith and be converted. Finally, it can be an invitation to release one's burdens with prayer of hope and renewal.

At comic conventions the invitation is an invitation to engage. It could be to join a creative universe. It could be to attend the after party. It could simply be an invitation that takes the form of believing that other worlds are possible. An attendee is invited by the wide array of options and to join in where one fits. Some may attend the conventions only for the panels and workshops. Others to gather loot, still others to just be in awe and present in an Afrofuturist space and feel invited to scurry from thing to thing in order to take it all in. The openness in refreshing. Instead of isolation and exclusion as normative expressions, welcome and inclusion into conversations are standard. Attendees are invited into conversations of new world view with artistic renditions of existing characters. Alternatively, one may be invited into an entire new universe created by a new artist creating opportunity
for one to start a new fan journey and “boldly go” where they have never gone before. Is this not what an invitation is supposed to do?

*My Experience of The Invitation: “Come into my Parlor,” said the Spider to the Fly*

When I walked down the aisle the convention halls the smiles of the artist each great me with sincerity and ease. The express their openness by the ease and relaxed postures. Some are nervous and I realize it may be their first convention too. Each artist and exhibitor beckoned me to join their universe. The beckoning hands were not like the snake oil salesmen luring you in. they were bright colored comic art and eye caching table displays which compelled the curious to come and see something different and new. Table after table was buzz with the sharing. Sometimes pleasant surprises. Like the story of a Women’s Study Professor who released her first comic book. She also had a delightful collection of iconic figures in literature such as Lucille Clifton, Amiri Baraka, or I got them all for my inspiration wall. I spent a while talking to her before a young couple came that went to school at her Alma Mater and made alumni connection while we all talked and shared our journeys. They wanted to know my story, as much as they shared theirs. There was not the negated question inference I get at large mainline comic conventions of “What’s a nice Black girl doing at a place like this?” Instead there was a joy in our shared “me too” Black Nerd Geek lived in that moment.

The willingness and openness did not feel motivated by simply selling to me mentality. What I experienced was a sincere offer to come into learn about their work. I learned their stories of struggle and progress which compelled me to want to hear more to learn more to understand more. I engaged the universes or worlds each time I went to a new artist or vendor.
Some vendors’ universes were not comprised of comic books or art posters. Instead many vendors had material culture items such as t-shirts, coloring books, pins, jewelry, keychains, or even stickers, the list is long. These invited me to engage in the building of my collections of materials that tell the stories of other worlds. For example, Yorli Huff’s invitation to her world of Superhero Huff is one of my favorites. Her comic universe is based on her own real-life story of workplace injustice as an undercover agent and the ensuing case of discrimination she filed (Lamarre). I was drawn to her personal narrative and the challenges she endured and overcome. I was inspired by the way she turned her adversity into a comic universe of empowerment.

The product line Huff developed went beyond the Huff Superhero comic. Her impressive clothing line captured my attention immediately. The t-shirts and leggings had images of female superheroes with natural hair; like mine. Her line included full sizes which means that she took into consideration the real body sizes of women, an act of gender consciousness for women of color with curves. I felt included. I bought my shirts and leggings. These have been some of the most recognizable items among my collection of material culture. They are also conversation starters that I share frequently with inquiries about women in comics and female superheroes. They ask, “Where did you get that?” or “I want one?” or even “is that a part of Afrofuturism?” I am happy to share her story of encouragement with responses in the affirmative. A piece of her story walks around with me and others every day. I continue to share her universe long after the conventions are over, a true solidified engagement with her universe.

Offertory and Exchange

The Offertory in a liturgy is an offering or giving of time, talents, and gifts. These can take place at the appointed moment in time or they can occur when the liturgical leaders
deems most appropriate. There can be several kinds of offerings in this broad scope. The
giving of time can be volunteering or service in which one gives out of their capacity to
contribute to the larger endeavor. The giving of talents can be read in the biblical sense
where “talent” meant currency—Cold hard cash. All endeavors sacred and secular require
money to operate in a sustained fashion. Cold hard cash is necessary whether through the
offertory, philanthropy, or fundraising the task of economic sustainability is a truth for all
projects. Finally, the giving of gifts are varied depending on the gifts an individual has to
offer.

At comic conventions the reality of economics are a constant aspect of the
production and presentation of art and the production of the event. For some their artistic
offering amounts to purchases and the accumulation of convention “loot.” I am no different
in this regard. For others their offering takes on seen and unseen aspects of economics, such
as volunteering, family sacrifices, or financial strains to realize a dream of a given artist. The
work of family support is a labor of love, but a tax on support systems nevertheless.

Another aspect that I mentioned earlier is the economic cost of attendance for those
traveling to a convention. If the convention is local, then the cost is limited. The attendees’
costs of travel are lower and the registration becomes the main cost outside of purchases.
Yet, Cosplayers costs are never minimal. The ongoing cost of developing a character is far
from nominal. In addition to the costume, props, digital presence and advertisements
increase the cost of the cosplay overall. These items may be custom made by professionals
or hand made by the cosplayer. Props for example, range from swords, whips, and other
items of the fantasy or science fiction world of the character. The accumulation of materials
for a given character are limited only by the individual’s imagination and economics.
Ultimately, the limits of cosplay character development are bound also by the decision to move on to cosplay yet another character.

*My Experience of Offertory*

The magnitude of products and cultural materials was overwhelming. I had to take them in small bites. After making an initial orbit and having conversations with each vendor, artist, or exhibitor my second round was to make purchases. I went through to make conscious and deliberate choices. I felt in many ways this was an honoring of their work. It is also a form of reinvesting in the community—sowing into the ongoing development of not only their individual art, but their extended families and support too. I didn’t have much to give as a grad student, but—what I do give and purchase, matters. These are purchases not just donations, so I receive much in exchange.

In no way was I there just to window gaze. I also wanted to take almost everything home. So small bites meant that small items such as stickers, keychains, and hand-held oddities made their way into my purchases. I had to be specific if I were to take a larger item home. I was not local and larger items had to fit into my suitcases. By my third convention I had a new technique.

I would bring one suitcase for the airplane as my carryon luggage. Then, I would check an empty larger suitcase and pack that with my purchases. I learned this lesson after my first MECCA con in Detroit where I had to get an Uber to Marshall’s to purchase a larger suitcase the Sunday after the convention before my flight. It was still a lesson in learning how to operate at a convention as a traveling out-of-towner. I stuffed the suitcases with materials large and small from comic books to graphic novels and poster art to the small items. My offerings added up rapidly.
The ability to make purchases was also limited by the hard dollar economics. I just could not randomly purchase everything I wanted. I chose items that were relevant to the intersectional nature of my research. For example, I decided at Motor City Black Age of Comics in Detroit I would focus first on the female artists and their products. There were only three primary female vendors. The female vendors' items were gender focused. They had characters and art which told the narratives of intersectional imaginary journeys inclusive of gender, race, and personal identities.

It is important to note there were complementary teams of men and women. The product of these were not directly focused on gender, they were nonetheless intersectional in different ways. Some of the material products and art I noticed had a cast of characters with a rich inclusion of gender and race presence in their narrative. When I spoke with the artists and creators, they articulated an intentional effort to create inclusive universes that took on real issues. (cite the comic and artist) For example, Black Women’s hair was a topic of one comic collection. I bought it for my own. As a woman who struggles with the health and wellness of my natural hair, I took pride in seeing the issue come to life in this form. It was a form that I can share with my two daughters and nieces that also wake up with an embodied reality of Black ethnic hair in American society as a social issue to be navigated (cite).

Another form of inclusion and gender complementarity was moments I witnessed that I called family affair. Seeing different family members mobilized to support an artist struck me as having a different meaning than commercial or financial gain. I attended several conventions where I saw several of the same husband and wife teams, with sometimes children, setting up booths or exhibits and assisting in the presentation of materials. I was impressed by this practice of collaboration and support. For example, the husband and wife duo that runs the Black Science Fiction Society, Jarvis Sheffield and Andrea Graves-
Sheffield, have had booths at three of the conventions I attended. They also have a strong presence in the digital community. They are only one example of couples and family teams of note.

These familial teams are a form of giving as well. The families’ sense of giving to the cause of one another’s success was visceral and something that impressed me. They emanated a consciousness of a shared vision whether it was for the product, the concept of their organization, or the passion of the convention scene. It was at times contagious. I was all in and there for it!

Another form of offertory is giving of time and volunteering. When I arrived to my first MECCA convention in Detroit in 2017, I was welcomed by a seminal author, Sharee Renée Thomas, who was just sitting at the registration table checking digital tickets and welcoming guests. There she was in her signature oversized Afro and smile while talking to attendees and spreading genuine hospitality. I learned over time that this was common for artists and writers in the convention community. Despite their big names and prestige, they aided in fostering community and welcome by pitching in and doing what seemed like menial tasks for them. The unstated graciousness demonstrated their own commitment to the communities’ success and inclusion of others.

I was at ease and felt included. By the end of the event I too was volunteering at the registration table and welcoming guests. We bought food and shared it as well as assisted with the breakdown of the event. It was indeed a family affair and if you are willing, you too were a part of the family.

Benediction

A benediction is a blessing and a charge. It is an affirmation of all that has transacted during a gathering. It is also a sending forth or charging to go beyond the moment and live
the lessons learned. A benediction calls for the hearts of those present to remember and live out the wisdom conveyed in the totality of the experience. It should not be mistaken for the final word. While it closes the liturgy, it is really an “until we meet again” proclamation. It is the closing word, but not the final word of a liturgy. The benediction charges one to go beyond what they have just experienced. The lessons of the good news are to be lived out beyond the moment of experience. The closing proclamation urges one to share and to “go make disciples.”

At a convention the closing can be formal with an announcement of the event closing. Or it can be a gradual closing of vendors spaces signaling attendees that the event is coming to an end. Attendees scurry to make final purchases. Conversations near the exit are elongated and linger.

And Oh my, the pictures! While many take pictures as they go along, attendees seem to take their last collection of photos hurriedly at the end of the conventions. The life-size posters, pop up signs, or banners at the convention entry ways often make wonderful keepsake photos as they exit the exhibit halls. Selfies, pictures with artists, cosplayers, and special guests often create a flurry at the closing of events.

The anticipation upon leaving is sometimes filled with the announcement of the next gathering or next event in a circuit of conventions. The going forth is deeper than a goodbye or “until we meet again”.31 The event embodies a new start rather than a culmination. For artists and attendees alike, it is a continued conversation as they exit the Afrofuturist space.

31God Be with You Till We Meet Again
My Experience of the Afrofuturist Benediction

I did not want to leave any of the conventions or for them to end. There was a yearning to stretch out my presence there. On one hand I did not want to seem like a mere lurking fan, on the other I just wanted to taste a bit more of the flavor of community and joy, because it was good. The camaraderie was good, emanating a sense that we were all in this together.

At almost all the events, I offered to assist in the take down or closing of registration. It was all I could do, since I could not physically do heavy lifting. I wanted to do more. In Toronto and Detroit conventions, I was invited by the hosts to join them for fellowship or after party time. In San Francisco, there was a planned fellowship on the program at a local Black owned restaurant. I was elated to be included. It also gave me a deeper glimpse into the world of the artists and not just as an attendee, but as a part of a dynamic community.

The benediction encouraged action. It is a mandate to go out and spread the word of the work that was revealed in the experience of liminal Afrofuturist space. I needed to spread the sense of promise and potential for an experience that fueled self-sustenance and survival. The benediction sparked an urge to connect to something greater and a purpose beyond the individual experience. The benediction left me with a compelling urge to connect and stay connected with others. I was moved to not merely go to the fellowship, but also become a conversation partner in a larger movement, to seek and find my place and to make a difference. Ultimately, each person is encouraged to act on the epiphany of representation and perceive that the world can be envisioned and dreamed differently than what they get in

32 Play on the African call and response, “God is Good all the time and all the tie God is Good.” Genesis “And it was good” as in Garden of Eden and Creation is good.
the larger society’s hegemonic imagination that fuels systemic dehumanization and oppression (Townes). I with an enfleshed promise of hope that hovered in my soul (Copeland).

Coffee Hour, Gathering, and Post Event Communion

Fellowship is not a definitive part of a liturgy. However, in large and small ways they occur. They can take the form of after church meals, Sunday dinners, or coffee and donuts after the communal gathering. Sometimes they are just long lingering time in the back of the church, that moves to the vestibule, that then moves to the sidewalk, then to the grass and finally edges into the parking lot for a final farewell. Then perhaps after the fourth farewell, it moves to a restaurant or someone’s home for Sunday dinner. Planned fellowships are designed to edify or uplift the people. It is an act to strengthen personal bonds and personal connections in the life of a faith community.

At a comic convention, the fellowship is the same. After the informal farewells, there are small groups that make connections for dinner. At other conventions, there may be planned gatherings in the evening at a local restaurant or local pub. The after party at each convention does also vary. Sometimes it is intimate and private among just attendees who connect. Sometimes it is among the artists alone. Sometimes it is a collective event where all who choose to attend can come and meet up: artists, producers, writers, fans, and the folk for an ingathering of all who would dare to keep the conversation going and continue dialogue of ideas and concepts.

Meeting After the Meeting: After the After Party

There is always more to reflect and say. For artists this is the awakened mind even after hours. The adrenaline is still flowing. There is more to discuss. New projects are bounced around and collaborations for other events or artistic endeavors are made.
The senior artists share with junior artists with a generative approach of conferring wisdom and their rich trove of years in the business. They are the sages of the conventions. When they take this extra time with others the impact is unforeseen, having the potential to extend into the next generation. They model the importance of mentorship, giving guidance and thus perpetuating their own legacies as well.

*My Experience of After the After Party*

After I left the formal gathering of the restaurant fellowship, on most occasions I simply returned to my bed and breakfast or hotel and planned my departure. On one memorable occasion, I was invited to what I came to call *wisdom-time*. Wisdom-time is when elders and sages are willing to share of their personal well of knowledge and experiences after an event or gathering in an informal setting. These are down time circles where intergenerational knowledge and history flows.\(^3\) These informal forms of knowledge are valuable and rich (N. L. Westfield). They can equip one with the tools of the dancing mind of those who have walked similar journeys and allows for unmitigated and unfiltered conversations (Morrison, *The Dancing Mind*).

I thought that it was important for me to be in the space if I was invited. So instead of going back to my own hotel, I went to the hotel where the event organizers for the San Francisco BCAF were staying. The very posh hotel was a far cry from the under renovation hotel without heat in which I was staying. I had not really eaten, so I ordered food and hot tea and settled into a booth near the senior scholars.

\(^3\) Wisdom time are invaluable moments in liminal space that takes up issues or grinds a conversation or simply are ruminations. These moments can happen planned or spontaneously. They are likened to fireside chats or in science fiction terms they can be called “Jedi Council Sessions” with the elders. Katie G. Cannon speaks of these types of conversations as yielding porch front epistemology, where knowledge of lived experience is transmitted and in that space, time, and moment can only be derived. Lynn Westfield Dear Sister time…
Stacey Robinson, David Walker, Joe Illidge, John Jennings, Tony Medina, and Charles Long were among the scattered artists and intellectuals filling the room. They were each in corners chatting away in pairs. I did not want to insert myself into what looked like a mini ‘meetings of the minds’, thinking up new projects and ideas. I was witnessing artistic collegiality certainly, however it seemed also sincere respect and invested interest in the shared work as well.

So, I waited for an invitation. There was a larger table they all eventually gathered at and invited me to join in. I brought my tea and plate and happily obliged. The elder at the table was Dr. Charles Long. I reintroduced myself to Dr. Long. I was in his seminar while in graduate school over a decade earlier while on a Doctoral Fellowship at Drew University. He graciously responded. Earlier in the day, the lead artists spoke about how the night before, the esteemed Long tarried in the lobby with them and wisdom time and deep and heady conversations ensued. They said it was like drinking from a cup of intergenerational wisdom, and I wanted a sip of the wisdom cup. So, I was there.

They asked if I had a specific question, and yes, I did. I wanted to know their own thoughts on semiotics and comics, and what perspective Long held on Black liminality. They set up a video recorder in the corner and let the tape roll. It was exhilarating.

These wisdom time conversations cut across age and station. They were almost always historically situated topics. Historical memories were woven with personal stories and thick concepts were unpacked in layers. In the case of this night, the topic was signs, significations, and semiotics. I sat on the edge of my seat like a girl at her favorite movie show. Time stood still. I listened and drank deeply from the well of wisdom.
Liturgical Reverberations: A Summary of the Experience of Afrofuturist Liminal Space

I have used liminal liturgy as a framing device for reducing the capta I collected over the course of my research. I have found that Black space offers a response to the duality of sacred and secular. While people experience Black space individually, this experience lends itself to communal intersubjective comparisons and comprehension across the Black life and the shared experiences of embodied hope free of hegemonic historical imagination. The experiences, and the affective modalities they invoke, reinforce a Black cultural imaginary which feeds the often anemic soul of visions for new worlds and possibilities of ways to positively prime the present for human advancement.

The noematic aspects of the liturgical structure I experienced at the comic conventions are imaginatively varied in the next chapter for the phenomenological interpretation. This process allows me to identify noetic correlates of the noema that include the experiences of hospitality, kinship and community, welcome and inclusion, familial sacrifice, intergenerational wisdom, a sense of anticipation and being suspended in time, and of a shared common passion for envisioning a better present. They were consistent over diverse conventions activities.

The structure of liturgy arose out of my own world as a Black churched woman, when I entered a comic convention, it was like I entered church. The immediate sense of welcome and sense of belonging awakened my own comparative experiences of initial engagement when entering into faith communities. The comparative to worship and Afrofuturistic liminal space is one of refuge and communal intersubjectivity. These types of spaces operate at a nexus, where Floyd-Thomas argues that “the tough burdens of life, concerns, and desires for the present and future; expressing deep emotion and lament
connected with personal communal plight and possibility; and reframing and affirming a positive Black identity that counters the negative one found in larger society (Floyd-Thomas, Floyd-Thomas and Duncan 179).

It is important to state that there are differences across varied faith experiences certainly. Moreover, there are variances in parity across Black church liturgies and the structure of this liminal liturgy of comic conventions, when compared, there are no absolutes in the dynamism of liturgy. Yet, informed by my horizon I could see the similarities with uncanny precision of mind, body, and Spirit.\textsuperscript{34}

The Black liminal imaginary offers liberative human self when the return to the engagement to the tangible lived world. Within these temporal spaces the Black human self is not constrained by subjugated and negated humanhood in social, political and economic spheres. It is an opportunity to engage in a self-imposed release and retreat from mundane into the fantastic possibilities of hope into a space that lifts one’s being.

\textsuperscript{34} I am referring here to the Womanist definition, that includes the Spirit as a source of deep love and communal care.
CHAPTER 5

PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION USING LIFEWORLD EXISTENTIALS

“The litmus test... is whether something is ‘life giving’ verses ‘death dealing.’
- Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Chapter Four used the structure of the liturgy to reveal the noematic content of the experience of the Afrofuturist Independence comic convention. The liturgical structure provided an organizational structure through which the totality of my capta could be articulated as a content of experience.

In the present chapter, I provide a phenomenological interpretation of the reduction of the capta provided in Chapter Four. This phenomenological interpretation involves using imaginative variation to examine the content of the experience articulated via the liturgical structure presented in Chapter Four. My goal in this interpretive stage of the research is to explicate the noetic-noematic correlations that constitute phenomenological intentionality. Whereas my focus in Chapter Four was on the noematic (content) aspects of my experience, my focus in the current chapter shifts to the noetic modalities through which the particular contents of experience became manifest. As a result of performing this phenomenological interpretation, I arrive at a set of thematic statements that describe the essential structures of the phenomenon of Afrofuturistic livity and potentiated hope. The noetic-noematic correlations that unfold within the Afrofuturist convention experience creates a portal through which it is possible to experience a commitment to the well-being and survival of African Diasporic people. The phenomenological interpretation reveals noetic-noematic correlations that counter the lived realities of nihilism and creates possibilities of survival as thriving embodiments of Black beings in contemporary times. In short, the conventions

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offer life giving hope individually and communally. I explicate each of these noetic-noematic structures in conjunction with the lifeworld existential described above. In what follows below I offer 14 specific noetic-noematic correlations that constitute the “essential” or “invariant structures” the constitute the experience of Afroturist Comicon Conventions (see Appendix C for a summary chart). I then use these correlations to address the research questions I posed at the beginning of this project.

I use what phenomenologists refer to as the four “lifeworld existentials” to assist in the interpretation (Van Manen 100-102). These four lifeworld existentials are \textit{spatiality}, \textit{corporeality}, \textit{temporality}, and \textit{relationality}. These lifeworld existentials function at the noetic level. They are modalities of experience through which an infinite number of noema may be experienced. In what follows, I offer a brief explanation of each of the four primary lifeworld existentials. After those explanations I turn to the phenomenological interpretation proper.

\textbf{Lifeworld Existentials}

\textit{Spatiality} refers to the felt world. It is our experience of being oriented in space or place. It includes both the actual physical aspect of the world that surrounds us, and our experience of that space. Consider the experience of being in a crowded room. I may experience this space as uncomfortable, and even distressful. But, if I experience that same physical space as I am getting ready to take my seat to view the premiere of \textit{Black Panther}, I may not experience any discomfort, and far from distress I may experience great excitement. \textit{Spatiality} refers to our experience of the space or place in which we are situated. It does not

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\footnote{35 See Appendix B for my Table on Free Imaginative Variation. These categories can be expanded or collapsed they are fluid and hold the potential for further analysis and are based on my own field research as a convention participant.}
provide a specific noematic content, only a noetic context. As human beings, we are always situated within space, and thus always have an experience of spatiality. The degree to which that spatiality is prominent in our experience, however, can vary greatly.

*Corporeality* refers to the lived body. It is the condition of our embodied existence in the world. In the simplest sense, corporeality is the body as felt. It is my presence (and/or absence) in my body that orients me in the world. My felt body may be present to me unconsciously, as when I engage in all the habits of movement and action that comprise my life (e.g., getting dressed, walking, talking, etc.), or when I do something and my body surprises me, like if I trip over a step. Up until the moment I tripped, my walking was my body’s unconscious presence (i.e., absence). Once I tripped, my body became consciously present to me as I felt my heart race at the near fall. Corporeality is also present to me in preconscious ways, as when I say, “I have a gut level feeling.” I don’t not yet know exactly what (noema) this gut level feeling is about (noema), but something in my body seeps into my pre-conscious awareness. Once that pre-conscious awareness take shape as a specific noema, it becomes a fully conscious corporeality. It is at this point I can say to myself, “that person gives me the creeps.” Corporeality is the body’s relation to the self, others, and the world. It encompasses unconscious, pre-conscious, and conscious aspects of my self-awareness.

*Temporality* refers to lived time. Temporality is not clock time. Rather, it is time as lived and subjectively experienced. Our experience of time often varies greatly from clock time. We say that “time flies,” or that “it felt like hours.” Our existence through the passage of time is an irreducible fact of human existence. The immediate present always emerges in relation to the past (both immediate and distant) and an anticipated (hoped for, dreaded, etc.) future. Phenomenologically we refer to the past as a “retention” and the future as a
“protention,” both of which are present in the immediacy of our experience. These
constitute “the horizons of a person's temporal landscape” of their life world (Van Manen
104). Time is relational to the world one occupies.

Relationality (or what I also refer to as Communality) refers to lived experience in
relationship to others. Relationality functions at the meta-level of perception of others and
our relationship to them. It functions at the level of my perception of their perception of the
relationship. It involves the often pre-conscious ways in which people orient themselves in
relation to others. Relationality often functions through social structures (e.g., communities).
If my boss asks to speak with me, certain rules and roles come into play. I am obligated to
do as my boss asks. There is also much more at work related to the particular relationship I
have with my boss. Perhaps I know that my boss considers me an expert in important ways,
so I always feel good when my boss asks me to come into a meeting. Or, if I have a poor
history with my boss, I might dread being called into a meeting. In each case, my
relationship to my boss is influenced by both the social structure and our particular
relationship history. I understand myself in relation to how I see my boss perceiving me.

While each of these four categories of lived experience can be differentiated, they
cannot be separated. One of these categories may dominate our experience at given
moment, as when I trip when walking down the street, but all four are always present.
Movement through space always occurs through the passage of time. The passage of time
changes our experience of a space. Our body never escapes spatiality or temporality, and
our relationships to others remain powerfully present even when we are alone.

Having an initial grasp on the basic lifeworld existentials, I move now to apply them
as the basis for my phenomenological interpretation of the reduction of my capta. I again
repeat the process of free imaginative variation by going through the liminal liturgy.
presented in the previous chapter. Following this phenomenological interpretation, I return to my research questions posed in Chapter One.

**Phenomenological Interpretation**

As I noted at the beginning of Chapter Four, my convention experiences are clearly mediated by my own worldview and past experiences which inform it. I am a Black woman living in the United States of America. As such, I have grown-up experiencing the reality of anti-black racism, and patriarchal White supremacy. I am also a Womanist and ordained clergy woman with a yearning to confront and seek respite from the onslaught of daily indignities I am subjected to as a Black woman in this culture. I seek moments of renewal, joy, and hope as life giving practices. Entering into the liminal liturgy of convention space became one of these practices. Although my life is unique in many ways, it also has much in common with all of those who, as African Descendant peoples, are subjected by the anti-black racist and white-supremacist cultures in which we live. The phenomenological interpretation that follows is not an effort to define a reality that is the same in everyone’s experience. Rather, it is an effort to lay bare the movements of consciousness through which these oppressive conditions are struggled against and usurped.

The phenomenological interpretation of these interconnected states or modalities of engagement during the convention events are based on the interplay between the noesis and noema. The noema is that which is experienced, and the noesis is the modality of experience. The correlation between noesis and noema constitute the directedness of consciousness, or phenomenological intentionality. These varied noetic-noematic correlations demonstrate how specific moments described within the liturgical structure discussed in Chapter Four, function beyond that structure as well. Explicating the noetic and noematic correlations
through the four lifeworld existentials allows me to specify the “essential” or “invariant structure” of the experience of discovering and living with potentiated hope as it emerges in the Afrofuturist comic conventions. Through this phenomenological interpretation I am offering an account of the time, space, embodiment, and human relationality experienced in an Afrofuturist liminal space of Black independent comic and arts conventions (Van Manen).

Summary of Noetic and Noematic Correlates

1. Relationality and Digital Community Building

My encounter with Afrofuturism through digital media was essential in my coming to learn about and seek out opportunities for further and more substantial engagement. I experienced the digital media related to Afrofuturism as a noema that created within me a noetic context of enlivened possibility. My exposure to these images grabbed me, mesmerized me, in those moments of viewing them, time stood still. As I continued to receive calls through digital media, I took in an amazing array of artwork by Afrofuturist artists. I was hooked into a world that stood in direct contrast to my everyday life that was often defined by the many indignities of being a Black woman living in the United States today.

My digital engagement with Afrofuturism grew as I explored Facebook pages, Tumblr sites, and joined multiple digital groups. As I participated in the digital Afrofuturist world, I felt bodily exhilaration. The heaviness of going out into my everyday world was lifted as I took in the images and messages from these digital sites. As I read through the details of each Call for Participation in the conventions, I felt a compelling need to be there. It provided counterbalance to my entire day. I wanted to be in a space that celebrated Black
life. In contrast to the mundane reality frequent microaggressions of snarky comments, bigoted rudeness, isolation, and gender biases that are normative life in Arizona.

Upon deciding to attend a series of conventions, I went into travel mode. The noematic content I encountered on-line created a modality of living that I needed to create in more substantial ways by actually attending these events. I began strategizing about how to find and pay for transportation, hotel arrangements, and registration. This modality of living generated through the Afrofuturistic noema I was encountering led directly to my refiguring of the very concrete issues related to the financial costs involved in booking plane tickets, hotels, and paying for small registration fees. I contacted the conference planners in advance. All were open to talking to me and gave me pointers for conference attendance. One convention organizer in particular was especially gracious told me where to stay and where to eat. Her hospitality was legendary. I felt a sense of community that was being built. The noematic content provided through the digital space of the internet created a noetic context of bodily exhilaration, and hopefulness that provided a strong contrast to the everyday realities of my normative life. This noetic-noematic correlation created a sense of potential for community that extended beyond digital space.

2. Relationality as Expansion Through Another’s Experience

The panels and workshops were places that invited a deeper engagement with the artists and their own life journeys through Afrofuturism. I attended a workshop on ancient connections to science fiction at the MECCA convention in Detroit. The workshop was given by a local Africanist Baba Kilindi Iyi. He gave an enlightening talk on ancient wisdom of mushrooms and their psychedelic impact across the ancient cultures. While not what I was expecting at all, I realized it served a purpose and gave him a space to voice years of
research and personal musings. His workshop brought his spiritual views and practices into a new space with potential new adherents.

Another panel workshop I attended at the Motor City Black Age of Comics was the “African Origins of Superheroes.” This workshop held attendees at the edge of their seats. They wanted to know where they fit in and what the connections were to the mainstream superheroes they grew up with such as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The connections between ancient Egyptian pantheon of gods and the superheroes of today provided repeated epiphanies that kept us on the edge of our seats. We had the opportunity to not just imagine connections but see that actual ways our Africana past was connected to the superheroes of today. We could see that even the European mainline superheroes were creatively whitewashed versions of African deities, legends, and myths that date back thousands of years. We were a part of the story.

Yet, another panel workshop I attended at the Motor City Black Age of Comics was the “African Origins of Superheroes.” This workshop held attendees at the edge of their seats. They wanted to know where they fit in and what their connections were to the mainstream superheroes they grew up with, such as Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The connections between ancient Egyptian pantheon of gods and the superheroes of today provided repeated epiphanies that kept us on the edge of our seats. We had the opportunity to not just imagine connections but see that actual ways our Africana past was connected to the superheroes of today. We could see that even the European mainline superheroes were creatively whitewashed versions of African deities, legends, and myths that date back thousands of years.

At each convention, I found that the creatives and artists yearned to share. They wanted attendees to grasp the intricacies of their art or story. They shared how they arrived
at a product that they could vend and market. Many times, however, it was not about the selling of merchandise alone or marketability of their product. Instead, what drove them was that they had a story to tell. They wanted to get the word out about their work and the relevance it has to the continuum of Black life.

I walked around the exhibit hall and met vendors and creators. I took time and listened to their personal pitch, especially if they were the artists and authors of the books, art, or comics being displayed. They were able to provide the firsthand story on their process and passion. When I asked what brought them to comics or the creative process, they often shared their personal stories, not merely on the origin of the text, but what inspired them to create as well. Their stories were narratives of struggle and personal epiphanies of realized dreams. It was a joy to hear their journeys. I was inspired by their tenacity to either get their art out or come full circle in life to return to art and creative processes. These were moments of good news and inspiration for any who would listen and listen indeed I did!

In each of these cases, the artist or workshop presenter offered specific historical accounts of Afrofuturism. Historical memories were woven with personal stories and thick concepts were unpacked in layers. Each of these presenters offered a specific content (noema) related to a distant past that demonstrated the centrality of African cultures to the images and stories that we hear today. It was an un-erasure of what has been erased over centuries of colonialism, anti-black racism, and white supremacy. *This noematic content created a powerful noetic context through which participants in the workshops could refigure their entire relationship to the past as African Descendant people.* None of us would see Batman, Superman, or Wonder Woman in the same way ever again.
3. Relationality as Gratitude and Grace

Relationality is not uni-directional, and as audience members took in the work of these presenters, there was a tangible sense of gratitude extended back to them. More than just “fan worship,” there was an intimacy that came with the book signings and the opportunities for pictures and questions. As I observed and participated in these interactions, it was clear to me that these presenters were engaged with each of the persons who spoke with them, or asked for a book to be signed, or to have a picture taken, with appreciation. Thus, another aspect of the noetic context is a modality of receiving appreciation that makes this something much more than “fan worship.” The workshop presenters are not motivated by ego-centric gratification. Rather, there is a tangible sense of shared challenges that are met through a common interest in countering the death-dealing histories that so often define our worlds.

Another example of this noetic-context in which artists and presenters at the conventions are not driven by ego-centric gratification was when I arrived to the MECCA convention in Detroit in 2017. When I arrived, I was welcomed by a seminal author, Sharee Renée Thomas, who was just sitting at the registration table checking digital tickets and welcoming guests. There she was in her signature oversized Afro and smile while talking to attendees and spreading genuine hospitality. I learned over time that this was common for artists and writers in the convention community. Despite their big names and prestige, they aided in fostering community and welcome by pitching in and doing what seemed like menial tasks for them. The unstated graciousness demonstrated their own commitment to the communities’ success and inclusion of others.

In yet another case, I met Maia Crown Williams shortly after checking in for the convention. She was the woman in charge with whom I had been communicating with
during my preliminary research. She and Dr. Reynaldo Anderson are the co-founder of the Black Speculative Arts Movement (BSAM). She is based in Detroit, MI and he in St. Louis, MO. She was an energetic and soulfully sassy proud Detroit native, who could cut you a look that can bring one to their knees with a personality indeed, large and in charge. Her personal welcome made the day rich. Taken together, these are examples of a noetic-noematic correlation that was generated across all of the conventions I attended. *In each of these cases, the simple process of greeting attendees (noema) becomes correlated in a noetic-context of relational affirmation of the value of the shared commitment to success and inclusion of others.*

In another variation of this noetic-noematic correlate is my experience of deciding what purchases to make. After making an initial orbit and having conversations with each vendor, artist, or exhibitor my second round was to make purchases. I went through to make conscious and deliberate choices. I felt in many ways this was an honoring of their work. This process of selling and buying material (e.g., Superhero Huff) reveals a certain kind of value tangibly present at the conventions. The conventions provide the space for the artists to conduct vital business enterprises. The merchandise and marketplace was where “loot” was gathered and exchanged. In the process of exchange, vibrant life stories came alive as well as offering life strategies of resistance. It is also a form of reinvesting in the community—sowing into the ongoing development of not only their individual art, but their extended families and support too. I didn’t have much to give as a grad student, but—what I do give and purchase, matters. These are purchases not just donations, so I receive much in exchange. Unlike simple “fan worship” wherein the purchases of items are motivated from a blanket sense of desire to have something, the purchases I made were fueled by *a noetic context in which I saw each purchase (noema) functioned as a way of supporting the artists and as a reinvestment in the community (noesis).*
4. Relationality as Fellowship and Historic Value Recognized

As affirming as these many encounters with conference organizers and presenters were, none were as powerful as the after-hours informal gatherings I was able to attend. On most occasions, I returned to my private bed and breakfast or hotel space after the official events of the day were completed. On one memorable occasion, however, I was invited to what I came to call *wisdom-time*. Wisdom-time is when elders and sages are willing to share of their personal well of knowledge and experiences after an event or gathering in an informal setting. These are down time circles where intergenerational knowledge and history flows. These informal forms of knowledge are valuable and rich (Westfield). I experienced these as what Toni Morrison calls the “tools of the dancing mind.” These gatherings can equip one with the tools of the dancing mind of those who have walked similar journeys and allows for unmitigated and unfiltered conversations (Morrison).

On another occasion, instead of going back to my own hotel, I went to the hotel where the event organizers for the San Francisco BCAF were staying. The very posh hotel was a far cry from the under renovation hotel without heat in which I was staying. I had not really eaten, so I ordered food and hot tea and settled into a booth near the senior scholars. Stacey Robinson, David Walker, Joe Illidge, John Jennings, Tony Medina, and Charles Long were among the scattered artists and intellectuals filling the room. They were each in corners chatting away in pairs. I did not want to insert myself into what looked like a mini ‘meetings of the minds’, thinking up new projects and ideas. I was witnessing artistic collegiality certainly, however it seemed also sincere respect and invested interest in the shared work as well.

So, I waited for an invitation. There was a larger table they all eventually gathered at and invited me to join in. I brought my tea and plate and happily obliged. The elder at the
table was Dr. Charles Long. I reintroduced myself to Dr. Long. I was in his seminar while in graduate school over a decade earlier while on a Doctoral Fellowship at Drew University. He graciously responded. Earlier in the day, the lead artists spoke about how the night before, the esteemed Long tarried in the lobby with them and wisdom time and deep and heady conversations ensued. They said it was like drinking from a cup of intergenerational wisdom, and I wanted a sip of the wisdom cup. So, I was there.

They asked if I had a specific question, and yes, I did. I wanted to know their own thoughts on semiotics and comics, and what perspective Long held on Black liminality. They set up a video recorder in the corner and let the tape roll. It was exhilarating. The setting up of the video recorder made it clear that they all recognized the value of what was transpiring. It made clear that their own modality of being (their noetic context) saw these casual conversations as historical enough to warrant making a video record. The noematic content of sharing conversation in a hotel lounge after the formal events of the day have ended, corresponds to a noetic-context that made these casual conversations concrete manifestations of historical value in the now. This noetic-noematic correlate is a relationality of fellowship and historical value recognized.

5. Relationality as Intersectional

As I participated in each of the Comicons, I noted that much of the activities were conducted by complementary teams of men and women. These activities themselves were not directly focused on gender, but they nonetheless were intersectional in different ways. Some of the material products and art I noticed had a cast of characters with a rich inclusion of gender and race presence in their narrative. When I spoke with the artists and creators, they articulated an intentional effort to create inclusive universes that took on real issues (Medina; Smith). For example, Black Women’s hair was a topic of one comic collection. I
bought it for my own. As a woman who struggles with the health and wellness of my natural hair, I took pride in seeing the issue come to life in this form. It was a form that I can share with my two daughters and nieces that also wake up with an embodied reality of Black ethnic hair in American society as a social issue to be navigated (Jetter; Savage).

A similar situation occurred at the San Francisco BCAF. One particular artist was a professor of Women and Gender Studies. Her work revealed her story as a Black queer women of color and academic. She also had another story about her ongoing encounters with dominant society about her hair. I found her work to be important work in this medium. Many young black girls do not have venues to articulate their sexuality and race, much less hear stories of women who have thrived in the face of discrimination and peer pressure within the Black community. The comic medium offers a way to have resources for discussion in an accessible medium of hope and inspiration. Moreover, the convention locale, San Francisco, presented a space and market that would be willing to have these conversations openly with these resources in hand. Perhaps, I was seeing the obvious. Yet there was something refreshing and novel to a comic book that explored sexuality and gender in an educational and an intergenerational approach. It was neither vulgar nor profane but provided a voice for youth and adult queer women who had been silenced in larger society. *This noematic-content centering of the interrelated specifics of race, gender, and sexuality corresponded to a noetic context that recognized intersectionality as integral to relationality.*

6. Spatiality as Transformations Into New and Previously Unavailable Worlds

The spatiality of each convention had its own character and identity. Each varied in nuanced and distinct ways. However, the experience of entering any convention is one that evokes particular noetic-noematic structures on every occasion. The BSAM-MECCA, for
example, was held in the Fall of 2017 at the Detroit Public Library. This was the first Black Arts comic convention I ever attended. Upon entering the building, the detailed carved sculptures and reliefs were made more imposing by the artwork and signs announcing the BSAM-MECCA event. The entrance to the historic edifice was ominous and the largest in Detroit. I was surrounded by the beauty of the Detroit Public library with its rich African American history clearly present. There was an imposing presence of black artists taking up the space with culturally unapologetic authenticity. The high ornate ceilings and classical themes carried into the exhibit hall as if daring one to challenge the wisdom of the space. I was surrounded by images and murals that were breathtaking. The sense of history carried in this space resonated with me viscerally as a welcoming embrace. It was an invocation, an entry into conversation with a Black worldview. The historic edifice of the library was transformed into an Afrofuturist locale of awe.

The Great Hall of the library top floor was a rotunda filled with vendors and exhibitors. There was a sense of arrival, a sense of finally getting to my first Black comic convention that swept over me in a wave of unexpected glee. The atmosphere was aflutter with engaged conversations with soulful Motown music occupying the air. All the encircling aspects collided to invoke a new cognitive consonance that I had not experienced prior. The noematic contents of this space existed in correlation with a noetic context that created a powerfully new experience for me. It was an experience that I could not have experienced except for the confluence of all of these particular aspects of space and context. In one moment, there was an unnamed alignment of mind, body, and spirit. It felt right. I was anchored in the moment. I felt home. Although this particular location had its own unique architecture, each of the conventions I attended created the same noetic-noematic correlation of a
transformed world that was previously unavailable. To be in the space meant to be in relation to the creators and to enter into their spatial imaginaries and universes.

7. Spatiality as Transformations Into an Authentic Self

As I walked around the exhibit halls, I met many vendors and creators. I took time and listened to their personal pitch, especially if they were the artists and authors of the book, art, or comic being displayed. They were able to provide the firsthand story on their process and passion. When I asked what brought them to comics or the creative process, they often shared their personal stories on not merely the origin of the text, but what inspired them to create as well. Their stories were narratives of struggle and personal epiphanies of realized dreams. It was a joy to hear their journeys. I was inspired by their tenacity to either get their art out or come full circle in life to return to art and creative processes. I was also impressed by the diversity of types of comics and arts. I saw comics. I saw individual artists. I saw crafts that I would see at a festival or marketplace vendor. These had earrings and niceties like church momma fans trimmed in lace and bling. These of course made my heart leap with joy and I bought two!

When I walked down the aisle the convention halls the smiles of the artist each great me with sincerity and ease. The express their openness by the ease and relaxed postures. Some are nervous and I realize it may be their first convention too. Each artist and exhibitor beckoned me to join their universe. The beckoning hands were not like the snake oil salesmen luring you in. They were bright colored comic art and eye caching table displays which compelled the curious to come and see something different and new. Table after table was buzz with the sharing. Sometimes I encountered pleasant surprises. Like the story of a Women’s Study Professor who released her first comic book. She also had a delightful
collection of iconic figures in literature such as Lucille Clifton, Amiri Baraka, or I got them all for my inspiration wall. I spent a while talking to her before a young couple came that went to school at her Alma Mater and made alumni connection while we all talked and shared our journeys. They wanted to know my story, as much as they shared theirs. This response stands is direct contrast with what I get at most mainstream conventions, which is, “What’s a nice Black girl doing at a place like this?” Instead there was a joy in our shared “me too” Black Nerd Geek lived in that moment.

The artists and vendors invited me to engage in the building of my collections of materials that tell the stories of other worlds. For example, Yorli Huff’s invitation to her world of Superhero Huff is one of my favorites. Her comic universe is based on her own real-life story of workplace injustice as an undercover agent and the ensuing case of discrimination she filed (Lamarre). I was drawn to her personal narrative and the challenges she endured and overcame. I was inspired by the way she turned her adversity into a comic universe of empowerment.

The product line Huff developed went beyond the Huff Superhero comic. Her impressive clothing line captured my attention immediately. The t-shirts and leggings had images of female superheroes with natural hair; like mine. Her line included full sizes which means that she took into consideration the real body sizes of women, an act of gender consciousness for women of color with curves. I felt included. I bought my shirts and leggings. These have been some of the most recognizable items among my collection of material culture. They are also conversation starters that I share frequently with inquiries about women in comics and female superheroes. They ask, “Where did you get that?” or “I want one?” or even “is that a part of Afrofuturism?” I am happy to share her story of encouragement with responses in the affirmative. A piece of her story walks around with me.
and others every day. I continue to share her universe long after the conventions are over, a true solidified engagement with her universe.

All of the Comicons I attended created a space where the desire for expression of the authentic Black Self that is unapologetically contrary to dominant hegemonic notions of the Black Self could be fulfilled. *The noematic content of these spaces created a noetic context for engagements among people that allowed an authentic expression of a Black Self to emerge outside of the dominant hegemonic cultural norms in which we live.* Black Independent comic and Arts conventions are culturally and historically informed aesthetic expressive spaces of artists and creatives that create them not solely or purely for the purpose of Black expression of their art, but for the expression of Black humanity through their art.

8. Corporeality as a Mind-Blowing Reality

Walking through the exhibit halls, listening to presenters, viewing the artwork was, at all times, a full body experience. I felt the buzz of the events deep into my bones. To say folks were “mind blown” is an understatement. I was also so blown away. I tried to hold back my expressions of glee and fandom glow as I met authors that I’ve read and artists whose work inspired me deeply. One set of panels I attended that had this effect on me the most were at BCAF. It featured artists such as Joe Illidge, David Walker, Nilah McGruder, and Brandon Thomas. The next panel featured Nnedi Okorafor, Victor LaValle, and Matt Ruff. The final panel featured Tony Medina, John Jennings, Stacey Robinson, and Damian Duffy. These authors and comic icons filled my shelf and put stars indeed in my eyes. The “mind-blowing” part of this for me was to be present in the same space with these authors whose works have been prized objects on my bookshelves for so long. To be with them in the same space transformed all of those past moments of inspiration through the work into a
new and enlivened bodily feeling of being real in ways never before possible. I could embody the worlds offered to me through their work with a concreteness that I had not previously experienced. *The noematic content of these authors gathered in this place with me created a noetic context of possibility for realness that I had not previously experienced.*

9. Corporeality as Material Affirmation

I was also impressed in the marketplace exhibit halls by the diversity of types of comics and arts. I saw comics. I saw individual artists. I saw crafts that I would not see at other festivals or mainline comic convention vendors. These were alternative artistic items that were components of black culture but perhaps not traditional comic conventions. Afrocentric jewelry and niceties like “church momma fans” trimmed in lace and bling were among the many vendors. The latter made my heart leap with joy and I bought two!

The materiality alone was not what provided the visceral corporeal rush. It was the affective joy of seeing myself and the beauty of Black characters represented in the art. The internal affect was the processing of being represented in the African cultural nuances of the material culture. I want to note that it was not a precognitive planned awareness. It took the form of an epiphany of ecstasy. There were sensations of relief that teetered on disbelief. There were many cases where *the simple but profound presence of beauty bursting forth through material art (noema) created a noetic context of epiphany at the relief from the negative images of Blackness that fill mainstream culture.*

10. Corporeality as Never Going Back

The many artists I spoke with spoke not only in plain ways about their journey but also about what challenged them. They shared in very honest and frank ways the challenges of being a person of African descent in literature, science fiction, and comics. Their
journeys were not easy ones. I was moved by the intimacy of the moment and the openness with which they shared. After the panels, I had time for conversation, to talk directly with the presenters, a snap few solicited selfies, to shake their hands, and thank them for their work.

There is a saying that “once you know, you can’t unknow.” Knowing their personal stories gave depth to their work. I had just completed reading Victor LaValle’s comic series indirectly based on a Black Frankenstein. I was also just starting Nnedi Okorafor’s Binti, an Africanfuturist novel. I found it refreshing and historically rich. They each shared in detail their stories and the powerful motivations that inspired them. My intellectual desire to learn more was strengthened deep into my body by their motivations and inspirational stories. It created within my body an energy that spurred me to a very basic and fundamental hunger to “know more.”

One panel was one of Speculative Fiction and Black Science Fiction authors, and featured Nnedi Okorafor, Victor LaValle and Matt Ruff. While I did not know the last panelist, the first two were significant figures to me in the emerging new wave of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts. The third was impressive and I looked forward to reading his work. The phrase that continued to echo was a version of the comment that “stories should be understood as a type of technology to tell about our humanity.” I have to admit I was in awe, in the first row, and star struck (completely geeked out).

The sharing was rich as the writers shared their inspiration, their personal techniques, and struggles in their creation process. Each of them had also been impacted by HP Lovecraft. If not impacted directly by Lovecraft’s work, then in a discursive way such as Okorafor. They each also shared these parts of their journey and how Lovecraft intersected with their work. Okorafor shared her experience of receiving an award where the statue was
in the shape of HP Lovecraft. Then soon after her coming to consciousness on his writing of "On the Creation of Niggers." Needless to say, the 2011 award there was a campaign to change the shape of the award and recently, in 2015 it was changed. This caused a great deal of conflict and challenges in the larger arts community as backlash from other writers who saw no problem with keeping the shape of the award in the image of Lovecraft, a man with clearly bigoted views. In all of these experiences I encountered complex noema of life struggles that shed uncomfortable light on the realities born by these African Descendant authors. The artists demonstrated care and concern for the participants’ awareness of the challenges and pitfalls as a public writer and in the case specifically as a Black public intellectual.

In the case of Okorafor, her Lovecraft experience provided an exemplary way to navigate a professional challenge as an embodied Black woman writer. Her navigation of the incident led me to know that in the twentieth first century there is hope to have sustaining impact as a Black public intellectual. It was this space which provided the venue for her and my own lived hope to connect. *Encountering these complex noema created a noetic context of never going back, both in the sense of never going back to not seeing the realities of the struggles these artists faced, but also in the sense of never going back to a time when these realities were accepted without notice.*

11. Temporality and the Intergenerational Imperative

At the Detroit Motor City Black Age of Comics Convention (BACC) Yorli Huff was an impressionable and memorable artist and vendor. After speaking with her and seeing her

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dynamic merchandise of a female superhero detective, I did a bit of research and detective work of my own. I wanted to know more about the sage storyteller who not only had a comic book series, but the merchandise and inspiring paraphernalia to go along with it. I was taken away not only by the tenacity of the character, but also by the artist. Her story as female detective was one that championed women and the dispossessed. She had in real life done the same as a federal agent who personally overcame professional discrimination and personal adversity. I left her booth not only with merchandise to wear, but with an inspiring story to pass on intergenerationally to another woman or young girl of African Descent. The value of this may seem trite. However, each young Black girl that needs a narrative of hope does always not get one. Many young Black girls who are caught in the cycle of poverty, low performing schools, and disparate family situations do not receive life giving stories. Too frequently, young Black urban girls are inserted as mere data of human casualty in the narratives of a sociological statistics. They are then disembodied into another report on a larger scale or perhaps on a personal scale never having the chance to experience resilience building spaces. I found Superhero Huff to be a doorway of an alternative vision for young women in a gender toxic America.

One father of Asian descent was with his daughter at his booth. He shared that he was there because he created a comic called *MESSed* with Asian characters for his daughter (Kalagayan). He wanted his daughter to have a set of comics and superheroes that looked like her. I found the inclusion of this artist was important in the convention. Space was made for other ethnicities and artists that did not fit in other mainline comic conventions. His “truth,” his “why” was motivated by creating a future and a world for his daughter. This was powerful to me. It spoke the value of representation and the importance of the development of the individual person’s self-perception in the world. For his daughter, she
would forever be changed by her father prioritizing her development and personal self-worth by making a comic that reflected her experience and possible worlds she could inhabit. I was moved. The artwork produced by these African Descendant authors (noema) provides a noetic context of intergenerational connection through which the struggles of the past create new possibilities for generations of the future.

12. Temporality as a Corrective Story Telling

At various points in my experience of these Comicons, I felt a sense of relief and assuredness at the writings and creative productions of the cadre of Afrofuturists who were making their mark today. It felt as if they were making what was wrong, right. They were corrective story tellers. So, while their fiction was not fact, it was a mode of reclaiming of culture and identify that has been present but delegitimized for millennia. Simply knowing that there were folks out there trying to correct the Africana story gave me hope and elated joy. These are what inspire and provoke praise breaks—expressions of elation or uncontrollable joy! To hear stories from the past (noema) told in a present in which they are newly valued creates a noetic context in which the many wrongs of the past can be experienced as corrected.

13. Temporality as Desire to Remain and Extend Presence

I did not want to leave any of the conventions or for them to end. There was a yearning to stretch out my presence there. On one hand I did not want to seem like a mere lurking fan, on the other I just wanted to taste a bit more of the flavor of community and joy, because it was good. The camaraderie was good, emanating a sense that we were all in this together.

At almost all the events, I offered to assist in the take down or closing of registration. It was all I could do, since I could not physically do heavy lifting. I wanted to do
more. In San Francisco, I knew the final day of the event would be at the larger convention venue downtown with all the exhibitors, so I stayed in the more intimate auditorium space to garner all I could from the panelists. Even after the last panel, I found myself glued to my chair in awe. In Toronto and Detroit conventions, I was invited by the hosts to join them for fellowship or after party time. In San Francisco, there was a planned fellowship on the program at a local Black owned restaurant. I was elated to be included. It also gave me a deeper glimpse into the world of the artists and not just as an attendee, but as a part of a dynamic community.

These experiences left me with a needed to spread the sense of promise and potential for an experience that fueled self-sustenance and survival. I was motivated to connect to something greater and a purpose beyond the individual experience. I felt a compelling urge to connect and stay connected with others. I was moved to not merely go to the fellowship, but also become a conversation partner in a larger movement, to seek and find my place and to make a difference. Ultimately, each person is encouraged to act on the epiphany of representation and perceive that the world can be envisioned and dreamed differently than what they get in the larger society’s hegemonic imagination that fuels systemic dehumanization and oppression (E. M. Townes). I with an enfleshed promise of hope that hovered in my soul (Copeland). Being in an Afrofuturist convention (noema) creates a desire to remain in that place and extend the possibilities made real there to a larger community. This desire is sustained through a noetic context of an enfleshed promise of home that hovers in the soul.
1. Griot/Griotte Temporality: Relationality or Communality *Lived Human*

*Relations*

The small auditorium was almost completely standing room only. The panel was one of Speculative Fiction and Black Science Fiction authors whose work I was familiar with. They included Nnedi Okorafor, Victor LaValle, and Matt Ruff. While I did not know the last panelist, the first two were significant figures to me in the emerging new wave of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts. LaValle was impressive and I looked forward to reading his work on *Black Frankenstein*. A phrase which continued to echo across the authors was a version of the comment that “stories should be understood as a type of technology to tell about our humanity.”

The sharing was rich as the writers shared their inspiration, their personal techniques, and struggles in their creation process. Each of them had also been impacted by HP Lovecraft. If not impacted directly by Lovecraft’s work, they may have been so in a discursive way such as Okorafor. They each also shared these parts of their journey and how Lovecraft intersected with their work. Okorafor, for example, shared her experience of receiving an award where the statue was in the shape of HP Lovecraft. Then soon after her coming to consciousness on his writing of “On the Creation of Niggers,” her response was not one of pride that the award should have presented. Instead it represented a tension of ontological and professional dissonance to receive an award in the name and visage of a man who denigrated Black being. Since the 2011 award, there was a campaign to change the shape of the award, and recently, in 2015 the visage was changed.

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of conflict and challenges in the larger arts community as backlash from other writers who saw no problem with keeping the shape of the award in the image of Lovecraft, a man with clearly bigoted views.

Black independent comic conventions emerge from imagined worlds where the Black experience is centered and operates as a portal to experiences not available within the dominant culture. The conventions in this study, and Afrofuturistic landscape which allow for individual and intracultural exchange, are driven not merely by the single experience, but also by the larger shared experiences of attendees. Black independent comic conventions are events (noemas) driven by the potential for new possible worlds, and new ways of countering the current sociogenesis of death dealing existence that confronts many human societies. Black independent comic conventions create noetic context of hope and new understandings in the lived experience of one’s everyday life.

ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. *When and how is Afrofuturism a salient perspective through which to critically examine contemporary conditions of lived experience for African Diasporic people?* Based on the phenomenological research I conducted, Afrofuturism emerges as a perspective though which to critically examine contemporary condition of lived experience for African Diasporic people when noetic-contexts create directedness toward experience that open the soul to new possibilities of hope and imagined futures that otherwise would not have existed.

2. *How does Afrofuturism create and utilize liminal spaces? What is revealed in the liminal spaces created by engagement with Afrofuturism?* Afrofuturism creates and utilizes liminal spaces through refiguring space and experience as African-centric so that participants can engage in ways of being (noetic-contexts) that transform their everyday reality of
anti-black racism and white supremacy. What is revealed in the liminal space created by engagement with Afrofuturism is an awareness of self as situated within the historical continuum that unabashedly recognizes the long arch of systemic oppression.

3. *When and how does race and gender in speculative fiction shape the lived experiences of those who engage in temporal imagined worlds?* Race and gender in speculative fiction provide representative possibilities of the racialized and gendered self in the imaginary. The Black imaginary offers innovative and culturally dynamic modes of expression. Through these modalities of expression, new ways of visualizing the Black self then emerge as having the freedom to now imagine the self through a Black gaze. The liberative implications therefore make space for the expression of one’s self in multiple formations. These are not mere identity grasping efforts, but rather efforts to express the intersectional dynamism of the Black self, whether it be raced, gendered, sexed, or other multiplicities of identity. It offers a freedom of inclusion that is only gestured toward in daily life. The recognized temporality means that within the space one recognizes that to exit one must return to the dominant society, perhaps renewed and invested in reexperiencing the Afrofuturist freedom once more.

4. *How are Afrofuturist spaces life giving in the face of the existential social oppression experienced daily as embodied Black people? In what ways do these liminal spaces offer livity and meaning to survive and thrive with joy and anticipatory hope in the face of persistent systemic human indignities of everyday life? How do these spaces promote futurity and cultural sustainability for African descendent participants? (What happens when the thrill is gone?)* After the convention experience, while powerful, one remains beholden to the daily societal exigencies in
the cultural normative context, that is undeniably governed by race, class, gendered situatedness in a White Heteropatriarchal Capitalist System. (of the current Global economy). The potentiated hope found in the liminal world of comic conventions can be mined as a liberative operative mode to be deployed by people of African Descent. The thrill of Afrofuturist comic convention extends for many, not all, as a way of life. It is a choice to live life in such a way where ones daily philosophy urges all decisions towards life centering science and imagination with the life-giving practice and joy of African Descendant people at heart. It becomes then an option to continue an Afrofuturist world view that extends well beyond the convention moment. In this vein, scholars have argued and continue to suggest that Afrofuturism, while speculative, contains the building blocks for reclaiming both the past and the creation of sustainable futures. The building blocks they offer are the particles of real consequences such as climate change, urban displacement and gentrification, ideological liberation, and revolutionary artistic movements (Anderson; Phillips). Offered is nothing short of new ways to imagine the future and then be motivated to dare to create a future where the lives of African Descendants not only matter but are valued and centered.

The Rastafari neologism livity means a “way of life.” Livity describes the foods we eat, our customs, our dress, one’s existence among a collective within an anti-market-driven economy, rituals, and philosophy. The philosophy of livity grounds a person’s disposition to politics and the political. See Neil Roberts “Violence, Livity, Freedom” Small Axe, Volume 18, Number 1, March 2014 (No. 43), pp. 181-192 (Review)
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND WOMANIST EPILOGUE: WALKING SANKOFA

“You are the Children of those who would not die!”
-Slave Castle Tour Guide

CODA: Sankofarration: “Go Back and Fetch It!” then Tell It

Afrofuturistic hope and vision becomes a way of life. It is a philosophical way of knowing, being, and doing in the world. Afrofuturism praxis and intentional action and the journey it takes in and through liminal Afrofuturist spaces is a new way to engage the world philosophically. “Imagination, hope, and the expectation for transformative change is a through line that undergirds most Afrocentric art, literature, music, and criticism. It is the collective weighted belief that anchors the aesthetic. It is a prism through which some create their way of life” (Womack 42).

The exploration through the nexus of interrelated experiences culminates with the gift of hope. More than anticipated hope that is not yet realized, but it is a hope that is revealed and inspired by the experiences. It is a hope that can travel beyond the boundaries of the experience and can be shared with others who traverse Afrofuturist liminal spaces. How can any experience have so much potential? These potentialities occur and are to be extracted from the experience through the prior description, reduction, and interpretation. While they could be anticipated prior to engagement in the comic conventions, they are achieved experienced moments that were highlighted in my liminal liturgy.

Afrofuturist convention experience offers a portal to the Womanist commitment to the “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker). My reflection on the phenomena reveals the modalities that counter the lived realities of nihilism and move
toward modalities of survival and the potential for new revelations of thriving as embodied
Black beings in contemporary times. My study details the existential significance of liminal
space in its capacity to thwart the impact of racial and cultural alienation. I reveal how this
celebration of Black life and embodied engagement with Afrofuturist representations in the
arts creates a restructuring of experience at the level of perception whereby previously
internalized norms of dehumanization are replaced by potentialized hope.

Afrofuturist liminal spaces are crafted with the intention of highlighting, celebrating,
and curating Black life and worldview with lived experience at the center, rather than the
margins. We don’t have enough. They are needed in large metropolises and in small locales
where Black ontology is marginalized and systemically made invisible. They offer sustenance
and fortitude in the midst of the current age. To be clear, the current age is an environment
of persistent toxicity to the subaltern soul. Black Comicon Culture functions as an ethic of
self-care which allows one to take time to recharge and reset in the midst of busy racial and
culturally embattled lives. It allows for not merely a counter narrative, but counter action
beyond the Afrofuturist narratives of imagined hope. It allows for a lived hope beyond the
walls of the experience. Afrofuturist spaces are training grounds for future livity of Black
lives set apart from hegemonic White imaginary.41

Afrofuturist conventions are spaces where Lydia Kelow-Bennett argues that the
“conditions of anti-Black oppression and Black resistance contribute to the content and style
of Black creative expressions, conceptualizing these conditions as torque—a twisting tension
out of which Black creative works emerge.” These are what Kelow-Bennett calls “Torqued

41The Rastafari neologism livi ty means a “way of life.” Livity describes the foods we eat, our customs, our dress,
one’s existence among a collective within an anti-market-driven economy, rituals, and philosophy. The
philosophy of livi ty grounds a person’s disposition to politics and the political. See Neil Roberts “Violence,
Livi ty, Freedom” Small Axe, Volume 18, Number 1, March 2014 (No. 43), pp. 181-192 (Review)
Spaces of Black expression” born out of critiques of racial domination, which I believe offer up landscapes for freedom of self in relation to each other as ontologically Black beings, one with one another.

Creative Torqued spaces manifest in multiple formations out of the need for temporal social worlds of healing, reconciliation, and resistance to anti-Black racism and systemic oppression in the lived reality. They arise out of necessity and self-preservation. These self-crafted liminal torqued spaces are robust semiprivate landscapes for the thriving of the human soul as long as they remain portals for imagination, motivators of movements, and repositories for potentiated hope (J. A. Gordon; Kelow-Bennett).

**Walking Sankofa**

“You are the Children of those who would not die.” These were the words spoken by the tour guides upon my visit from the Maison de Slaves at Goreé Island in Senegal in 1995 after seeing what is called “The Door of No Return.” It is the farthest point in a captured African’s journey prior to being loaded onto cargo ships to transform their lives from that of human to enslaved cargo. While standing there with other students from across the African Diaspora, we wept. It was a deep guttural sloppy weeping that was imbued with the sorrow of the many millions who crossed the great chasm of the Atlantic Ocean in the bowels of ships, to be disenfranchised from their humanity, distributed as cargo, and disembarked on the shores of places like Bahia, West Indies, French Guiana, Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Jamestown. Someone did die during those voyages, someone kept taking their breath, that I might stand here today. They Lived. I was a Child of “Those Who would Not Die.”
I heard the words echoed again, two decades later, when a variation of this haunting statement was uttered by another tour guide while I was exiting the Elmina Fort in Accra, Ghana. I began again to try to make sense of these words over the years with a self-reflective journey of *Sankofa*. Sankofa means to “go back and fetch it” in the West African Ashanti language of Twi. It means to remember a past that you many never have known and recapture it. It infers an action of retrieving a memory or knowledge from the past to be utilized in present day life with intentionality of human motion toward the future. Needless to say, Sankofa living is uncomfortable, and at times uneasy.

What does it mean to be both a memory and a future imagined hope in your present life? How can the lived reality and potential of the yet unborn be the driving force for an utterly denigrated and oppressed slice of humanity that moaned at the Doors of No Return? These West African ancestral progenitors stood in these doors as they were loaded up into the hulls of ships. They were no longer to be daughters, sons, spouses, worshippers, craftsmen, nobles, chiefs, queen mothers, midwives, or herdsman. They were to become ontologically inhuman. They were to become slaves.

I am a descendant from one of these people. I am descended from those “who would not die.” Many of my ancestors could have died on the march from inland to the slave forts, or had their throats cut at the coastal Last Bath trading site, or died from dysentery in the ankle deep human waste on the floors and walls of their captors’ dungeons, or died as excess cargo thrown overboard during the sea voyage, or took their own life as they were systemically stripped of names, identity, and personhood on auction blocks and plantations, or died as they ran away to an unknown promise of freedom, or died at the hands of soldiers and oppressive authorities of the Governments which ruled the lands of South America, Central America, North America or the Caribbean/West Indies or at any
point of the trade. Had they perhaps died during the Civil War, Reconstruction, or the Black Nadir, had they died during Jim Crow and lynching terrorism of systemic disenfranchisement, had they died … I would not have lived. The kaleidoscope of historic resistance which was required for my very being today is almost unfathomable. They lived and so I live.

Yet the descendants of the captors and the descendants of my African progenitors have very different lives in 2019. White privilege and Black oppression are synced in systemic denigration which continue to operate in concert with a negation of humanity of Black bodies. The persistence of a hegemonic imagination accentuates the need for a counter and vibrant Black imaginary of hope.
REFERENCES


—. “Violence, Livity, Freedom” *Small Axe*, Volume 18, Number 1, March 2014 (No. 43), pp. 181-192 (Review)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF ORG/CON</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DATE 2017 Cycle</th>
<th>COSTS/Budget Estimates</th>
<th>CONTACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSAM Detroit: MECCACON MIDWEST ETHNIC CONVENTION for COMICS and ARTS</td>
<td>Detroit, MI Detroit Public Library</td>
<td>Sept. 16th-17</td>
<td>Air BNB: $300 Registration: $5 Airfare: $500.</td>
<td>Maia Crown Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSAM Toronto 2017 Black Speculative Arts Movement</td>
<td>University of Toronto 27 King’s College Circle, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1S5</td>
<td>Saturday, October 21 at 1 PM – 8 PM EDT</td>
<td>Air BNB: $300 Registration: $10 Airfare: $500</td>
<td>Maia Crown Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Annual Motor City Black Age of Comics Convention 2017</td>
<td>Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan</td>
<td>Saturday, November 18 at 11 AM - 6 PM EST</td>
<td>Air BNB: $300 Registration: $10 Airfare: $500</td>
<td>MoBACC P.O. BOX 21821 DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48221 Andre Batts @ <a href="mailto:motorcityblackage2016@gmail.com">motorcityblackage2016@gmail.com</a> Website: <a href="http://dreadlocks101.wix.com/motorcityblackage">http://dreadlocks101.wix.com/motorcityblackage</a> <a href="mailto:motorcityblackage2016@gmail.com">motorcityblackage2016@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Comix and Arts Festival BCAF MLK Weekend</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>January 13-17, 2018 MLK Weekend</td>
<td>Hotel: 600 Registration: Airfare: $500</td>
<td>John Jennings</td>
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<td>MECCA Con 2018</td>
<td>Detroit POST Split from BSAM POST Black Panther</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
<td>Air BNB: $300 Registration: $10 Airfare: $500/ Delta Miles</td>
<td>Maia Crown Williams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ABOVE:
**ATTENDED CONVENTIONS**

### BELOW:
Conventions for 2018 Cycle researched not attend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSAM St. Louis and DC 2018 Black Speculative Arts Movement</td>
<td>St. Louis MO, Washington D.C.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reynaldo Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacktasticon 2018</td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>June 16th, 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONYXCON IX</td>
<td>Wolf Creek Library</td>
<td>August 25th</td>
<td>Family Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame Con</td>
<td>New York Marriott at The Brooklyn Bridge 333 Adams Street Brooklyn, NY 11201</td>
<td>Aug. 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schomburg's 5th Annual Black Comic Book Festival</td>
<td>NYC: Harlem Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 515 Malcolm X Boulevard New York, NY 10037</td>
<td>Jan 13-14, 2018 (2018)</td>
<td>Deirdre Hollman email [deirdr <a href="mailto:ehollman@nypl.org">ehollman@nypl.org</a>](mailto:deirdre <a href="mailto:ehollman@nypl.org">ehollman@nypl.org</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The East Coast Black Age of Comics Convention, Incorporated or ECBACC, Inc</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SolCon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaylexicon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Con—in Baltimore</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfroCon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wakanda Con</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B

IMAGINATIVE VARIATION: NOESIS AND NOEMA

SELECTING EXPERIENCES TO UNCOVER MEANING IN THE

PHENOMENA FORMALIZES THE ANALYSIS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>The Mode of the experience</th>
<th>Overlapping correlations</th>
<th>Additional/Unexpected Revealed Correlations</th>
<th>The What of The Experience</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spatiality</td>
<td>&quot;The Impact/Affect of the Experience&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;The experience of something&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporeality</td>
<td>Meaning of the experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Category or Thing experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/C/R/T</th>
<th>NOESIS</th>
<th>NOEMA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>Anticipation</td>
<td>The experience of Pre convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excitement</td>
<td>Calls and Notices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of being lured in</td>
<td>Engaging in Pre Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being tempted to come &quot;Taste and See&quot; how good it will be.</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationality</th>
<th>A feeling of inclusion and what I have to offer</th>
<th>Valued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being valued in the moment, but also in the community in general</td>
<td>Sense of seeing the self reflected in the images of the art and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sense of safe space</td>
<td>Recognition that all spaces are not safe for self expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safe to express</td>
<td>Or safe for self – being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>感</td>
<td>Experience of welcome and inclusion into a particular liminal space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Relationality | Sense that One can possess the Audacity and daring to voice the incongruency of anti-black racism with their livity, living choices | Valued |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | When values one's voice and opinions matter | Experience of Worth and Worthiness |
|               | Their input matter | *To hear their story |
|               | Their lives matter | *And that they were also worthy to tell their story |
|               |感 | Gospel Good News from the Artist |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/C/R/T</th>
<th>NOESIS</th>
<th>NOEMA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>The experience of Pre convention</td>
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|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               | When values one's voice and opinions matter | Experience of Worth and Worthiness |
|               | Their input matter | *To hear their story |
|               | Their lives matter | *And that they were also worthy to tell their story |
|               |感 | Gospel Good News from the Artist |
| Relationality | Being fed affirmations of human livity and fuel for the soul, a shared common passion for envisioning a better present and hope for a Better Future | Experience of intersubjective affirmation of the individual self/subject |
| Relationality | Permission to dream To come a be a part of something different something new and open to new ideas Feeling of entering an alternate reality in the space (If only temporarily) The permission to imagine | The Experience of the visual and digital Call The Experience of Entering into the Space of the convention Hall The experience of the empowerment of a Temporal Collective Imagination |
| Relationality | The sharing of their stories and witnessing to their challenges motivated others to perhaps take up the task Talking and sharing with the children and being open to answer | Experience of the Workshops and Panels Affirmation of Artist To/by attendees To/by each other By other artists |
| Relationality | A sense that there was a conscious choice to live out their dream and art As a way of life Afrofuturist lens as a choice | Call to participate Welcome Invitation to Afrofuturism |
| Relationality | A Sense of entering into the universe of particular artist  
Sense that new worlds could open up and be built  
A freedom of expression of new world affirming ideas | Permission to imagine | Experience of Sankofa-narration | Conversing and engaging Artists’ Imagined Worlds)  
Readings of Sacred Text or Scripture |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Relationality | Sense that there is a willingness of artist to talk to each person individually  
They grasped on to a freedom in their work  
Their work seem to provide space for a liberty to conceive new worlds and new possibilities  
Unbound and without limits. | Personal liberation for the artists | Experience of Artist sharing their truths | Experience of the Workshops and Panels  
Praise Breaks and Shouting |
<p>| Relationality | Vision of their alternative world that can be or have the potential to be | In contrast to the current disaffirming world of racial capitalism and the white hegemonic imaginary | The experience of listening to stories and exhibitors with “gospel” | Exhibit Hall Conversations: The Gospel, Sermons, and Homilies |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporality</th>
<th>A sense of longing for things to continue</th>
<th>Suspension in time</th>
<th>Experience of the desire to suspend time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>Hold on to the positive experience longer</td>
<td>“On Pause” inside of the convention. Temporal suspension of time inside the space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationality</td>
<td>The sense that it is necessary to go out and tell somebody of the experience the Good news of the event</td>
<td>Getting the word out about the artist and the substance of their cultural productions</td>
<td>Tell the story of positive cultural productions. Productions of Hope and cultural uplift (rather than productions of evil and dehumanization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>Having to let go Letting go and leaving means dealing with the reality of going back into the daily anti-Black racist reality of daily life- (Fanon/ Yancy)</td>
<td>Mitigating the white gaze becomes once again necessary</td>
<td>The experience of leaving and closing down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>Temporary nature— In institutionalizing of the events? Does institutionalizing(structuralizing sedimented) the experience make if too</td>
<td>Benediction/ Departure/ Closing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Relationality | Familiar and stagnant …
|---------------|-----------------------------
|               | Does it begin to take on the qualities of oppression or characteristic s of that which one is trying to depart because of institutionalization (i.e. Church, Barbershops Civic Orgs)
|               | Relationality
|               | Communality
| Families who work and sacrifice to make the dream of production happen
|               | A sense that they have a Vision of it being worth the effort
|               | The sense that we are in this together collectively and not individually
|               | Inspiration to collaborate with family and friend to make a dream come true
|               | A knowing that it is possible after seeing families working together in action.
| cultural uplift cultural connectivity | Kwanzaa Principles Of Ujaama and Umoja
| Experience of Witnessing Black Familial sacrifice, Witnessing Black Familial sacrifice
<p>| The Communal care of each other Collective Economics |
| Exhibit Halls and Conversation s The Gospel, Sermons, and Homilies of Artists |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationality</th>
<th>The experience of Kinship and community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Sense of being a part of something larger than oneself And yet on the individual level a feeling of importance and value to the larger Goal/milieu/ The sense that one’s intellectual needs met and fed by elders— a sense of being tended to mentally and validated intellectually</td>
<td>Experience of being included in conversations with Elders and Creatives Experience of having intellectual needs met and fed by elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spatiality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Corporeality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrofuturist space then is inclusive space Womanist Space Intersectional Space Intergenerational Space</td>
<td>While gender dynamics are not invisible *erasure— neutralized? *complimentary YET They are in many ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hospitality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Invitations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured gatherings after the events were alive with conversation and sharing Folks were still sharing their books Young people were able to informally ask questions to artists And it was a communal kaleidoscope of ideas and sharing All seemed to be welcome</td>
<td>Experience of being included in conversations with Elders and Creatives Experience of having intellectual needs met and fed by elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After the</strong></td>
<td><strong>Affinity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After party (unscripted wisdom for survival and Livity) Elders, Sages, and Griottes Time</td>
<td>Experience of gendered inclusion The experience of gender recognition but not gender essentializing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A sense that my age, race, and gender were not limits to engagement. Can take up or lay down gender norms of the dominant culture in this space: choice of artist or choice of the participant made irrelevant or negligible. The artistry and the Imagination and intellectual capacity are what is recognized. Gender troubling space to what is normative. The experience of embodied necessity to be present as women (Or in some cases Not women but just to “BE”).

Relationality Corporeality

Send that there is a new way of engaging well after the event. Belief that there is a ongoing community afterwards to help support this new world view. Ontic Ontology A way of being. Livity for the soul Afrofuturism as an encountered or as an intentionality in the phenom sense? A Way of being for living. community “of Believers”
APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF NOETIC NOEMATIC CORRELATES
1. Relationality and Digital Community Building

The noematic content provided through the digital space of the internet created a noetic context of bodily exhilaration, and hopefulness that provided a strong contrast to the everyday realities of my normative life.

2. Relationality as Expansion Through Another’s Experience

This noematic content created a powerful noetic context through which participants in the workshops could refigure their entire relationship to the past as African Descent people.

3. Relationality as Gratitude and Grace

In each of these cases, the simple process of greeting attendees (noema) becomes correlated in a noetic-context of relational affirmation of the value of the shared commitment to success and inclusion of others. The purchases I made were fueled by a noetic context in which I saw each purchase (noema) functioned as a way of supporting the artists and as a reinvestment in the community (noesis).

4. Relationality as Fellowship and Historic Value Recognized

The noematic content of sharing of conversation in a hotel lounge after the formal events of the day have ended, corresponds to a noetic-context that made these casual conversations concrete manifestations of historical value in the now. This noetic-noematic correlate is a relationality of fellowship and historical value recognized.

5. Relationality as Intersectional

This noematic-content centering of the interrelated specifics of race, gender, and sexuality corresponded to a noetic context that recognized intersectionality as integral to relationality.

6. Spatiality as Transformations into New and Previously Unavailable Worlds

Each of the conventions I attended created the same noetic-noematic correlation of a
transformed world that was previously unavailable.

7. Spatiality as Transformations into an Authentic Self

The noematic content of these spaces created a noetic context for engagements among people that allowed an authentic expression of a Black Self to emerge outside of the dominant hegemonic cultural norms in which we live.

8. Corporeality as a Mind-Blowing Reality

The noematic content of these authors gathered in this place with me created a noetic context of possibility for realness that I had not previously experienced.

9. Corporeality as Material Affirmation

The simple but profound presence of beauty bursting forth through material art (noema) created a noetic context of epiphany at the relief from the negative images of blackness that fill mainstream culture.

10. Corporeality as Never Going Back

Encountering these complex noema created a noetic context of never going back, both in the sense of never going back to not seeing the realities of the struggles these artists faced, but also in the sense of never going back to a time when these realities were accepted without notice.

11. Temporality and the Intergenerational Imperative

The artwork produced by these African Descendant authors (noema) provides a noetic context of intergenerational connection through which the struggles of the past create new possibilities for generations of the future.

12. Temporality as a Corrective Story Telling

To hear stories from the past (noema) told in a present in which they are newly valued creates a noetic context in which the many wrongs of the past can be experienced as corrected.

13. Temporality as Desire to Remain and Extend Presence
Being in an Afrofururist convention (noema) creates a desire to remain in that place and extend the possibilities made real there to a larger community. This desire is sustained through a noetic context of an enfleshed promise of home that hovers in the soul.

14. Griot/Griotte Temporality: Relationality or Communality Lived Human Relations

Black independent comic conventions are events (noemas) driven by the potential for new possible worlds, and new ways of countering the current sociogenesis of death dealing existence that confronts many human societies. Black independent comic conventions create a noetic context of hope and new understandings in the lived experience of one’s everyday life.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

SAKENA DE YOUNG-SCAGGS

Arizona State University
Barrett Honors College
Tempe, AZ 85287–1612

Tempe Campus
Email: DrSYS@asu.edu
Phone: 480-727-

EDUCATION

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Anticipated Graduation May 2019
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Dissertation: Afrofuturism, Womanist Phenomenology, and the Black Imagination: A Liberative Revisioning of Black Humanity

Boston University School of Theology
STM Master of Sacred Theology
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MDiv Master of Divinity
Concentration in Ethics and Hebrew Bible May 2000

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Women's Studies Certificate, Awarded Concurrently May 1996
Concentration in Women in Religion and the Body: Catherine De Siena

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Barrett Honors College, Tempe Campus Aug 2019

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School of Politics and Global Studies, University of Legon, Accra, Ghana, West Africa

Graduate Research Teaching Assistant, School of Social Transformation, Gender Studies Aug. 2014-May 2018


Outreach Coordinator: Graduate and Professional Student Association Fall 2014
Three Campus Model: West, Downtown, and Polytech

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Faculty Associate,

BOSTON UNIVERSITY—Boston, MA
Associate Dean, University Chaplain Aug. 2005-Aug. 2007
Marsh Chapel Dean of Undergraduate Affairs

BROWN UNIVERSITY—Providence, RI
Associate Protestant University Chaplain May 2000-Aug. 2005

Lecturer, Africana Studies Department Aug. 2003-Aug. 2005

BOSTON UNIVERSITY—Boston, MA
Director of Community Life, BU School of Theology
Research Assistantship, Dean of Student Affairs Aug. 1998-May 2000

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
WST 335 Lost In Space: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Science Fiction, Spring 2017, Fall 2017
WST 300 Women and Gender in Contemporary Society, Summer 2015, Spring 2018
WST 378 Global Feminist Theory (online), Fall 2016
WST 100 Women, Gender, and Society (hybrid, online, and in person), Spring 2016
WST 378 Global Feminist Theory (online), Fall 2016
WST 380 Gender, Race, and Class Spring 2015, Fall 2015
WST 313 Women and Sexuality (online), Summer 2014
AFR 360 The Black Families in the Diaspora, Spring 2012
AFR 394 The Black Child in America, Spring-Fall 2011, Fall 2012
AFR 370 The Family, Ethnicity, and Cultural Diversity, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2013

Courses Developed and Taught:
Fall 2012, Spring 2013
AFR: Leadership in Ethnic Communities Spring 2003-2005

RESEARCH INTERESTS
Africana Philosophy, Phenomenology, Ethics and Black Imagination in a Global Context
Futurism, Liminality, and Sustainability in Higher Education and Historic Cultural Institutions
Womanist/Feminist Epistemology and Ethics as social transformation agents in social movements and culture.
Intersectionality, Inclusion, and Innovation in Technology and Humanities (STEM + Arts)

PUBLICATIONS

“A Seminary Chile’ to her Mamma Dr.” Anna Howard Shaw Center Newsletter, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 1999.


Book Review, w/ Marcel Young-Scaggs, God is Like a Mother Hen by Carolyn Stahl, Anna Howard Shaw Center Newsletter Vol. 14, Issue 2, 1998.

PAPERS PRESENTED 2013 TO PRESENT

“Ontology Without Apology: Black Spatial Imaginary and Black Speculative Fiction as Resistance and Renewal Fuel for Alternative Futures” Caribbean Philosophical Association, Brown University, Providence RI June 2019

"Afrofuturist Phenomenon and Life-Affirming Liminality in Independent Comicon Culture,” The Colonial, the Postcolonial and the Decolonial research cluster at the Institute For Humanities Research, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ Nov. 2018


"Afrofuturism, the Black Imagination, and Black Panther,” Central High School “Bob Cat Talks” Multicultural Lecture Series, Feb. 2018


“Tracing Epistemology and Spiritual Wisdom of West African Griottes,” AAR Western Region March 2016

“Who Gets to be a Feminist?” Panel for the Women’s Caucus, AAR Western Region, Santa Clara, March 2015


“Soul Food and Communities of Care: Radical Love and Hospitality in the Inner Lives of Women,” NWSA, Puerto Rico Nov. 2014

“A Womanist Phenomenological (Re)Memory of Coming Home: Pilgrimage to Ghana,” The Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists, St. Louis, MO May 2014

Event Convener and Panel Moderator, *The New Black, A Film: Gay Rights, Civil Rights, Marriage, And the African American Church.* ASU Tempe, AZ March 2013

**INVITED AND GUEST LECTURESHIPS AND KEYNOTE TALKS (Partial Listing)**

Panelist, "Academic Conferencing as a Graduate Student" October 2018


“I Know I’ve Been Changed” Anna Howard Shaw Annual Celebration, Boston University, Anna Howard Shaw Center. Feb. 2006

“Beyond Boundaries,” Keynote, Merrimack County Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Breakfast, Merrimack, MA Jan. 2006


“Shades of Purple: Womanist, Mujerista, and Feminist Theology,” Providence College, Providence, RI March 2001

The Anna Howard Shaw Distinguished Lecturer, Leominster United Methodist Church, Leominster, MA Feb. 1999

**SERVICE**

**INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE**

**Arizona State University**

- School of Politics and Global Studies Alumni Board 2017-Present
• SHADES Graduate Mentor 2013-2018
• Graduate Women’s Association: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Rep 2015-2016
• Campus Committee on Inclusion, Arizona State University 2013-2017
• Women and Gender Studies Graduate Student Association 2014-2018
• Black Graduate Student Association, President and Ex-officio/Historian 2013-2018
• Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) Grant Reviewer 2013-2014
• ASU Black African Coalition Rites of Passage Ceremony Officiant 2011-2018
• Arizona State University Commission for the Status of Women 1993-1996
• International Foundation for Education and Self Help (IFESH), Student Intern 1994-1995

**Boston University**
• Dean of Students Crisis Counseling Group, Boston University 2005-2007
• Boston University School of Theology Alumni Board of Advisors 2005-2007
• AHANA Minority Students Mentor 2005-2007
• Boston University Search Committee, Martin Luther King Jr. Chair in Social Ethics 1998-2000

**Brown University**
• AHANA Minority Students Mentor 2000-2005
• Committee Member for the Doctoral Program Proposal Development, Africana Studies Department, Brown University 2003-2005

• Search Committee Brown Women’s Center Director 2000-2001

**Conference Service**
American Academy of Religion (AAR) Western Region
• Board Member, Diversity Officer 2018-Present
• Section Chair, Womanist/ Pan African Unit 2013-2018
AAR National, Feminist Theory and Religious Reflection Group
• Steering Committee 2013-Present
National Association of Women’s Studies
• Panel Moderator 2014-2018

**In the Community and Church**
• Tanner Chapel AME Church, Associate Minister Int'l Education 2018-Present
• Fusion Campus Ministries, Arizona State University, Chaplain 2017-Present
• New St. John AME Church, Associate Minister 2014-2017
• Campus Christian Center C3: President’s Interfaith Challenge and Norton Center Coord. 2012-2014
• Women in Ministry AME Church:
  Various Officer Conference Level Positions 1998- Present
• Center for Progressive Leadership Political Fellow 2011-2012
• Arizona Interfaith Coalition for Foster Children and Families, 2009-2013
• Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. 2003-Present
• Miriam Hospital, Board of Governors, Served on the IRB Committee 2005-2007

**GRANTS, HONORS, AND AWARDS**

School of Social Transformation Graduate Travel Grant(s) 2013-2018
Consultation of African and African Diasporan Women in Religion and Theology, Spelman Scholar Summer 2016
Graduate and Professional Student Association Travel Grants 2013-2016
NAACP Service Award, Religion, East Valley NAACP 2016-2017
Outstanding Mentor Award Graduate and Professional Student Association 2015-2016
Fullbright Intercultural Curriculum Grant Recipient: Ghana Summer 2015
Women and Gender Studies International Travel Grant, Ghana Summer 2014
Interdisciplinary Research Colloquium Doctoral Fellow, ASU Graduate College 2013-2014
Fund for Theological Education (FTE) North American Graduate Fellow, Drew University 2007-2009
Mary McLeod Bethune Scholar- Boston University School of Theology 1997-2000
Recipient of the FTE/Wabash Minority Recruitment Conference (RCC) Program, San Francisco Fall 2000
Lilly Foundation and Louisville Institute Young Clergy Vocational Fellowship 1998-2000
Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence. VOCA Grant Awarded, AZ Hotline Established Spring 1999

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND GUILDS**

NWSA National Women’s Studies Association
AAR American Academy of Religion
ICNAP Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists
APA American Philosophical Association
CPA Caribbean Philosophical Association
FEAST The Association for Feminist Ethics and Social Theory
ASA African Studies Association

**ORDINATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Preparing Future Faculty Program, Arizona State University Aug. 2016-May 2017
Ordained Itinerant Elder in The AME Church Aug. 2001

**LANGUAGES**

Italian, Intermediate, instructional, translation, and conversational
Spanish, Translation and conversational
French, Translation and conversational
Twi, Ghanaian Akan Languages Beginner level

**REFERENCES UPON REQUEST**