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LOVE AND DREAMS PROJECT

MY INSPIRATION:

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. The Sh'ma is the radical Jewish declaration of love for God that asks us to hear (Sh'ma). This is the prayer sung loudest, with passionate voices that seek to shed their exhaustion, their expectation, their previously contained despair. I think it is within these brief moments of singing the Sh'ma, in this reverberating silence created by noise, that we create a freedom space. The Sh'ma is open communication with an unfathomable entity, an ideality, like the necessary relationship with queerness and how "we may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (Munoz). It was in the space created by the Sh'ma that I first felt I could transcend the confines of temporal, linear logic and engage in the most anti-rationality -- the belief in a God whose name is spelled by Hebrew letters that cannot even be pronounced. The way the Sh'ma feels is a complete antithesis to capitalism. I will be using poetry to imagine what this space within the Sh'ma, what a world nestled within the power of its sound, would be. Poetry is the only way to describe this space folded between the lines of fingerprints while simultaneously stamped on the heart, "for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are -- until the poem -- nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt" (Lorde).

This poem, meant to be spoken aloud, will aim to explain not only what this zero capitalism space will look like but more importantly what it will feel like for the dreamers that will take refuge in this abstract home. For it is the octaves within the Sh'ma as they rise and descend that represent this struggle towards a new world, where the strain, the painful burden of recreating and perpetuating this liberated, anti-capitalistic world is only felt in the vocal cords. A vibration that promotes feeling, feeling, feeling because the guttural, unearthed soil sound buries all present logic. Where ancient language is the only thing capable of unpaving concrete roads in your veins, restoring the dirt, the grain, the magnanimous roots caked in mud and dreams...¹

¹ To personally engage with this project, to force my mind to evade all that it has been taught, I looked to Afro-futurism. Afro-futurism asks we collectively engage in the celebratory destruction of present structures while denying those whose visions of the future seek to reproduce the same systems of oppression in a new frontier. Most importantly, as Ytasha Womack spoke to, Afro-futurism is dependent on activism grounded in reality, a future-oriented way of thinking that directly addresses the injustice being

יהוה

The spelling of God's unpronounceable name

Let us never be impartial to the summer sun

No chins raised, strung up, by what hangs over our heads or guilt in being distracted - no I mean astonished - by the sound of the wind²

Let kids crane their necks up at blank, untelling sky not high rise buildings whose towers distort, contort, confine, reflect back broken playgrounds with shattered swings that expect you to sit sit sit to swing³

No berry lips bled of color to wet the dotted line

No contract with your heart to be deserving of the blood it pumps, the blood it pumps so that you can heal, love, embrace another

lived on a day to day basis by people of color. I had to imagine physical tearing down of white-columned, pristine, but internally acidic buildings in order to find the previously dormant playfulness required to engage in radical dreaming.

² In Cruising Utopia, astonishment is talked about as an “important mode of contemplation” because it helps one to “surpass the limitations of an alienating presence” (Munoz 5). This line is also built upon in Alexis Pauline Gaumb's Evidence, in which she crafts a post-capitalist world where no one is exhausted past passion. Both Munoz and Alexis Pauline Gaumb are speaking to capitalism's devastating ability to exhaust us past seeing and participating in all the beauty that stirs us to create. There are very few moments in this current state where we have enough energy to fully witness the world or be excited by things we cannot consume, like the wind. We instead feel guilty for taking the time to appreciate these things, because it is time spent away from being productive. It is because we revere the word “produce” and not “create” that we do not see these moments of astonishment, where we are challenged to see the world for all of its potentiality, as “productive.”

³ The power of capitalism lies in its ability to overtake and exhaust your waking state so as to pervert the nature of your dreams. Capitalism asks you to dream only within the confines and context of our existing, stagnant structures, it asks you to “sit, sit, sit.” It asks you to become enamored (craning your neck) with dreams that only validate the way the world currently operates. Black and brown bodies are forced to only craft dreams “recognizable to the state” which means dreams contingent on the continuance of exclusionary, patriarchal, white supremacist institutions that profit off their pain (Rios Rojas and Stern 3). The blank, untelling skies in this metaphor are “the dreams of the oppressed, the violated, and im/migrant” which “might not be acceptable within the criteria of dreams that white supremacy, colonialism, and power desire”(Rios Rojas and Stern 3). This untelling sky is a vast void in which those dreams can be shouted into, where there is no obstacle to their conception, but rather ancestors who echo those same sentiments back. We see that liberation and revolution is suppressed because capitalism equips us only with broken logic (hence, the shattered swing) yet tells us that it is enough for us to swing. As Robin Kelley says “we are manufactured to plastically cooperate in our own oppression,” and manufactured to find enough measured, forced joy on this playground that we no longer think to question or reimagine.

No laboring and toiling within the fields of our lungs to give monetary value to our voice

Let us play in the shadow of our mothers lashes

Let us find ourselves with tongues that no longer resist bending to soft words⁴

And hands that take time to touch

Let kiddie paintings originally reserved to decorate empty plastic fridges, act now as grand tablecloths, as bibs stuffed in our multicolored t-shirts, for our shared meals of abundance⁵

Sit Shiva for the old world⁶

⁴ Black Radical Feminist theory recognizes “the deep interconnectedness of struggles around race, gender, sexuality, culture, class, and spirituality” (Kelley 154). To deconstruct and distance ourselves from a world dominated by capitalism means also freeing ourselves from class-based environmental racism, patriarchy with hypermasculinity (tongues that can now bend to soft words), educational inequality, and the list goes on. So many structures within American society are built to feed and rely on one another, which is why trying to address any one injustice appears insurmountable to all those who attempt it. Even further, capitalism penetrates our psyche with logic that tells us to value the individual over the community. This justification makes us numb to injustice against humans and the earth because we do not recognize that we are codependent on so many other life forms for survival. My anti-capitalist space is governed by a shared sense of responsibility not to structures of authority or power, but to each other.

⁵ To promote and validate feeling over rationality is a subversive act. As Audre Lorde says, “for within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men.” We must rely on feeling as a valid source of knowledge when our thought processes are not truly our own and are instead what the world is prompting and socializing us to think. Capitalism profits off all interactions that seek to polarize, individualize, and distance communities from engaging in communal dreaming that facilitates open, shameless expression of feeling. It profits by degrading our sense of vested interest in one another’s liberation and happiness, while simultaneously making us view the time spent on activities that make us better people or lovers or friends as unproductive. This line seeks to reclaim feeling and more importantly to take something such as child’s art, that in our current capitalistic world can be seen as trivial or not substantive, and turn it into the type of mentality that we adorn our tables with. This is personifying Robin Kelley’s declaration that we must “build a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality.” I chose a table because this has always acted as a universal symbol where ideas are exchanged, friendships are developed, and meals are shared amongst families. I took inspiration from excerpts in Robin Kelley that talk about degrading capitalism’s effects by “changing the traditional routines that we have established as a result of living in a totally corrupted society... changing how you relate to your wife, your husband, your parents, your coworker” (144). Capitalism co-ops our free time so that we have little to no space to engage in the intimate relations that foster within you a sense of purpose beyond your job as a producer and that validate your existence and contributions beyond how well you fit into current society. Even the notion of “free time” speaks to how we structure our current society around fitting play into work, fitting moments of freedom into what we can only now realize as a type of mental and physical bondage.

⁶ Shiva is a Jewish practice of mourning, one in which mourners must cover all of the mirrors in their home for seven days. When this poem is spoken aloud I hope to have a rhythmic, pounding nature that brings my audience to feel the end of the capitalist world, one that conjures an image for the audience that looks like shattered mirrors raining sparkles. I want us to mourn the old world so that we are in accordance with Afro-futurist practices of dreaming. We cannot participate in this new world if we are not

Dance and throw your arms and laugh as we cover the mirrors
Lay back together as flowers kiss these knobby knees that everyone in our family has

Let my garden melt into yours

Let us spend afternoons sitting by the rivers in our rooms, splitting and spilling pomegranates to
revel in the holy scripture of stickiness that mends us together⁷

Let no doorway, no metal walls distract your purple laughter from reaching my ears

Let us not sneak away to freedom but bask in it

And let our children, cradled in the divot of our ancestor's shoulders, have mobiles woven by
these words:

L'dor v'dor⁸

R'fuah Sh'leimah

CONCLUSION:

To put it simply, I wanted my poem to capture the essence of Robin Kelley's beautiful imagining of a free society in "which everyone will be a poet -- a society in which everyone will be able to develop his or her potentialities fully and freely" (158). I leaned into the realm of abstraction to honor Kelley because this project may be one of the rare moments in my college education where I can engage in my rawest style of writing without hesitation, where I can be

intimately still aware of what old conditions used to be like. When reading this, I want people to become breathless, due to how many words there are, up until these lines of mourning. After the audience finishes the part about sitting Shiva, the next lines are supposed to be mellifluous, encouraging the audience to now take a deep, leisurely breath so that they can understand what this pleasure-filled new world will feel like. I speak about intimate details from my own family (knobby knees) because in this new world, the driving force behind our own families, that connection, will have to drive how we all regard one another (knobby knees everyone in our family has).

⁷ This line is dedicated to the powerful idea of communal or collective dreaming. Alexis Pauline Gaumb says "even the act of trying to explain our dreams to each other can reveal so much about the assumptions that keep us in place. And I believe that that is a major part of what it will take to live in a deeply different world, the destabilization of the assumptions that keep us in place and keep us keeping each other pinned down" (Collective Dreaming: An Interview). She even continues to say "are our aspirational dreams just something else that we feel pressure to individually achieve? What if that's just not how it works? (Collective Dreaming: An Interview)." So much of the inaction in this world is caused by a pervasive feeling that we are alone in our thinking of radical thoughts. Capitalism profits off us feeling alone because we are so much quicker to dismiss our ideas of a new world when we hear no validation of these visions by others. Capitalism teaches us that to reject living within our current structures we must dramatically cast ourselves out of society and face isolation on the fringes, but rather it is within the community that we can begin to shed the burden of oppressive logics and assumptions. In Judaism, the community eats pomegranates together to commence the beginning of a new year, to acknowledge that it takes collective will to move forward and because we are taught that pomegranates are the fruit that await us in paradise.

⁸ These Hebrew lines translate to: From generation to generation a renewal of spirit. The lines R'fuah Sh'leimah come directly from the Mi Shebeirach, the Jewish prayer of healing.

wholeheartedly a poet. In playing with these ideas, I realized this was a culmination of years of me yearning for an anti-capitalist space that I could occupy as a student being prepped, in many ways, to serve capitalism. I found myself subconsciously constructing most lines to start with “let us,” a sort of begging for this reality to manifest and a simultaneous acknowledgment of the need for “us.” I need this space to exist for my mental well-being, for my survival because, as Audrey Lorde would say, this poetry is not a luxury. This class has taught me capitalism penetrates our minds and dreams, but more than that I’ve found capitalism finds warmth, life, and a safe place to burrow within the ventricles of our heart. So much of the current world’s construction is predicated on us losing humanity and that is why so many words within my poem were dedicated to the simple premise of a world where we stop destroying each other. I hope readers of this project learn that the power we were never meant to know comes from the community that capitalism denies us. Like I found in the Sh’ma, there are spaces of radical imagining occurring every day and communal dreaming unfolding from the mouths of adults whose imaginations were believed to be hijacked years ago. I come from a people whose entire existence has been consumed by dreaming of an inconceivable place, a freedom space for the Jewish people where we could not only rest but have the capacity to finally participate in life. It was our dreams that gave us resilience in the present moment. As Walidah Imarisha says “our ancestors literally bent reality to create us,” and as I look in the mirror I see this. The arch of my lips is the mast of the ship that carried my great grandmother Rivkah from Russia to Tokyo to Milford, Delaware. My hair braids like the dusty challah bread my ancestors used to split thirty ways, wishing it would feed more mouths. And my eyes, when hit with light, resemble the grape juice they’d drink with l’chaim in mind – to life, to life they’d say. This project has reaffirmed for me how deeply entrenched and precariously balanced between past and future we must be when dreaming, for we are forming our descendents as we do so. These reimagined spaces are closer than we think and are begging to move from abstract words to physical places of permanence. Until then, we sneak away together, first to your dreams and then mine.