An Analysis and Comparison of Capitalist Realism - and its Potential Alternative, Afrofuturism, Through an Exploration of Music and Art

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Abstract

Capitalist realism traps people in a seemingly endless present. This stops culture from evolving because artists are not engaging with and reproducing artistic and cultural works from the past in meaningful ways. It has erased the past, is dictating the present and is constraining possible futures. In the past, cultures evolved by introducing new members to previously created works and traditions. This is no longer happening under capitalist realism because everything is assigned an economic value and is stripped of its generative cultural value. This renders cultural works into static icons. However, there is an alternative to capitalist realism - Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism proposes an alternative to capitalist realism by facilitating glimpses of the sheath that masks people from the Real. Mark Fisher describes the Lacanian Real as, "what any reality must suppress in order to sustain itself" (2009, p. 19). Fisher's book Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative? and Kodwo Eshun's 2003 article "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism" will be mobilized as the main texts in this exploration of the tensions between the two ideologies. The present paper analyzes capitalist realism as an ideology and compares how both Afrofuturism and capitalist realism use images and sound as a method in different ways. Finally, it presents hope for a different future where a non-capitalist world is imaginable by examining contemporary Afrofuturist art.

Keywords: *capitalist realism, cultural stagnation, Afrofuturism, intertextuality, speculative futures*

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Introduction

Society is confronted by the pervasive ideological framework of capitalist realism, which denies the possibility of alternative socio-economic systems. It is in this context that Afrofuturism emerges as a powerful counter-ideology. Can Afrofuturist art still liberate people's perspectives of the future when capitalist realism assigns everything and everyone an economic value? If we lived in a world without capitalism, what would be created? This paper will address these questions through an engagement with Fisher's (2009) critique of capitalist realism and Eshun's (2003) exploration of Afrofuturism. Readers will learn that Afrofuturism provides not only a critique of the limitations of capitalist realism but also a speculative framework for imagining alternative futures. Through its use of aesthetics, intertextuality, and cultural retrieval, Afrofuturism offers a method of reconnecting with the past to envision transformative futures, challenging the stasis and commodification inherent in late-stage capitalism. The present paper compares the use of images as a method by capitalist realism and Afrofuturism. This paper will analyze the pervasive nature of capitalist realism, an ideology that nothing new is created, and that capitalism is the only viable economic system. The implications of capitalist realism will be discussed through contemporary and past musical examples. This paper will then present examples of how Afrofuturist art is already offering an alternative to capitalist realism in society. Through these examples, the paper will explore how Afrofuturism can serve as a vital resource for reclaiming agency and fostering hope in the context of a world dominated by capitalist realism.

What is Capitalist Realism?

Capitalist realism is the current state of affairs and the result of late-stage capitalism combined with neoliberal political/economic policies and postmodern ennui. Capitalist realism is

the pervasive belief that no ideological or economic alternatives to capitalism exist (Fisher, 2009). “Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics” (p. 10). What Fisher means by collapsing beliefs is that nothing new in culture or society is being created. This lack of cultural evolution contributes to postmodern ennui. Key to postmodernity is the message and belief that while capitalism is imperfect, we are better off with capitalism compared to communist totalitarianism or other economic systems. Altogether, neoliberal ideology, postmodern ennui, and the economic system of capitalism combine in such a way that capitalism is accepted as the only viable economic system. It is this belief that Afrofuturist art can disrupt.

Fisher (2009) lamented in his analysis of Alfonso Cuarón’s, 2006, *Children of Men* that for culture to survive we must interact with it. He and Gutmann (1993) both explain that new members of society, the young, must be introduced to historical cultural artifacts and in an interaction between the old and the new, the young consciously reproduce culture and society. Reproducing culture and society does not mean to make an exact copy, but to adapt and to create something based on, or inspired by, the old. When reproducing culture and society, one strives to produce something that reflects their contemporary subjectivity and current needs. When setting the context for his explanation of capitalist realism, Fisher (2009) refers to T.S. Eliot’s idea that the exhaustion of new cultural ideas also strips us of our past. Eliot proposed this idea in his 1919 essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, in which he discussed the tradition of writing (Poetry Foundation, 2009). Eliot believed tradition was an active practice in which past works influenced contemporary artistic creation. These new works, in turn, change our understanding

of the past works. This is the situation of capitalist realism, a seemingly never-ending present with no past, and a limited, oppressive future.

What is Afrofuturism?

Afrofuturism is a counter-ideology that intervenes in the overdetermination of Black people's lives, histories, and futures by colonialism (Eshun, 2003). Its mediums include art and music, which are important for re-interpreting the past and present, and expressing ideas about the future. Afrofuturism developed from gathering countermemories, which was a response to imperial racism. Afrofuturist countermemories explore temporal power and provide an alternative narrative to the colonial archive that has excluded Black people and subjectivities from history. However, countermemory is a practice that predates Afrofuturism and originated in response to epistemic racism. Countermemory contradicts dominant discourses by troubling and revising Western historical accounts. Through acts of counter-remembering, Afrofuturists reinstate overlooked histories and perspectives that challenge the supposed neutrality of dominant Western epistemologies and show them to be partial and biased. This clears a path for alternative epistemologies to advance. An example of counter-remembering would be the recognition of the Dogon who are a people from Southern Mali's Bandiagara Escarpment who, "…seem to have possessed knowledge about our universe centuries before such information could be verified by modern telescopes" (Dorsey, 2020, para. 4). The complex Dogon cosmology holds that the "Sirius B" Dog Star solar system is a binary star system, with the smaller star in a 50-year orbit around the larger. In his paper, Eshun (2003) described how: "Ogotomelli, the Dogon mystic, [who] provided an astronomical knowledge of the "Sirius B" Dog Star… demonstrated a compensatory and superior African scientific knowledge" (p. 296). Additionally, archeological evidence dates Dogon knowledge that Jupiter has four moons and

Saturn has rings to 4000 B.C.E. Acknowledging these excluded epistemologies invites everyone to reinterpret the past and thus change the present. Quoting Paul Gilroy, Eshun (2003) argued that belief systems develop and diffuse as they circulate: "...even as the movement that produced them fades, there remains a degree of temporal disturbance" (p. 297). These breaks in reality provide opportunities for the disempowered to break free of their present. When the disempowered change their present view of themselves, and their epistemologies are validated, they may become free from the hold of speculative futures that project a miserable existence in which they continue to serve capitalism under capitalist realism.

Methods of Capitalist Realism and Afrofuturism

Capitalist realism is an ideology that eliminates the past and casts the present as endless: "...[by way] of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects…a monetary value" (Fisher, 2009, p. 10). By assigning a monetary value to all cultural objects, they become commodities for sale. Traditional artifacts, such as ceremonial regalia, are stripped of purpose and meaning: an instrument to empower transformational change becomes a static icon. This is how capitalism disrupts the continuity between the past, present, and future. Another way capitalist realism limits the future is by projecting market dystopias through the practices of marketing and public relations (PR), which are essential to the survival of capitalist realist ideology. The following quote demonstrates how market dystopias are when corporations' projected images do not align with reality. As Fisher (2009) argued, the use of images in capitalist realism correlates with the determination of value:

> ...in a late capitalist culture … images acquire an autonomous force… The way value is generated on the stock exchange depends of course less on what a company 'really does', and more on perceptions of, and beliefs about, its (future) performance. (p. 35)

As Eshun (2003) described, future-oriented media such as science fiction films and novels interact in a positive feedback loop with capital to create and shape economic value. Companies employ narratives that become a factor in the process of valuation as explained by Klinge et al. (2025) who noted that, "Increasingly, remunerating corporate executives in share-based compensation… further incentivises storytelling to influence a company's stock price" (p. 4). Storytelling often involves images, for example, Tesla's 2016 video exaggerated their vehicles' self-driving capabilities (Jin, 2023). The futuristic vision of a self-driving car was one of many factors contributing to high estimates of Tesla's future earning capacity, as Klinge et al. (2025) explained:

> The combination of a charismatic CEO, who is positioning his company as a 'disruptive' force in a sluggish industry environment by means of well-orchestrated product presentations and celebratory investor days, coupled with simple and appealing narratives, has been one of the most important intangible assets impacting Tesla's stock price. (p. 7)

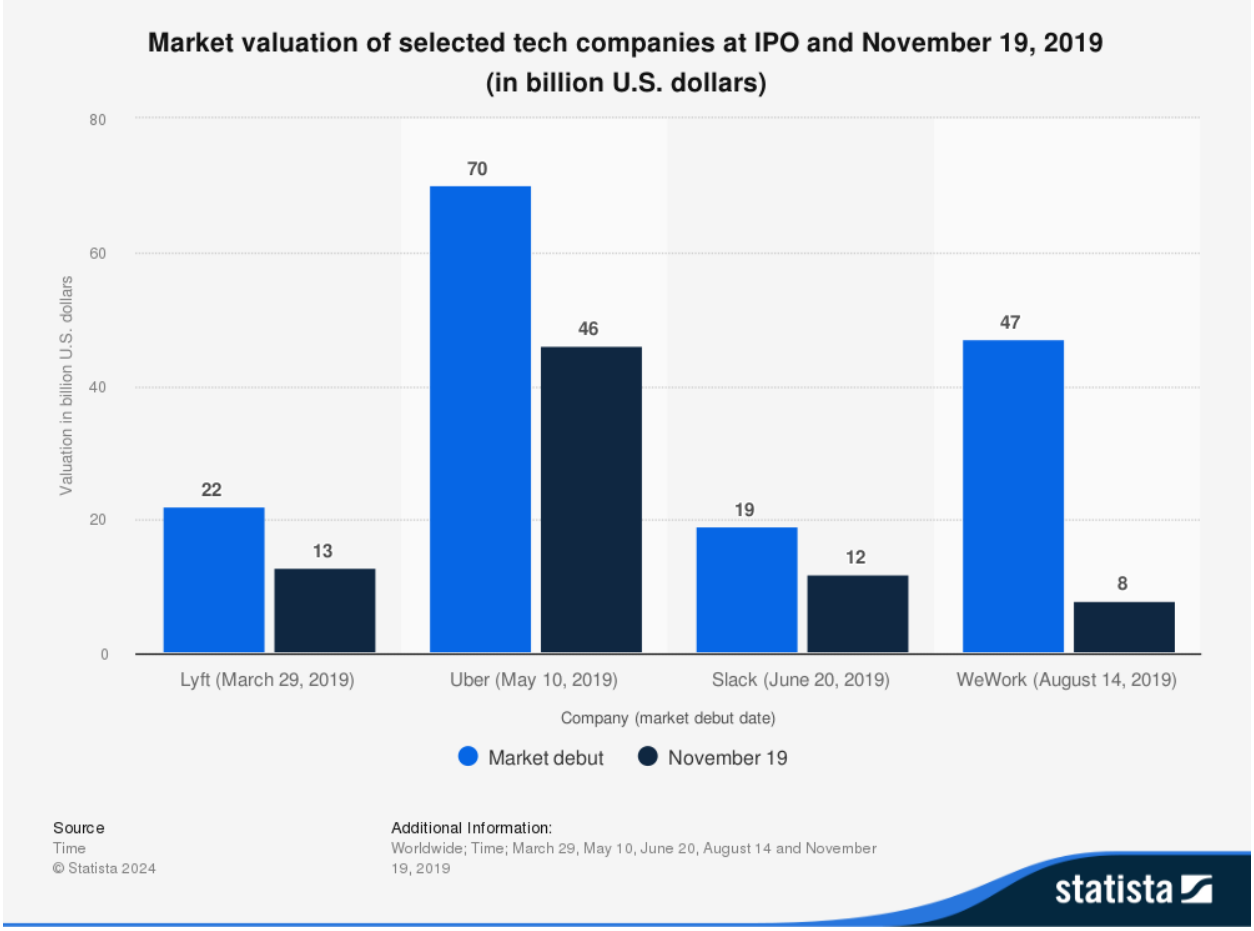
Further evidence of corporations having inflated valuations comes from a Statista (2022) analysis of big tech companies Lyft, Uber, Slack, and WeWork's valuations at the time of their initial public offering (IPO) in 2019. Figure 1 illustrates that all four companies were valued between $7 to $39 billion less than their pre-IPO valuations months later on November 19, 2019 (Time, 2019). Powerful descriptions of the future influence the present by commanding the market to make these projected futures a reality. However, there is a negative side to these futuristic projections. As Eshun (2003) argued:

> "These powerful descriptions of the future demoralize us; they command us to bury our heads in our hands, to groan with sadness. Commissioned by multinationals and

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), these developmental futurisms function as the other side of the corporate utopias that make the future safe for industry". (p. 292).

Figure 1

Graph comparing market valuations pre and post IPO



Note. From Time. (2019, December 2).

Eshun (2003) criticized how global institutions' dominant narratives about Africa's future—shaped by economic forecasts, environmental warnings, and health statistics—frame the continent as inevitably locked into poverty and crisis. These externally produced projections strip

African social reality of agency and possibility, suppressing the potential for imagining different, more hopeful futures.

An example of a private enterprise presenting an image of a corporate utopia while an underlying dystopia operated unnoticed, '…as the other side of the corporate utopias…' (Eshun, 2003, p. 292) is OpenAI, the company that makes ChatGPT. According to a 2023 Time article by Billy Perrigo; OpenAI had a contract with an intermediary company, Sama, to employ workers in "…Kenya, Uganda and India to label data for Silicon Valley clients like Google, Meta and Microsoft" (para. 7). Specifically, the work being done by these employees was labelling horrifying written descriptions and visual depictions of violence, including sexual violence, to train OpenAI's software what not to generate. OpenAI paid the intermediary company Sama $12.50 per hour for this work, however it is reported that employees received $2 or less per hour. Employees were additionally paid a bonus of $70 per month for the explicit nature of the work. As global capitalism drives such exploitation, the valuations of companies based on utopian depictions of the future (e.g., self-driving cars, AI) elide the stories of exploitation behind those technologies.

The Use of Images

Both capitalist realism and Afrofuturism harness the power of images as methods of their ideologies. When serving capitalist realist ends, images are used to sheath the Real from consumers. Fisher (2009) described Lacan's interpretation of the Real as, "what any 'reality' must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality" (p. 19). Consumers must be shielded from the Real because the true nature of capitalist realism is all-consuming, relentless, exploitative, and

unsustainable. Corporations use icons and images to show they are, "socially responsible and caring" and sheath the Real "that companies are actually corrupt, ruthless, etc." (p. 36). Images of productivity, such as meeting targets, are also used in capitalist realism. Fisher uses the term "market Stalinism" to explain the paradox that neoliberals criticize the bureaucracy of government yet reterritorialize bureaucracy to maintain the appearance of success: "What late capitalism repeats from Stalinism is just this valuing of symbols of achievement over actual achievement" (p. 34). This means that productivity targets, which are created by the audit culture in many industries, become ends in and of themselves rather than a measure of progress on a scale of productivity. This is a key way in which capitalism functions.

In contrast, Afrofuturism uses images to reassemble alternative epistemologies and histories that were rendered unseeable by colonialism and global capitalism. From the perspective of dominant discourses, Afrofuturist images suddenly appear. This sudden appearance can allow a person to perceive the sheath of capitalist PR/advertising and the constructed narratives that are touted as reality for what it is: artifice shielding true reality. Afrofuturist images subvert dominant narratives and simultaneously propose speculative futures, which allow one to see that there are alternatives to capitalism. Revealing the sheath and introducing possibilities for liberation provides the opportunity for a reality other than a capitalist one. According to Eshun (2003), "Taking its cue from this 'dual nature' of the 'critical and utopian', [corporate projections] an Afrofuturist art project might work on the exposure and reframing of futurisms that act to forecast and fix African dystopia" (p. 293). Indeed, the work *Lion Bank* by Afrofuturist artist Meschac Gaba (see Figure 2) demonstrates this balance of "critical and utopian".

Figure 2

Example of Afrofuturist art by Meschac Gaba

Note. Bankivi: Lion Bank, 2014. Wood, decommissioned Central African (CFA) franc banknotes, plexiglass, assorted coins 34 1/4 x 17 3/8 x 1 inches; 87 x 44 x 2.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles.

It is critical because its use of the decommissioned Central African franc currency as a medium could represent the stereotypical representation of some of Africa's economies as being in poverty and experiencing a lack of financial agency (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, 2014). It is utopian because it uses a symbol of the lion representing financial power and strength to resist the very stereotypes the piece could be critiquing (Contemporary &, 2015). In this way, Afrofuturism can use aesthetics to make knowledge appear to people. Such is the process of Afrofuturist art: making something appear that may have always been there, made unseeable by dominant discourses. Imagine someone holding negative prejudiced beliefs about the economic prospects in African countries. By aesthetically engaging with Lion Bank, such a person might trouble their perception of colonial discourses by reflecting on their beliefs and considering how African countries have financial agency. In short, both capitalist realism and Afrofuturism use images in different ways to accomplish their ideological goals.

Capitalist Realism's Suppression of New Cultural Works

An Afrofuturist Example of Intertextuality

One area of culture where capitalist realism has a stronghold and is smothering the production of new and creative works is the music industry. A cultural example of how "...the future harbors only reiteration and re-permutation" (Fisher, 2009, p. 9) is the evolution of the song *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,* an African American spiritual gospel song (The Fisk Jubilee Singers, 1909). The first record of this song dates back to Wallace Willis in the 1830s (Green, 2018). Lyrics from this song were reinterpreted by Parliament in 1975. In searching for examples of Afrofuturism in music that were created during postmodernity and capitalist realism, I found that Dr. Dre's *Let Me Ride* (1992) sampled Parliament's lyrics in a third iteration of *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (The Fisk Jubilee Singers, 1909). I initially hoped to use this as an example of the

intertextuality of music, and the reclaiming of creating new things. However, as I researched the history of the song and its origins, I found further evidence of pervasive capitalist realism.

One of the key strategies of Afrofuturism is intertextuality, which is the weaving together of historical, cultural, and speculative references to comment on contemporary Black experience and envision new futures (Eshun, 2003). By repurposing existing media texts, Afrofuturism engages in a process of cultural retrieval and reinvention, where historical narratives are transformed to assert Black agency. The Afrofuturist musical artist George Clinton and his group Parliament created the song *Mothership Connection* (1975) which intertextually applied the lyrics, "Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home" from *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* (Songfacts, 2020; The Fisk Jubilee Singers, 1909). Clinton repurposed the existing text and the lyrics transformed to, "Swing down, sweet chariot, stop and let me ride" which merges historical, cultural, and speculative references.

The traditional gospel song is attributed to Wallace Willis, an enslaved person from Oklahoma who was inspired by the dream of crossing the Ohio river to Ripley, Ohio, which was a key milestone on the Underground Railroad journey (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2024). Before the abolition of enslavement, this song would be sung potentially with a double meaning. Home could refer to heaven or to a land where enslavement had been abolished. Clinton's reinterpretation of the original text expanded on it and added reference to a speculative future. The mothership in Clinton's version replaces the chariot from the original gospel and symbolizes how Clinton "...envision[ed] African-Americans in space as a way to liberate one's mind from the shackles of racism and poverty or any other societal constraints" (Keyes, 2014). This is an example of repurposing the text which creates continuity between the past and present and proposes transformation of the future.

A Capitalist Realist Example Lacking Intertextuality

The 1992 hit single, Let Me Ride by Dr. Dre missed an opportunity for another sonic and visual intertextual Afrofuturist transformation. In the song, Dr. Dre sampled Parliament's 1975 hook and added lyrics over top of it which were:

Swing down, sweet chariot, stop and let me ride (hell yeah)

Swing down, sweet chariot, stop and let me ride (what all the n***** sayin'?)

Swing down, sweet chariot, stop and let me ride (hell yeah)

Swing down, sweet chariot, stop and let me ride

Other references to the significant element of the chariot in Dr. Dre's version include, "Rollin' in my four with sixteen switches" and "Rollin' in my six-four" (Dr. Dre, 1992. Both 'four' and 'six-four' reference the 1964 Chevy Impala vehicle. Despite reusing the hook from George Clinton's *Mothership Connection* (Parliament, 1975), Dr. Dre's song is not Afrofuturist. In contradistinction to Parliament (1975), Fisher (2009) argues that Let Me Ride (1992) is merely a consumer product of late-stage capitalism, a re-permutation, nothing new. The consequence of a seemingly continuous present is that our future is limited and our past is lost because there is no longer any genuine engagement with cultural objects. Where Parliament (1975) projects Afrofuturist transcendence and freedom, Dr. Dre (1992) projects materialist and capitalist themes, as evidenced by the lines, "You look good inna ya car, eeh" and "Clockin' all the riches, got the hollow points for the snitches" (Dr. Dre, 1992). All the lines referencing 1964 Chevrolet Impalas are materialistic, which is further evidence of capitalist realism.

Rapping about violence in Gangsta Rap is commonplace, and it reinforces capitalist realism. When people are oversaturated with violence or corruption, they become desensitized to it and don't care (Fisher, 2009, p. 14). Fisher (2009) explained how the examples of LA noir

films featuring gangsters, which undermined and negatively represented social services such as welfare, served to push people in favour of neoliberal policies because it seemed like the social safety net was not working. Let Me Ride (Dr. Dre, 1992) is a cog in the wheel that recycles media upholding capitalist realism.

Afrofuturist Themes

In *Mothership Connection*, collective liberation was a theme as evidenced by the repetition of calling the audience "Citizens of the Universe" (Parliament, 1975). The potential for collective liberation that was a theme of *Mothership Connection* gives way to individualistic aspirations in *Let Me Ride* (Dr. Dre, 1992). Dr. Dre's song reinforces the idea that personal success and consumption are the only conceivable goals. The hip hop song neglected not only a sonic Afrofuturist opportunity, but a visual one as well. In the music video for the song, the last scene shows a Parliament concert with George Clinton enacting his space iconography (Dr. Dre, 2023). As Clinton ascends in a plume of smoke, an image of Dr. Dre's face is superimposed over the clip. This is an eerie foreshadowing of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* from 2006, in which there is a scene at Battersea Power Station where "Cultural treasures – Michelangelo's David, Picasso's Guernica, Pink Floyd's inflatable pig are preserved in a building that is itself a refurbished heritage artifact" (Fisher, 2009, p. 8). In both *Let Me Ride* (Dr. Dre, 1992) and *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006), capitalism has taken over society. The meaning of art has been reduced to just icons and nostalgia. There is no continuity with the past in *Let Me Ride* (Dr. Dre, 1992), no speculation about the future, only the violent immediacy of the present.

Capitalist Realist Themes

Doja Cat's 2021 song *Need to Know* seemed promising, as an example of contemporary Afrofuturism, because of its use of sci-fi imagery in the music video and the album title *Her*

Planet. Some of the Afrofuturist themes I was looking for were collective empowerment, speculative transformation, and social commentary. As Eshun (2003) notes:

> Afrofuturism uses extraterrestriality as a hyperbolic trope to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities: from slave to negro to coloured to evolué to black to African to African American. (p. 299)

In contrast, I interpreted *Need to Know* (Doja Cat, 2021) as primarily about individual desires for personal gratification like romantic and sexual encounters. In the music video, Doja Cat and her friends appear as humanoid aliens, interacting in a cyberpunk-inspired environment (Doja Cat, 2021). Despite the presence of these images, they are used more for aesthetic and style-based reasons rather than for social commentary. As mentioned earlier, capitalist realism employs images as a method to sheath the Real from consumers. In this music video the cyberpunk styled living room and green skin colour of Doja Cat and her friends are images that serve capitalism by being a distraction from the Uber product placement that is prominently featured on the flying car she and her friends take to the bar.

While the images present an obviously futuristic context (e.g., flying cars), the actions of the actors in the music video have not transcended capitalism (Doja Cat, 2021). They act out a typical nightlife experience that is not different in any meaningful, or transcendental way, from what one would experience in the present. For example, tossing a futuristic currency on the bar to pay for a drink. Yes, the currency looks different from what we are familiar with in the present (it looks like rocks) however, its purpose and use has not evolved. There is no reference to Black historical narratives or attempts to bridge the past with an imagined future and the economic system shown still seems to be capitalism. The music video still operates within the boundaries

of capitalist consumer culture with flashy visuals and club scenes that display material wealth. This reinforces capitalist realism because even futuristic depictions fail to imagine alternatives to the current socio-economic system.

How Afrofuturist Art Provides a Framework for Futurity

Afrofuturism is a method for society to develop beyond capitalist realism. Yung Yemi is a visual artist who uses Afrofuturism to envision liberation from control systems and reclaim agency through narrative, creativity and speculative thinking. Yung Yemi stated in an interview about his mural of Mary Ann Shadd (see Figure 3) that, "A lot of times when I walk into a gallery or an art institution I feel like the art I'm looking at is sort of removed. It's not really speaking to me. I feel like it's not speaking to my community" (Toronto History Museums, 2021). This aligns with the opinion Fisher (2009) expressed that, "Tradition counts for nothing when it is no longer contested and modified. A culture that is merely preserved is no culture at all" (p. 9). Yung Yemi's mural honours Mary Ann Shadd (1823-1893) who was, "…the first Black woman in North America to publish and edit a newspaper, The Provincial Freeman.…Shadd promoted the abolition of slavery and the emigration of African Americans to Canada. She also advocated on behalf of women's rights" (Shadd, 2013).

What makes the mural Afrofuturist is that the art engages the viewer in a temporal experience. The historical figure of Shadd is interpellated in the present, connecting the past with the present. This past-present connection opens up possibilities for the future. Furthermore, Yung Yemi explained the flower in her hair and the trilliums on her chain as representing Pennsylvania, Delaware and Ontario - the geographical areas of significance to Shadd (Toronto History Museums, 2021). He explained that on Shadd's large earrings, one of the symbols is the Adinkra symbol (also known as the wisdom knot), which speaks to education since Shadd was a

Figure 3

Example of Afrofuturist art by Yumg Yemi

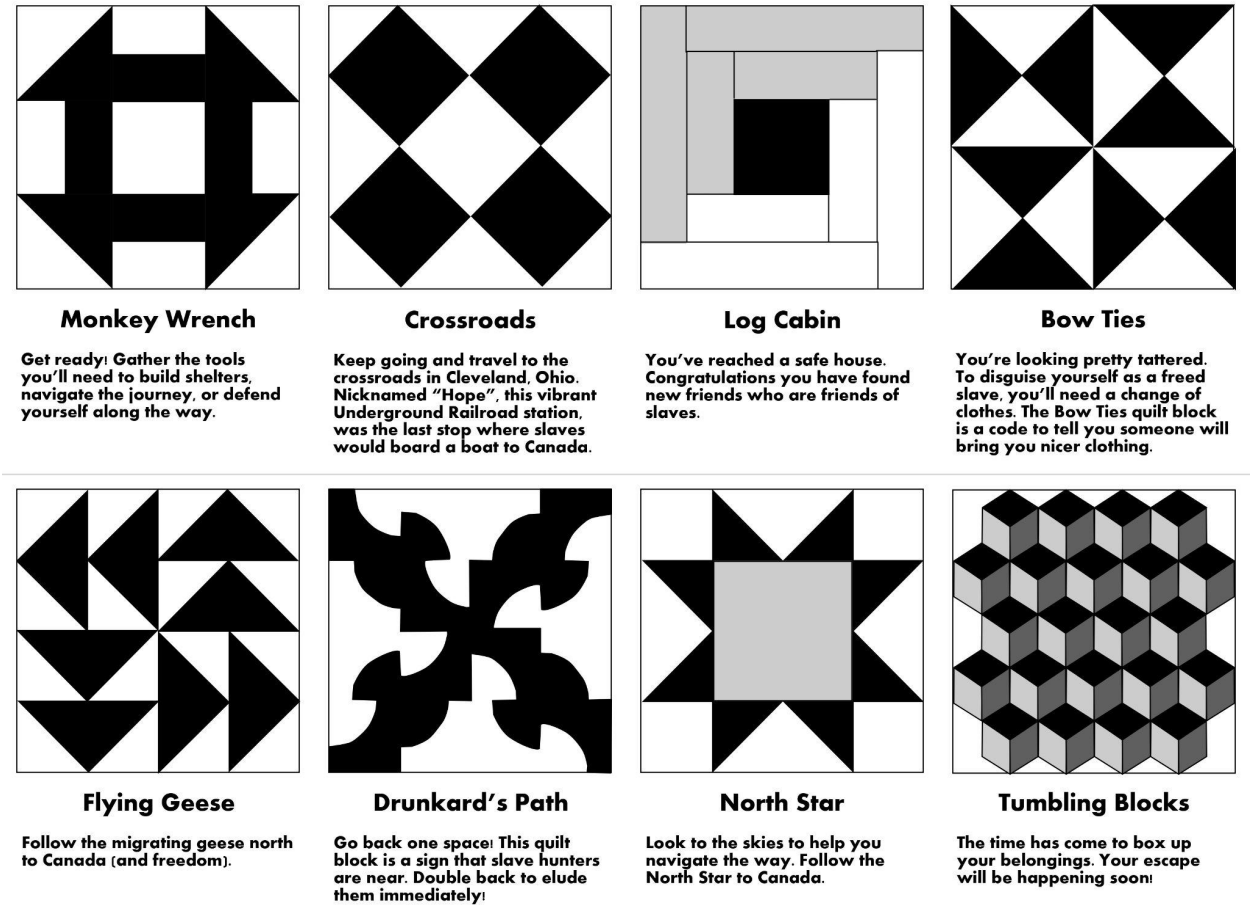
Note. Mary Ann Shadd, Commission for Toronto History Museums, Toronto, ON.

Adegbesan, A. (2020). The likeness of Mary Ann Shadd adorned with symbolic gold jewelry, pink and gold flowers, and a diamond encrusted headpiece. She wears a purple and white mantle adorned with symbols.

teacher. On her purple, gold and white mantle (colours which symbolise the women's suffrage movement), there are quilt patches that were really symbols of the underground railroad (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Quilt squares that communicated secret messages along the Underground Railroad



Note. This reference image was originally seen by the author in the Awakenings reflections video by Toronto History Museums (2021). The reference image is based on Ozella McDaniel Williamses' oral history of how quilt blocks were used to communicate messages during the Underground Railroad. Wiliamses' knowledge was shared with authors Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, Ph.D. who recorded it and published *Hidden in Plain View* in 1999. A

reference photo of eight different quilt block patterns. Each pattern fits into a square block, but the designs represented include triangles arranged like bowties, triangles and squares arranged like a star and triangles arranged to represent migrating geese.

In the middle of the eagle pendant hanging from her chain, there is the Juneteenth star. According to The Well (2022):

> Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, the date on which enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, finally received the news they were free. This was two years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, one year after the Senate passed the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery, on April 18, 1864, and six months after it was passed by the House on January 31, 1865. The burst outlining the star, inspired by a nova (what astronomers refer to as a new star), represents a new beginning for all African Americans. (para. 4)

Finally, the North Star centered on her headpiece was one of the main symbols sought when escaping enslavement. The futuristic aesthetic reflects Afrofuturism's aim to envision empowered Black futures, while grounding them in historical figures like Shadd. Yung Yemi is quoted in the video saying, "All of the adversity that she faced is probably more adversity than I or most other people are facing in 2021. If she could find that sense of strength and inner purpose, I think we can do it in 2021 as well" (Toronto History Museums, 2021). This illustrates how Afrofuturism engages temporality to connect the past to the present which, in turn, inspires new futures.

Conclusion

Challenging capitalist realism is daunting because it appears as if it were the natural order of things. To move forward, the illusions and facades of capitalist realism must be broken down along with new imaginations of how the future could be. Afrofuturism presents a method of challenging capitalist realism by using aesthetics to reveal the sheath of capitalist realism hiding the Real, while simultaneously proposing alternative, speculative futures. Beyond theory, this has tangible implications for artists, scholars, and cultural practitioners. Afrofuturist creators such as, Tau Lewis, Hebru Brantley, and Quentin Vercetty, and others like them can actively resist capitalist realism by reclaiming historical narratives and engaging in cultural retrieval and renewal in a way that refuses commodification. This research contributes to fields such as education, media studies and cultural criticism, providing a framework for understanding how artistic and sonic practices can reshape perceptions of time, history, and futurity.

Future scholarship could explore how Afrofuturism can be integrated into contemporary artistic and academic institutions without being subsumed into the very capitalist structures it critiques. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaborations between artists, technologists, and activists could expand Afrofuturism beyond aesthetics and social commentary, to shaping real-world initiatives in education, urban design and economic models. Ultimately, Afrofuturism does not simply provide an escape from capitalist realism—it creates a speculative framework for imagining and enacting alternative futures. In a world where capitalist realism forecloses possibilities, Afrofuturism insists that other worlds are not only possible but necessary.

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