"Writing New Worlds," Allied Media Conference 2020 Plenary

Alexis De Veaux, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and Walidah Imarisha

This is an edited transcript of the plenary "Writing New Worlds" from the Allied Media Conference, July 24, 2020. The plenary brought Alexis De Veaux, Walidah Imarisha, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs together for a conversation about legacy, possibility, and the role of writers in making the future we deserve intriguing, imaginable, and irresistible.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs is a Queer Black Troublemaker and Black Feminist Love Evangelist and an aspirational cousin to all sentient beings. Alexis is the founder of Brilliance Remastered, an online network and series of retreats and online intensives serving community accountable intellectuals and artists in the legacies of Audre Lorde's profound statement in "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" that the preceding statement is "only threatening to those… who still think of the master's house as their only source of support."

Alexis De Veaux is a Black queer feminist writer whose work in multiple genres is nationally and internationally known. Born and raised in Harlem, New York City, Ms. De Veaux is published in five languages—English, Spanish, Dutch, Japanese and Serbo-Croatian. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and publications, and she is the author of numerous books including *Spirits In The Street, Na-ni, Don't Explain, Spirit Talk*, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde,* and *Yabo*.

Walidah Imarisha is an educator, writer, public scholar, and spoken word artist. She has co-edited two anthologies including the visionary fiction collection *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements.* Imarisha's nonfiction book *Angels with Dirty Faces: Three Stories of Crime, Prison, and*

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Redemption won a 2017 Oregon Book Award. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Scars/Stars.*

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – We are so excited to bring you all this Writing New World plenary. Toni Cade Bambara is the person who inspired the language behind the description for this particular plenary. Toni Cade Bambara, for folks who don't know, was an incredible writer, filmmaker, self-identified cultural worker, was a pre-Allied Media Conference (AMC) visionary, because her work was grounded and accountable to the people, and she was all about the work of creating a culture where we can be free. And some of the language that came up is the idea that the role of the revolutionary artist is to make revolution irresistible, which Toni Cade Bambara said.

Also, the idea which I learned from Aishah Shahidah Simmons, that sister is a verb. These are phrases that I feel my co-interlocutors today fully embody.

For the three of us, for everybody who's watching, we want to invite you to dedicate your participation in this conversation to somebody who is not in real time part of this conversation, who is part of why you showed up for this. Maybe they've been especially on your heart, mind. Maybe they're part of the reason why you want to write new worlds. Maybe someone older or younger than you, living now, lived before. It can be anyone that you want.

I am dedicating my participation to the great Cheryll Greene, who is looking at me. I have a photo with her in it that's on my desk facing me right now. She was and is an incredible editor, worked for many years for *Essence* magazine, was one of the people who was responsible for so many important books, especially for Black liberation, including Assata Shakur's autobiography for example. And she has personally been a mentor to me since I was a teenager.

She's now in the ancestral realm. She also is a person who connected me with Alexis De Veaux, because they collaborated together to create an incredible series of transnational Black feminist works in the, some would say, unlikely pages of *Essence* Magazine at a time when it wouldn't have been imaginable except they imagined it. It's an example of writing new worlds, it's an example of sistering that absolutely has informed my life, and, yes, I'm here with some of Cheryll's books, right with me. And I'm dedicating my participation in gratitude to her.

Walidah Imarisha – I'm definitely thinking a lot about Octavia E. Butler. And I have a little frame picture for her behind me too. I'm just thinking so much about her impact on my understanding of new futures. Reading her work, when I was still in high school, I felt like I had both permission and a North Star as a Black woman to imagine myself into these futures.

And not just imagine my presence, but imagine my agency and my ability to create change, whatever happens. *Octavia's Brood*, which grew directly out of my understanding of Octavia Butler's work, has definitely, I feel like, made revolution irresistible for me and has created so much sistering through everyone involved in the project who identifies in that way, and then so many connections that are still being made every day.

Alexis De Veaux - I would like to dedicate my participation in this conversation this afternoon to the historical Black "she," those individuals irrespective of gender who identified with, embraced, wore as clothing, and assumed the locations of Black and female in the so-called new world.

Their feet are my feet today. And my breath is their breath. So, I have learned that and I have to honor all of them, and include my grandmother and my mother and so many beings who have claimed this space of Black and female who are no longer living on this earth, but who live in the aura and the atmosphere of this earth.

So, let me begin with a question to you, Walidah, and to you, Alexis, and to myself. Because I've heard each of you say this word vision or visionary in our opening comments. And I want to begin by asking us, how did we arrive at the term, "visionary fiction"? What does it mean? How did we arrive at it? Where is it going? Where is it taking us? Or where does it want to take us?

And how is visionary fiction kin to or not kin to what we have also known as Black speculative fiction.

Walidah Imarisha - Well, I can start us off. I'm so appreciative of that question and the space that it opens up. For me, I started to use the term visionary fiction, I think, maybe ten years ago. Specifically in relationship to creating a special issue of *Left Turn* magazine that was looking at radical science fiction.

And, you know, we kept saying radical science fiction but I really wanted a new term that I felt encapsulated the deep connection between this fantastical art and creation—and the space of organizing in revolution and change. And so, we called it the visionary fiction issue. And I started molding more of my work around that. And then when I connected with adrienne maree brown, my co-editor for *Octavia's Brood*.

When adrienne and I started to join forces and adrienne was doing work around emergent strategy, we saw the connections between visionary fiction and emergent strategy and the ways that they sort of intersected to allow us to imagine different futures and then build them into existence.

So, for me, as a Black woman, I think of visionary fiction as absolutely rooted in Blackness. And in the experience of oppressed peoples creating decolonized dreams of the future. Visionary fiction is rooted in that. It is a space where others can come to that as well. But for me, it is not visionary fiction if we're not rooting in the understanding that those who have held the liberated dreams of the future that they were told were told again and again were science fiction are the oppressed and the marginalized, are black and brown folks and that they are the ones who dreamed the impossible dreams and then changed the entire dreams to make them all of our lived realities.

And, so, I don't think Black speculative fiction and visionary fiction are one of the same; but I don't think that you can separate them out from each other.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – Of course, Walidah, I learned and I first read visionary fiction from you because you asked me to be a part of that issue of *Left Turn* magazine. And now, I'm just realizing this in this moment. I'm like, oh, this is part of what prepared me to be able to say yes later when you all asked me to write something for *Octavia's Brood*, because you asked me to interview this incredible artist, Cauleen Smith, for the *Left Turn* visionary fiction issue.

This idea that we could really vision to the end of what we could imagine, and what we had been working so hard to achieve. Like as you say, imagining every day with our organizing and our practice and our decision to be part of revolutionary movements—we could go all the way to the end of what we could imagine and then be creative there.

That's what was offered to me and I saw it as, and have continued to experience it as, a blessing in so many ways. Because what it does for me is it allows me to see the limits of my own imagination. And it allows me to see whatever it is that I think I really wish would happen that would be better than this current situation. It allows me to be creative there. Which then means I'm not being reactive to the present situation, I'm being expansive and going as far as I possibly can with my imagination, which also makes me rigorous with myself, right?

So, it's like if everybody would just stop doing this form of oppression I'm fighting is a reaction. But to say what is the most beautiful thing I can imagine? And how can I be there, put myself there through my art? And then be creative all over again from there? And it's challenging. It has led to decisions in my everyday life. It has made me a more generous participant in the present because I understand that I have a creative role in not just the future that we can have, but importantly, the future that we can imagine.

I would say that's what visionary fiction means to me.

Alexis De Veaux - I would like to add that for me this term that you've been critical to imagining and putting into language is precisely the idea of a Black woman making language that addresses who we are as Black diasporic peoples.

I'm always in favor of Black people creating language. I'm always in favor of people creating language. I think English as a language is, you know, it only gets vibrant when Black people start speaking. Because when we—you know what I'm saying—when we, when we feel the need, we have to open it up and create some new word that is the "it."

So we know our ability to infuse English with another English, or what June Jordan used to call "an other where." The places that we can be—we're here, and we can be other where, that idea.

I love that you said, Black speculative fiction and visionary fiction are not one in the same, but they also don't cancel each other out. And what I particularly like about the construct of visionary fiction is the movement towards the decolonial project, to decolonizing the power structures around Black and Brown diasporic lives.

That, I think actually is an important distinction if you will; between Afrofutur-

ism, and a lot of what is popularly known as speculative fiction. The notion of the decolonizing project. Because that really sets a particular tone in terms of looking at narratives of resistance. I'm going to not use the term "history" right now. Because I think that term often suggests a "back there" or "before" or something that no longer is. And I'm actually trying to wean myself off of some of this language.

I like that both of your comments did not suggest the word "hope," and the reason why I like that is because I have begun, lately, to wonder about the term "hope." Is it a passive term? What has hope to offer us now? Is there some other way we can think? Maybe we need to think in more active terms? Like vision? Which means to see or envision, which is the act of seeing and therefore doing. So I really appreciate that in constructing this language.

Walidah Imarisha - That's so powerful. So often when we talk about hope, it's so tentative, right? It's something where we're reaching out and we don't know if we'll be able to even be able to even catch a taste of it. And I absolutely agree with what you're saying.

And for me, I think the power of visionary fiction—that combination of the imaginative, the speculative, rooted in community organizing and revolution—is that we know that we can change the future because we've done it again and again and again. And so, in alignment with what you're saying, I want us to claim the future with the same certainty that we claim, as you're saying, not the history, but what came before. And also that we're attempting to claim the present with that same certainty.

I'm so excited to be sharing this space with y'all for so many reasons because of your brilliance, your creativity, your innovation. And I think the way that all of our work sort of sees naturally Blackness as time travel, or as time subversion. That we are able to reclaim or re-envision what has been and, you know, use that in active embodiment in the present or for the future.

I think a lot about the past, especially as Black folks. Because, not only do we have to reclaim it, we do have to reimagine it sometimes, because so much of these stories have been purposefully obliterated. And, I think there's a sadness to that but there's also a power to that because we bring ourselves into that reimagining as well. We infuse what was with ourselves to give it life. That's a huge responsibility, a sacred one, and it's one that you both have done and are doing so beautifully and poignantly. So, I guess we're thinking about the future but we're also understanding time is a construct. So what lessons from y'alls work holding what has been, and especially as Black people, can we and do we need to build the futures that we want?

Alexis De Veaux - One of the things that's evolving in my work, in terms of what we call the past, is to understand precisely this idea of the absence of time in our memory. I'm really working to not so much reconstruct and retell or particularly reimagine the past, but to be able to tap into memory in ways that communicate our narratives. And if the narrative is about being a runaway at a particular point

in the story of Blacknesses, then that is still true. There's still runaways. Maybe in different ways, utilizing different strategies, but we are still runaways.

So we can't talk about it was and it no longer is because we're still in it. We are still in it. We are still enslaved by the structural injustices that created the moment for Saidiya Hartman to understand and then to articulate for the rest of us this is the afterlife of slavery, what we're living through now. So it's not over, it had a life and it also has an afterlife or what I call the death life. So, I'm less interested in picking through the past, which is a viable strategy for writers; but I'm less interested in that as a project than I am in the memories that we need to attach to the present reality.

The present is still the slave ship. It's a slave ship in different forms, but it's still the slave ship. How do we connect with what we think of as these lost narratives or lost historical facts or voices that we no longer hear. Actually, we still hear those voices. Or, I should say, I still hear them. In fact, I hear the ancestors very loud these days. Very loud! So if that's true for me, then I can't have a sense of them being not present, because they are.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs – That resonates so much with me. I hear ancestors right now and at all times. One thing that Barbara Smith—and if folks don't know, Barbara Smith is a Black feminist icon, one of the founders of the Combahee River Collective and Kitchen Table Press and absolutely an unstoppable media-maker for our freedom. What's interesting to me is that she said that enslaved people must have been organizing while in enslaving ships. She said, "How do I know? Because we still exist." So the capacity to organize even in a situation of horrific context like the hold of an enslaving ship, the evidence of that capacity—that Black organizing capacity is our very lives.

At the same time that I think about the persistence of the context, I feel that my role is really about facilitating our presence to that transformative lineage—and I feel like that's my role because I'm obsessed, I am full of longing, I'm full of desire and love. I want to have been there. I want to have been there, Alexis. I mean now, I've been in your living room salons because you're still having the living room salons, but I want to be at the first one. And I love imagining what was it like. What did it smell like? What do people have on? I feel I was present in that moment, even as a dream and I feel loved by that. And I feel that there's a way that the moment that we're in now also has that accountability. Where there are those dreams that we're having that will be looking for the evidence of this. Because we're calling right now with what we're doing, what we're saying, what we're leaving, what we're changing, the energy that we're putting out. And so that's how I think about this idea of time travel that there's something so loving about it.

And I do spend a lot of time quite literally picking through the past. I spend a lot of time sitting in archives, literally reading every piece of correspondence, however trivial it may seem. From Black feminist writers and folks who are involved in Black feminist publishing and organizing and that comes out of the fact that that's a portal. Those physical items to me are sacred and they have the power to translate energy and to bring me clarity about what that moment was already

calling for that I'm accountable to right now. Because it is all now.

I think about how much I love the possibilities—I love to look at the things that didn't happen. I love to look at Toni Cade Bambara at the 1988 Essence Black Women's Retreat—which was organized by Cheryll Green—and she said we should create an anthology. And it should be everything. It should have poems, it should have stories, it should have recipes. It should have star maps and it should have legislative proceedings.

And that particular project did not happen within Toni Cade Bambara's lifetime but I love going to that moment. I understand it's not that everything we call into being is to be owned by us as individuals in this lifetime. Or even as collective participants in a particular organization or at a conference or in a moment. It's actually every time that's another portal that opens. And we can go live in those portals anytime, if we just know that it was there, if we just sense it and believe in it. This is what visionary fiction has taught me: if we can even imagine it ourselves, we can travel there and come back through to this moment through that energy. I think that's my lust for the archive. That is my constant wondering. It feels generative to me to want something that I know is always going to cause me to be creative because I can never fully have it.

Walidah Imarisha - You have become in a way part of that memory, right? You are now an active participant and you're a kind of like a receptacle for that memory. But in a living way. You're not a cold, lifeless container. You are an organic holder of this memory because you have seen it or read it or witnessed it. So you're adding your own breath to it to give it more life. But it's also infusing itself into you as well.

It's that multiplicity of transfer. And that piece is an important part of visionary fiction, and of any liberatory movement—challenging linear time as a one-way street. Nobody Black or Brown ever believed that. None of us thought anything like that until western capitalist imperialism came along and said we have to commodify time. We have to stake it to the ground. We have to stretch it and measure it and then hold it there. The idea that is so powerful in what both of you are saying and the work you live is recognizing time as fluid and not only flows backwards and forward, but is doing so at the same time. It's moving in all directions at the same time.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, I think of your piece "Evidence" in *Octavia's Brood*, which is about this future that is one of the most beautiful futures that I have read or engaged with. One of the things I love about it is your idea that this person in the future is sending messages back to the past to tell us, "Y'all are going to get through this. And this work will not be lost." It's obviously reassuring as someone in the moment that feels so uncertain to get that long view and have it say, "No, it's inevitable that you will build this future."

But I also think it also speaks about the responsibility of the future to the past. That the future doesn't just exist. It is in motion. It's in conversation, it is in relationship, and all relationships are built on accountability and responsibility in the most joyful foundation of that. And so the future speaking back to us and saying, "We

know it's our responsibility to give you strength when it seems like you are not going to make it through," and then thinking that the work that we're doing, the work that y'all have—it's doing the same thing to those folks in the past that have given us so much. That is our responsibility to send back to them as well. "Hey, everything you are fighting for, everything you pulled down, maybe you didn't feel like you've held it then but you pulled it here and we will help hold it for you."

Alexis De Veaux – I would add to this part of your own definition for visionary fiction: those we call our ancestors dreamed us and then bent reality so we could be. And this idea of, again, in an absence of linear time, the relationship between one memory and another which creates the third memory, I think is quite powerful. And very much a part of how we are each describing what we do in our work, which is bending the reality of what we call before us, bending the realities of the present us, and bending the realities to come.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - I have a question about our writing practices because I know that many of the people who are watching this, the people who are attracted to this AMC space, are creators, they are mediums. I always say the "Media" in Allied Media Conference is actually that we are all mediums, portals bringing this future through.

And I think it's really useful to talk about our writing practices and our creative practices more generally. What those practices do to us and how that exists in relationships, how it changes our relationships, how it's nurtured by relationships. I love what you said about accountability, Walidah, and that it's actually an ancestral accountability, and the accountability to the future, and then there's the accountability in the present that is accountable to that. So I would love to hear anything y'all have to say about your writing practice and how it's been transformative to you in relationship.

Alexis De Veaux- That's such a wonderful question because for me, it actually requires me to sort of think along the spectrum of the genres that I've written in. Recognizing that I have written children's books. memoir, fiction, short fiction, essays, biography, poetry, and plays. It's easy to say all of that and also not easy to articulate how each of those things has been transformative.

I think what I understand about my work now and my writing practices, is that my work is moving towards what I call the sacred, what I call "Black sermonic text." I am not someone who is grounded in the particular church experience. But I know the value and the need of Black sermonic text in Black life in narratives of Black life, and in narratives of Blacknesses. So, in that way, my practice is really more about engaging with something I'm now calling "afictional philosophy." It's afictional because it's moving away from fiction and more towards what I as a writer see as a sermonic text. And a Black sermonic text can be a sentence as much as it can be a book.

I recognize in my work now the sacred and the movement towards philosophy, towards trying to philosophize difference. And also trying to find a philosophy of Blackness, recognizing that that means that my work is much more organic than it used to be. 20, 30, 40 years ago, I used to go to my desk, write eight hours a day. I would be spent afterwards. And that was how the work got accomplished, these long sessions in isolation. Now my work is more organic because it's more grounding in this notion of something sacred. I'm no longer hoping to create characters as much as I am trying to speak with spirit. So spirit comes, tells me their name, what their thing is in relation to this narrative, and how to move from there. Sometimes spirit comes on the regular—sometimes spirit don't show up.

And I have learned to understand that doesn't mean that I'm having something called writer's block. I've never had writer's block in my life. I'm either with the pen and the notebook or I'm not. This notion of writer's block comes, I think, comes from someplace else, culturally. And in this effort to really have a practice around afictional philosophy, moving away from the constraints of story and time in the narrative, has meant for me more currently that I'm working on this project around parables.

I thought these were short stories. But there's a difference between short stories, which are part of that narrative, and parables, which have much more to do with the sacred and Black sermonic text.

And also, I discovered that I wasn't really talking about parable as a noun, like a person, place, or, thing. I was actually talking about "to parable"—the verb, to parable. It was several months before I even understood the definition of that. And there are now some twelve different definitions of the verb to parable.

So my process and my practice has to do with, again, philosophizing difference and really looking at Blackness as the abolition project, not just as a racialized state, but as a movement toward abolition itself. And within that, trying to connect to the notion of Blackness being the dominant narrative in whiteness. isn't that what the 1619 Project showed us? When you look across at what has become known as America, Black people and Black culture are foundational to all of that. So Blackness is the dominant narrative in the whiteness project. Whiteness is the dominating narrative. Whiteness is the predatory narrative. Whiteness is the thing that hooked itself up with heterosexuality and made heterosexuality normative. So, for those of us who are in this current moment practicing wokeness and who identify and have identified as white—whether it's a writing practice or an activist practice—one of the questions here is to really discover is how did whiteness become practice? Both in terms of the social contract and also in terms of the thing that is on the table right now, literature. What gave whiteness itself, basically.

And that's part of my practice as a writer, to not necessarily inform those of us who identify as white about that, but to write in ways where not only am I writing against something like whiteness or homophobia or transphobia or ageism or a multitude of structural injustices, but my question to myself as a writer for every project is, what am I writing towards? Not just what am I writing against, because that holds me, constrained by that imagination.

I hope I'm doing this in the parables, writing towards.

Walidah Imarisha – For me, I know *Octavia's Brood* has changed every aspect of my life. It's changed how I create. It's changed how I imagine and dream. It's changed how I organize. It's changed how I am in relationship with people.

I am so thankful for *Octavia's Brood* as its own entity, separate of me, that we have all given life and breath and love to nurture. Because it has gone in places and brought things into being that I never could have imagined. I think one of the things specifically created, connected to my own writing project, is how incredibly collaborative every aspect of *Octavia's Brood* was and the many different collaborations with folks who are bringing different pieces of shared visions of liberated futures, both in what we are building, but also how we are with one another.

And not just the writers themselves. We were lucky enough to have Sheree Renee Thomas, who edited the incredible anthology, *Dark Matter: 100 Years Of Speculative Fiction From The African Diaspora*—which if folks haven't read that two volume set, you must go get your life right now, it's waiting for you. And she was so incredibly generous with her time and her wisdom, giving us feedback for each individual story, for the project, and then just speaking to adrienne and myself, you know, as Black women, speaking as a Black woman who has created an anthology and has seen it move in the world, to just gift us that wisdom, that guidance. And so, I think that process of collaboration is so incredibly important.

At the beginning of *Octavia's Brood*, I could not begin to imagine the ways it would change and shape me as I was changed. That process of collaboration is incredibly important and I think especially for artists trying to create change. How can we create different worlds if we are not practicing how to be different as artists in that process as well? And I think the process of creation is as transformative as the outcome of it. I've read every story in *Octavia's Brood* many times, and I'm transformed by those stories. But having the immense honor of seeing that process and that process of collaboration transformed me in different ways.

Right now, I'm feeling incredibly lucky in this moment to be working on another collaborative anthology project that is headed by Wakanda Dream Lab and Policy Link called, *Memories of Abolition Day.* It's a collection of Black writers who have been brought together. And we've shared space to collectively imagine a post abolition world. And then we are writing stories within that world. And it was the project I didn't know I was needing in this moment until Calvin Williams, who has been spearheading it, reached out to me and said, "Do you want to be a part of this?"

And what came out of it, that I think is so important in this moment, is we created this world and then wrote individual stories that naturally span a 500 year period, starting in 1919 going to 2419. The time span shows abolition as a process, not as a destination. All of us had something in our story that we began collectively calling Abolition Day, the day the last prison closed. But the story continues for hundreds of years after Abolition Day, because we were all struggling, struggling in the most positive way, with the idea of what comes next? How do we push beyond what we can imagine, what we're told is possible. Abolitionists don't want prisons.

But what happens when we get that? And what's our responsibility to the future and the present to say, "This is what we do want." It's been incredible to see the brilliance that so many Black creators are bringing to this, the different visions of the future. The multiplicities of futures in one, the containing of multitudes, and to see there's space for everyone's vision in this real collaborative project way. It's one thing to say it, and then it's another to actually create that space for it.

It has inspired me so much just in terms of thinking about this on the ground organizing that's incredible and visionary and revolutionary right now, and the futures that we are pulling into existence every single day around the globe. And to just really take that long view of the future and to know it's all important. The next year is important, the next 50 years is important, the next 500 years is important. And they are all there waiting for us to connect, as Alexis De Veaux said, one memory to another. And I feel like this project has enabled me to connect as one memory to so many other folks' memories past, present, and future.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - What do we mean by future? Alexis, if you would say a little bit about this idea of future or thinking of time beyond future, which I think is actually very related to, Walidah, whatever you want to say about what it is to be living in an abolitionist present with a shared language in a way that it's not been before.

Alexis De Veaux - I want to put this back on you, baby, I want to say something about your work in relation to this idea of future. Because we have *Spill*, we have *M Archive*, we have *DUB*, we have *Undrowned* that's coming out. I want you to talk about this, like and we've used the term a lot—future—but we haven't really said what we mean and culturally. When we use the term future or the future it's always gesturing toward some time or place that's far off, and we're not necessarily going to see, view, witness, in our lifetime. Some years ago, when I was living in Buffalo, New York, I heard Reverend Gerard Williams say the future is your next breath. And I remember being so arrested by that idea, that it was my present, it wasn't something that I potentially would never see. So let me just pose that to you, Alexis, in terms of the incredible body of work that you have put forward already.

How do you construct the future both as part of your practice and also part of your visionary strategies in terms of the kinds of literature and the subjects of your books?

Walidah Imarisha - I absolutely want to second that. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, what about your brilliant futurism. Your futures are not only so beautiful and so compelling, but so visceral. You are also doing this incredible work of making the future tangible, which I think is such important work to be done and a key part of us being able to get to that future. But as creators, it is hard because we live here. And so, how do you, Alexis, do this amazing work of making these beautiful futures tangible?

Alexis Pauline Gumbs - Oh, I almost got away, if it wasn't for you pesky geniuses (laughs). Thank you for asking me to do that explicitly, and I could listen to you all for days and I want to and I love to.

I would say my writing practice is daily, it is a core commitment. It really is a spiritual practice. Any books that I have published or will publish are very much artifacts and evidence of a ceremony that's going on.

People do sometimes ask, "How can you put so much out there?" It really is a by-product. Like if I'm going to work out, it's the sweat. There is a way that what I know that I need to do as an artist, making the revolution irresistible, in the legacy of Toni Cade Bambara, is I need to wake up and create this day. I need to do that first. So, before I even engage with my loved ones or with whoever I'm collaborating with, I actually have to create first and live inside of that. And it's a rigorous practice because for me, when I wake up, it's still dark. Sometimes, I can see some planets, I've been seeing Mars and Venus out my window these early dark mornings this week.

Often I write things and I don't understand it. And sometimes there's stuff I'm still learning what it really means. But what I will say what I started to notice when I was writing *M Archive*, which was coming out of a daily practice sparked by M. Jacqui Alexander's work and particularly questions from her book *Pedagogies Of Crossing*, I started to see that even though some of the scenes are literally, hopefully out of this world, on a planet of sulphur where we're with somebody and her heart is turning to coal, then to diamond. And then that's what I saw. I didn't think about what does that mean? How do I relate that in a linear way? I don't even do interpretive work. I just allow it to be. And what I started to see is the little pieces of what I wrote every day. The day I wrote about the planet of sulphur and the heart, the beautiful black heart that was turning to coal, turning to diamond, I literally walked into an art gallery and there was all this white beautiful sculpture and then there is there was a black heart in the middle of the thing. It just met me like that. And I thought, "Okay."

So ultimately, I think my practice is a faith practice of believing through my creative practice I can tap into all time and prepare myself for the ethical responsibility of being in this day. Noticing and looking at this day in a way that I wouldn't get from just reacting to what is filtered through the media. It has to come through a different form of tapping in, one I see as spiritual. And that process is a self-loving process. And what I found is that it generates spaces and artifacts that other people can engage in and they feel loved by it.