

# A Third Universe is Possible

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Resilience, connectedness, and healing, are key in the process of overcoming the many faces of trauma and its sources. The power of love, social connection, peer support, and cooperative economies are pertinent avenues to pursue the possibilities that Afrofuturism presents us for new realities of living. There have been countless studies done in public health on trauma, resilience, and peer support and it is time to acknowledge that there need to be massive and wholistic changes in our systems that currently oppress, dislocate, and dissolve communities.

Justice, liberation, and healing are matters of public health.

This piece is an ode to and extension of the academy of work bringing together liberation, justice, health, healing, and the possibility of many futures that includes [Octavia Butler](#), [Audre Lorde](#), [Nikki Giovanni](#), [adrienne maree brown](#), [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#), [la pearson](#), [Paulo Friere](#), [Dr. Barbara Love](#), and many other minds that stretch through the cracks in oppressive systems of being, learning, and doing.

The prose and [poetry](#) are original pieces in part inspired by a yearlong fellowship of thinking through racism, violence, trauma, hunger, poverty, and oppression with the Center for Hunger-Free Communities... and in part a lifetime of experience and observation.

## I. TRAUMA

*Because colonialism is a perverted affair, our relationships are also warped into complicitous arrangements of violation, trespass, and collusion with its mechanisms.*

– la pearson

Trauma is systemic, embodied, and genealogical. Public health fields define trauma as an emotional response to overwhelming stress informed by moments and individual interactions. Trauma can be inflicted by events and individuals, but it is also introduced and perpetuated by systems. There is systemically imposed trauma and oppression in our health, education, policing, housing, and economic systems. Trauma comes from years of economic exploitation and strategic marginalization. You can track the consequences of violence inflicted on communities from historically forced dislocation and manifestations of genocide to contemporary issues around health and lack of economic stability. Healing the effects of trauma begins with acknowledging the moments and networks of trauma, realizing what the point of trauma is and taking account of what its effects are.

As I rub my mother's back  
I wait and pray  
That I will not feel her breathing shallow  
Or her hot tears  
Rolling down my forearms  
A baptism of salty broken silence  
I am reborn  
With a little less  
Each time  
I am afraid that one day  
There will not be enough of me  
Left to encompass her  
To suffocate the flames  
Of a fire that reignites itself  
On the whim of a whisper  
of breeze

## II. RESILIENCE

*I see, after talking with you I did see, that Johnson/ sent his storm troopers into Detroit and that's wrong/ and the wrong is not what we have done but what/ Johnson and all the johnsons before him have done/ and it's wrong that we hate but it's even more wrong/ to love when neither love nor hate have anything to do/ with what must be done.*

– Nikki Giovanni,

“Letter to a Bourgeois Friend Whom Once I Loved (And Maybe Still Do If Love Is Valid)”,  
Black Feeling, Black Talk

Resilience is a powerful tool and an incredible asset in the face of hardship. However, people should not have to withstand continuous exposure to trauma in the name of “being strong.” People experiencing imposed conditions of poverty via either systemic oppression or interpersonal traumas are expected to constantly pull themselves up from the mud and push forward, regardless of what forces are working against them. People living in these conditions should certainly be applauded for their adaptability, strength, and innovation in the ways they work to thrive. We should also certainly remove the systems that create the need for such resilience. Bearing the weight of global greed and resource hoarding is not a skill anyone should be compelled to practice.

The first rule  
is never make eye  
contact. Engaging could be  
Provocative.  
Dangerous.  
Who knows how much  
Of yourself you can assume  
Behind someone else's  
Eyes? How far can you see into  
a stained glass  
soul?  
Colors bouncing off  
White walls  
Into mouths  
coming out as cloudy grunts  
and prescriptions  
because swallowing complacency  
is easier.

It's not a pipe-line  
But a private delivery service  
Each hand picked  
Plucked from soil  
And repotted in concrete.  
Some paint themselves in gossamer  
Anxious of manifest destiny  
No camouflage sustainable enough  
To protect against such predation.

Wealth is carved not of alabaster  
But of black bone  
Alchemy

### III. CONNECTEDNESS

*There is nothing unusual about feeling the suffering (or glory) of another life. This is how we are designed, to live in intimate relationship with all life around us. This doesn't mean we are naturally kind or caring or attentive to that life. It only means that we are designed to be intimate with other life forms. To be attuned to them. To feel them, their joy and suffering, their presence and absence. This is why we have to learn ways to hold this information, to be in right relationship to the life around us. This is also why we have to heal, to get the support we need to integrate the trauma we carry so that we are not in a feedback loop of loud noise on top of loud noise that means, in order to survive, we have to separate ourselves from the rampant expression of life.*

– Susan Raffo, Please don't call yourself an empath

Hierarchy fuels our current society under the guise of necessary order. Organic connection and respect of personhood has become anomalous in a time where we have become so interpersonally distant that common and accessible ways of working, thriving, and understanding each other have been trivialized, marginalized, dissected to only be reassembled into academized trendy appropriations. People take great lengths to learn about creating functional alternative systems that rely on cooperative engagement, resource sharing, and gift economies while completely unaware of the way our current global capitalist system has obliterated existing systems in favor of white supremacy. Connecting with and supporting each other in a manner that decentralizes knowledge and skill baring, deprioritizes competition in efforts toward wealth hoarding, and brings equanimity to Black, Brown, and Indigenous ways of living, being, and knowing just might bring some clarity and peace to what lies ahead for the US.

Radical honesty	Realizing that tusks can impale	To its reality
Leaving out nothing	As well as they can carry	Gifted in understanding
To expose everything	Unforgetting, unforgiving	Others
Global bare underbelly	Yet not built to digest you	Sharing space at the
Blinking at claws	Built to tear you from the ground	watering hole
To play nicely	But simply to linger	A chrysalis of safety
Gently caress	Raised trunk and bowed head	To have the same goal
Tender	To the fixed reality	Laying exposed
Almost raw	Of fearlessness	Nourished by the
Consciousness	Those who are not a threat	water
Laying between teeth of an elephant		

## IV. HEALING

*Hurt on an individual, a community, and a state level has to be healed there... before the people in that community, before the people in that state will be able to live together in a transformed society.*

– Dr. Barbara J. Love (Conflict & Trauma: Strategies for Transformation and Healing , Theatre Without Borders 2010 conference)

Healing does not exist in opposition to justice. Programs that try to intervene in undesirable socioeconomic conditions won't work without healing from historical and contemporary trauma. True justice is transformative and sits beside, if not within, healing. Reparations, reconciliation, reallocation of land and resource are all steps toward healing and steps outside of the capitalist system that created situations of harm that bring us to today's marginalization and oppression.

My name is split  
Between two wonders  
So she wretches me by my middle  
To remind me that she swore  
To paint me with  
Colors her artist never touched  
But recoils when I ask her  
To clean the brush  
Change the water.  
Each stroke  
Angry teeth  
Pressing into the  
Fuzz of an overripe peach  
Pushing harder against  
Loose skin until  
The pocket bursts  
And sticky, sour juice  
Cascades.  
I will not apologize  
For staining these walls  
Or your hands.

## V. OVERCOMING

We went there to confer/ On the possibility of/ Blackness/ And the inevitability of/ Revolution  
– Niki Giovanni, “Detroit Conference of Unity and Art (For HRB)”, Black Feeling, Black  
Talk)

To overcome trauma is to name it. It is to recognize its mechanisms, functions, and consequences. Overcoming trauma is uprooting it and replacing treacherous soil. It is bringing the sources of trauma to justice by abolishing contemporary versions of historical violence in order to truly allow for a healing that ignites energy toward transformative living and being. It is accountability in action. This overcoming is also a returning to ways of living and knowing that were thrown in shackles and behind gates in favor for the supposed comfort and convenience of a select few. Overcoming is allowing for possibilities outside of systems and values that serve to oppress and being willing to throw them away for those that we used to know or have yet to encounter.

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Flat  
Sphere  
Hyperbole

Octavia gave us many maps to the sun

Many suns to map  
Giving ode to Future Afros  
Where the idea of care and love  
Turned inward  
Rings not radical  
Nor aspirational but

True  
Natural  
Safe

Just.

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