

Guest editorial for themed section *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism: theoretical discourse and review

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes that *Black Panther*, with its aesthetic and thematic emphasis on Afrofuturism, as well as its spectacular technical production, makes a unique contribution to cinematic history in several significant ways. In order to establish these noteworthy contributions, both the film and Afrofuturism are engaged with. This article is divided into three distinct parts. Part I provides a brief theoretical overview of *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism. Part II, a short review, follows. Co-authored by Mark Kirby-Hirst, the review contextualises and analyses the film within the bounds of Afrofuturism and twenty-first century art and film criticism, in an effort to argue for the relevance and import of such a unique and yet mainstream piece of cinema history; which, we conclude, is owing in no small part to the rise in popularity of decolonising tendencies in the humanities, in art, and in wider twenty-first century visual culture. The last section of this article, Part III, provides a brief synopsis of the contributing articles to this special themed section of *Image & Text*.

Introduction

Black Panther was written and directed by auteurs Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole, and released in 2018. With its almost all-black cast, its predominantly positive depiction of blackness, and its visually stunning Afrofuturist aesthetic and Afrofuturist plot, the film was immediately celebrated by audiences and critics alike. *Black Panther*, as encapsulated by André Carrington (2019:7), was historic in that it addressed the black audience ‘by name, not in the guise of blackness itself’. Therefore, considering its inclusivity and its technical production and representational “blackness”, as well as its transnationalism (see Carrington 2019; D’Agostino 2019; Makhuba 2019), the film should indeed be lauded. However, the film has not been without its detractors. For instance, scholars have dismissed the film for its capitalist cultural production and overt marketing; its neoliberalism; its representation of Africa as a reductionist, homogenised entity (see Gathara 2019; Mukhuba 2019; Zeleza 2018); as well as for inherent colonial tropes and lens (see Zeleza 2018). Despite its critics, the film was a phenomenal feat and box-office success; not least for its Afrofuturist themes, the aesthetic itself which is principally positive/utopian. The film has even inspired a hashtag movement #Wakandaforever. The themed section of *Image & Text* was a direct response to the film’s overwhelming glocal¹ triumph. The call for papers specifically requested that the theoretical framework, or lens, be that of Afrofuturism. As such, this article provides a broad theoretical overview of both *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism, a film review, and a synopsis of the contributing articles.

Part I: *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism

The film *Black Panther* needs no introduction, and the film is undeniably Afrofuturist. However, the film has been criticised from the fairly superficial – such as the characters’ accents being ‘jarring and annoying’ (Gathara 2018; Reilly 2018); or the claim that the film is nothing but a brilliant marketing ploy, a ‘marvel of marketing’ (Gathara 2018) – to the much more damning: the inclusion of colonial tropes and discourse. One of the most astute criticisms of the film is its reliance on the ‘postcolonial gaze’, posited by academic Paul Tiyamba Zeleza (2018). He identifies several colonial terms, aesthetics, and themes inherent in the film. For instance, at the outset of the film, the audience is told that Wakanda is a tribal nation-state. For Zeleza (2018) this term “tribe/tribal” is the “N” word of colonial denigration for African societies. There is nothing authentic or liberating about referring to African communities as “tribal”, a term that evokes atavistic identities and primordial politics’. Zeleza (2018) also draws attention to the ‘Tarzanian animalistic chants’ by Wakanda’s neighbours who come to intervene in

the bloody and violent warfare (Cobb 2018). While further depictions of 'shields and spears and gyrations' in *Black Panther* are reminiscent of early Hollywood films that represent 'tribal African warfare' (Zeleza 2018). In fact, not dissimilar to the Johnny Weissmuller/Tarzan Hollywood films in the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, Zeleza (2018) argues that the film, through various portrayals and aesthetics, produces a dangerous homogenisation and a very simplistic view of the African continent; for instance, he observes the 'National Geographic' imagery from tribal markings to 'elongated mouth disk'. In other words, any and all "tribal" bodily adornments/markings are decontextualised and thrown into the fray, whether they be from Indonesia or Africa, as though anything "exotic" will do. They are aesthetically pleasing, but lack context and therefore are devoid of meaning, except to look "African" or "mysterious". Furthermore, according to Zeleza (2018) all of this adds up to the depiction of Africa as the "dark continent". An Africa that was literally (physically), and metaphorically, created and colonised (and neocolonised) by racialised and racist socio-economic realities of the west. He also takes issue with the stereotypical Amazonian female warriors; and the female cast, whose roles are merely supporting; as well as Killmonger's character portrayed as the 'proverbial angry Black Man'; and the dystopic and desolate American scenes of the "hood" and "thuggish" African American youth – all direct results of America's own imperial wars and racial and economic conflicts (Zeleza 2018).

Patrick Gathara (2018) offers a similarly scathing critique of *Black Panther*, calling it 'a vision of Africa that could only spring from the neo-colonial mind'. Jelani Cobb (2018), writing in *The New Yorker*, concludes that *Black Panther* is a 'profound film'. Despite this, he also suggests that the film is simply another white/western/European-imagined Africa, or rather "Africa". An imagined "Africa", a brutalised "dark continent", that 'is a creation of a white world and the literary, academic, cinematic, and political mechanisms that is used to give mythology and credibility of truth' (Cobb 2018). Despite this, he suggests that the film exemplifies a 'redemptive counter-mythology' (Cobb 2018). Patrick Gathara challenges Cobb's (2018) definition of the film by arguing that the film offers little more than stereotypical, destructive myths about Africans and Africa. Whereby Africa is depicted as a 'divided, tribalized continent, discovered by a white man who wants nothing more than to take its mineral resources, a continent run by wealthy, power-hungry, feuding and feudal elite' (Gathara 2018). Despite Wakanda's progressive, vibranium sci-fi technology, Gathara (2018) correctly points out that Wakanda appears to have no intellectuals who can conceive of a way to execute a transitioning rulership that precludes ultra-violence and bloodshed. For Gathara (2018), Wakanda-ians have been made invisible (there are little to no references or focus on the actual citizens, there is only an emphasis on the elite and the Wakandan warriors);

infantilised; and represented as unsophisticated. So unsophisticated, argues Gathara (2018), that an American can simply waltz into Wakanda and take over, which is, of course, not dissimilar from what occurred in Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the Europeans taking over Africa (then Americans and now, circa 2019, China). Accordingly, the editorial now turns its focus to Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that looks at literature, arts, music, music videos, fashion design, films and television programmes through a black lens. It aesthetically documents black struggles; black identity; and black hopes, as well as acknowledging, or referencing black historical trauma (collective and individual). Alisha Acquaye (2017) argues that these narratives enable agency and it is a way for blacks to ‘understand[ing] the past and present, by crafting futures that we can control’. By making use of Afrocentricity; African magic realism; African mythologies; African aesthetics and traditions; all of which are ‘intertwined with technology, sci-fi and social awareness, Afrofuturism narrates a parallel or distant reality that is empowering and effervescent’ (Acquaye 2017). In existence since the 1920s, it was only much later on that cultural studies scholar, Mark Dery (1994) encapsulated the aesthetic in his chapter entitled, “Black to the future”, in the book *Flame Wars: the Discourse of Cyberculture*. Dery (1994:180) defined the term as:

[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addressed African-American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future – might, for want of a better term, be called “Afofuturism”.

Mark Dery (1994:180) critically engaged with the topic by asking:

can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers — white to a man — who have engineered our collective fantasies?

His definition addresses the future of blacks and in doing so, he identifies both space and time that are simultaneously dealt with. The themes inherent in this cultural aesthetic, broadly speaking, are a science-fiction imaginary; technological innovation; the African Diaspora and futurist themes. As such, Erik Steinskog (2018:4) argues that

'Dery's discourse points to the necessity of counter-histories, of searching for legible traces of black history, so as to be able to imagine possible futures'. Steinskog (2018:4) also makes a very significant point of departure. While Dery's work, and other authors such as Alondra Nelson (2002), focus on Afrofuturism as engaging specifically with African American history/histories and the Diaspora, Steinskog (2018) takes Dery's definition and theoretical positioning to apply to all of black culture and history rather than limiting it to the Diaspora. I have adopted the same position. Afrofuturism has several central elements, one of which positions black people at the centre of science and technology, as opposed to being on the "receiving end" of technology and so called "progress" (one need only reflect on eugenics, for instance consider the role eugenics played in the genocide of the Herero people). According to Ytasha Womack (2015:17), an Afrofuturist text has black protagonists who wield power through advanced science and technology. As such, the Afrofuturist text 'aim[s] to reintegrate people of color into the discussion of cyberculture, modern science, technology, and sci-fi pop-culture' (Womack 2015:17). It repositions blacks in the context of science and technology: they use advanced technology instead of being used and/or dehumanised and/or decimated by it. In doing so, it questions science and technology's inherent race and ideology and power structures (Spencer 2016:211). Therefore, Afrofuturism for this article, is defined as the utopian infusion and reimagination of black history and Africa's history, past, present and future; with the oft-times positive use of technology. Kareem Reid (2013) writes that Afrofuturism is the

act of re-imagination, reclamation of black identity – a rejection and subversion of debilitating stereotypes, and expression of the infinite ways of interpreting the past, present & future, demonstrating the cosmopolitan reality of the black experience.

Aesthetically, Afrofuturism includes taking inspiration from African myths; designs of the future (such as the extra-terrestrial/alien); philosophies and art that understand or challenge pre-existing modes of perception about Africa and the black experience. As such, it is revolutionary, and it ultimately seeks to destabilise the status quo. There are many Afrofuturist writers, artists and musicians, from Michel Basquiat; Samuel L. Delaney; Octavia Butler; Charles Saunders; NK Jemisin; Nnendi Okrafor; Geoffrey Thorne; Janelle Monae; Sun Ra; and Tananarive Due. Several artists that are specifically worth mentioning are: Omar Victor Diop; Kehinde Wiley; Lina Iris Gold; and John Akomfrah (*The Shadows Took Shape*).

Returning now to *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism, according to Rochelle Spencer (2016:211), Afrofuturism 'relies upon the fantastic in order to better understand racial oppression'. The Afrofuturistic cinematic text grants blacks agency in the telling or

re-telling/reimagining their futures and revisiting or reimagining their past. Spencer's research focuses specifically on Afro-surrealism, a "cousin" to Afrofuturism, and her premise is a very relevant one: the challenge of representing trauma and oppression, most especially collective trauma. How does one engage an (any) audience without trivialising or boring them? As Spencer (2016:213) argues, '[r]evisiting trauma is never an enjoyable experience' but it is essential, because understanding trauma and its historical context(s) is crucial 'to building a more just world'. Spencer (2016:213) also acknowledges that 'new tools are required for such re-imaginings/revisiting to tell or retell familiar narratives'. And, Afro-surreal narratives incorporate the cinematic techniques of narrative, foremost for 'making history relevant' and secondly, to 'suggest an African notion of temporality, one that merges past, present, and future imaginings of events' (Spencer 2016:214). Spencer (2016:214, 223) concludes that these cinematic practices 'allow us to gain a new and more meaningful appreciation of the past' and that they can be used to 'highlight historical traumas'. I am of the opinion that her concepts can also be applied to Afrofuturism, and in doing, perhaps counter some of the criticisms of *Black Panther*, as raised by Gathara (2018); Zeleza (2018); and, Cobb (2018). Rather than criticising Killmonger's character, or taking issue with how African American youths are portrayed as "thugs" and thieves, rather extend her conceptualisation of Afro-surrealism to that of Afrofuturism.

In other words, Spencer's (2016) theoretical positioning suggests rather that Killmonger's portrayal is of a man whose identity has been lost in the Diaspora. A very poignant depiction. His "return" to Wakanda asks the audience to remember the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; the horrors of the kidnapping, torture, and violence. Not only is it a collective trauma, but it is also an intergenerational trauma, historical traumata that has been passed down through the generations. The same with the "hood" or ghettos of America: those are also representative of collective, cultural and historical traumas. Of imperialism, and violence, of capitalism and re-colonisation. The fact that Killmonger wants to save all who have suffered from human trafficking, is testament to how global the trauma is. It is not relegated to only one country or continent. That he uses violence as his preferred "message" or resource, is itself a demonstration of how he has been brought up – with violence; with economic disparity; a sub-altern; forgotten; with a marginalised and Othered status. In other words, *Black Panther* has used Afrofuturist cinematic techniques to depict and retell various African/diasporic/African-American traumas. The fact that these traumas have been noted, discussed or critiqued means that they have been brought into the public sphere for discussion, and that is an extremely valuable contribution to understanding and remembering history. These auteurs have found imaginative ways of re-telling familiar history/ies.

In summing up this section, I refer to researcher Nomusa Makhuba's (2019:12) response to the film, which she states was predominantly positive, 'because it momentarily soothed the prolonged trauma of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, or economically sustained racial segregation – that is, the condition of being alienated from the world one inhabits wherever one is'. Scholars Duncan Omanga and Pamela C Mainye (2019:20), while writing about audience research in Kenya, conclude that the film created a 'cultural moment'. A significant moment, which 'gradually led to the momentous meltdown of the glacier of black under-/mis-representation, and a turning point in black cosmopolitanism and new imaginaries of African identities' (Omanga & Mainye 2019:20). I would like to extend this viewpoint to that outside of Kenya's reception, and state that this "cultural moment" encompasses Hollywood, South Africa, and elsewhere. And indeed, Zeleza (2018) likewise refers to the film as an 'iconic cultural moment' in the African American community. However, Makhuba (2019:12) also raises a pertinent point, in that the film itself, upon closer scrutiny raises 'many uneasy open-ended questions about the place of Africa and Africans in the world'. But like with all films, *Black Panther* is open to multiple interpretations and readings; and the fact that it has brought questions and debates about "blackness"; representation; identity; history; the Diaspora; colonialism; neocolonialism; gender equality; and economic apartheid, to mention but a few, into the public sphere, is indeed significant. But rather than delegating this "cultural moment" to a brief spate of time, I do rather hope that this is only the beginning of real deliberations that leads to transformation. Whether that be how "Africa" is viewed or (re)imagined; or how Hollywood, and other cinematic styles, deals with "blackness", henceforth. In fact, Carli Coetzee (2019:23, see also 2016) has elaborated on this perspective, and in her work, she contends that Afro-superheroes are 'embedded in contemporary social and political contexts and provide ways of understanding the emergent present ... Wakanda can be a resource for transformation, rather than a place beyond engaged politics to which we can escape'. Referring specifically to Nakia's activist projects and Killmonger's objective to liberate black people globally, as well as Killmonger's return to Wakanda, Coetzee (2019:23) remarks that these scenes/themes not only reference history (the Diaspora and trans-Atlantic slavery) but also #BlackLivesMatter (see Newkirk 2018; Serwer 2018). *Black Panther* is therefore a theatricalisation, or dramatisation of the past (trans-Atlantic slave trade; the Diaspora); the present (Nakia's activist activities are not dissimilar to the terrorist group Boko Haram kidnappings in Chibok, Nigeria, in 2014; and the depiction of imperialist and economic apartheid in the "hood" or African-American slums/ghettoes); and the future dated (science-fiction). Which are also the combined essential tropes of the philosophy of Afrofuturism (a reimagination of the past, present and future).

Part II: *Black Panther*, “Postart”, and valorising the popular (with Mark Kirby-Hirst)

Famed critic Pauline Kael (1969:79) once described cinema as ‘a tawdry corrupt art for a tawdry corrupt world’. Her essay entitled “Trash, Art and the Movies” became a highly influential piece of film criticism, the effect of which is still felt to this day. Almost certainly, Kael would have found the recent explosion in popularity of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)² to be proof positive of her argument that the creation of art was never the purpose of the cinema. In his rereading of Kael’s article, legendary filmmaker Paul Schrader (2006:36) sums up this sentiment with his own interpretation of the “Post-art” era of filmmaking, with Quentin Tarantino’s (2003) *Kill Bill* becoming the ‘apotheosis of Kael’s movies-as-trash ideology’ because of its postmodern approach to narrative, pop iconography, and sensationalism. The truth in these words, especially with regard to the productions that characterise the MCU, can only lead a scholar of the moving image to the impression that any analysis of the products of the MCU is both frivolous and without merit (much like the films themselves). But is this necessarily the case? Can one find value in something that is, undoubtedly, a product of twenty-first century mass culture?

Schrader (2006:40) goes on to discuss a group he refers to as the ‘pleaders of special causes’, essentially any marginalised group or supporter thereof, practising academic art criticism ‘without critique’, or as he cynically adds, attempting to criticise art without suggesting whether it is “good” or “bad” art. Their practice is apparently to isolate artistic and cultural production (that is, African-American cinema) from the ‘larger Dead White Male panorama’ and thus evaluate the work as a separate entity instead of positioning it within the artistic history and tradition of the medium. Does studying and critiquing a film like *Black Panther* fall within this zone of “special causes”? As a product of the collective imagination of the MCU, and so also an example of modern popular culture, can *Black Panther* be utilised for more than mere entertainment value and perhaps transcend the complexities of the post-postmodern era? This is the question at the heart of this theoretical review of the film. And one, we would like to suggest, it does indeed.

In his 1994 article, entitled “Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism 1.0” Mark Dery (2008) posits a key question for comprehending the significance of a film like *Black Panther*. While many would immediately dismiss the film as unimportant, given that it is little more than an artefact of postmodern popular culture, Kael would, at least in our opinion, have rejoiced to see the eventual downfall of Erik Killmonger, given his ostensibly communist wealth and technology sharing philosophies.³ So at a minimum,

the film has some value as a capitalist morality play. But there is more to it than that, and therefore we quote Dery's (2008:8) question at length:

Why do so few African-Americans write science fiction, a genre whose close encounters with the Other – the stranger in a strange land – would seem uniquely suited to the concerns of African-American novelists? Yet, to my knowledge, only Samuel R Delany, Octavia E Butler, Steven Barnes, and Charles Saunders have chosen to write within the genre conventions of SF. This is especially perplexing in light of the fact that African-Americans are, in a very real sense, the descendants of alien abductees. They inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done to them; and technology, be it branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, or tasers, is too often brought to bear upon black bodies.

It is precisely because of this – because *Black Panther* is a major product of the MCU with an estimated budget of US\$ 200 million (Setoodeh 2018), earning almost US\$ 1.347 billion to date worldwide (Box Office Mojo 2019), because it foregrounds black characters in the context of the white MCU, and precisely because it presents an alternative potential narrative to that offered by the extant white Eurocentric histories of colonial and postcolonial relations that the film ought to be studied. The black experience is still one characterised by limitations, stereotypes, and enforced subservience, and it is through such narratives that the likes of *Black Panther* may be assiduously examined.

Black Panther was released to worldwide acclaim, not only at the box office but in many cultural exchanges concerning the significance of the film as a cinema milestone. Coogler's (2018) interpretation of the *Black Panther* mythos, first penned by Jack Kirby and Stan Lee (*Fantastic Four*, July 1966) provides the viewer with several different acts of storytelling, shifting perspectives and offering insight into the motivations of a number of the characters in the piece. His perspective could also be argued as consciously decolonising because of the manner in which white western characters are marginalised, and the technological and scientific accomplishments of the Wakandans are placed front and centre. Mariolga Reyes Cruz (2012:141) defines decolonisation as 'moving towards a different and tangible place, somewhere out there, where no one has really ever been'. It is also what Jeff Corntassel (2018) calls 'everyday acts of resurgence' which engender Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge. Decolonisation is a challenge of white imperialism, white centring; white neo-liberalism; and the political and ideological colonial policies still in effect in business, government, education and religion. *Black Panther* is itself a re-imagination of 'somewhere out there'; it is also an 'everyday act of resurgence', against the so-called

liberal Hollywood white elite (with an almost all-black cast and at least ninety percent of the technical crew were black); and it has created a public debate that will most definitely create future Indigenous epistemologies. While decolonisation has many competing definitions and interpretations, its underlying ethos calls for change through action. *Black Panther* has actioned change, it has challenged the winning genres/formulas of Hollywood, for instance: the old stereotype of the white, western hero has been defied, the hero is a black man, and the two villains are white. It has inverted decades of Hollywood traditions and stereotypes, with that inclusion alone. It has challenged the very foundational ethos of early film used by colonialists to indoctrinate, and propagate for the taming of the “barbarians”. Filmmakers went to Africa and other indigenous lands and filmed rituals and everyday activities of the “natives”, and used this as proof that they had to be saved by western conglomerates, industry, and religion. It was therefore used as a tool to spread political and ideological propaganda, as well as justification for their extensive colonising of the lands, people, and minds. It is because of the high production proficiency, and its resonance with decolonisation, that *Black Panther* transcends mere entertainment and is to be considered a significant artistic endeavour. As Anthony Michael D’Aostino (2019:1) has emphatically stated about *Black Panther*, ‘[t]he importance of the popularized race-critical posture toward corporate art and awareness of the veritable positive effects of quality minority representation cannot be overstated.’ *Black Panther* has successfully re-centred the genre’s formula and themes, through ‘soul-searching and social responsibility within a predominantly black milieu’ (Carrington 2019:6). Which brings us to the contributing articles, all of which, in some way, reverberate with what has been written in Part I and Part II of this editorial.

Part III: contributing articles

This edition starts with *A nation under our feet: “Black Panther”, Afrofuturism and the potential of thinking through political structures* by Bibi Burger and Laura Engels. Burger and Engels focus on the comic book series of *Black Panther*, scribed by intellectual Ta-Nehisi Coates. They specifically focus on black culture being created in a space or shadow, called ‘the Mecca’. This is a reference to the space where black collective traumata and memories are recognised. In doing so, they reference Afrofuturism as a theory that allows for readers of *Black Panther* to gain an original and more evocative indebtedness of black traumatic past/s, thereby dealing with historical memories and traumata as espoused by Rochelle Spencer (2016:214, 223) above. They also frame their article with Afrofuturism by situating its political and ideological consequences as found in the comics themselves.

Shenid Bhayroo's article follows, entitled *Wakanda rising: "Black Panther" and commodity production in the Disney Universe*. His article deals with *Black Panther* as a cultural commodity which he argues, offers an opportunity to identify counter-hegemonies; and to provide challenges to the 'systemic erasure of Afro-histories'. This is significant, because as already discussed, the cinematic narrative of *Black Panther* references the diverse history/ies of blacks, from the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the diaspora. In doing so, it works as an archive, or a form of documenting black collective history/ies, which in itself is a very momentous contribution, despite it being a 'marvel of marketing' (Gathara 2018).

Rosemary Chikafa-Chipiro's article is the third in this special themed section, namely *The future of the past: imagi(n)ing black womanhood, Africana womanism and Afrofuturism in Black Panther* (Coogler 2018). The title itself references the focus: gender and *Black Panther* and Afrofuturism, and Chikafa-Chipiro argues that the film is 'Africana womanist-centric'. However, the article also suggests how important both the film as well as theoretical framework of Afrofuturism is, as they both challenge western hegemonic ideas of black culture and Africa.

Laura Burocco moves away from a hermeneutic, interpretivist analysis of *Black Panther* by conducting an audience reception study, entitled *Do not make Africa an Object of Exploitation Again*. The focus in her paper is on black identity and the Diaspora; the Afro-Brazilian past as well as the future; and the content for her study is an Afro-Brazilian public. Salim Washington's article *You Act Like a Th'owed Away Child: Black Panther, Killmonger, and Pan-Africanist African-American Identity* critiques *Black Panther* for its 'romanticising of a fictional Pan-African nation and culture'. Washington does however conclude that the film is significant in that it works as an allegory about the place of Africans, in both post-colonial Africa and the Diaspora. Last is Danielle Becker's *Afrofuturism and Decolonisation: Using "Black Panther" as Methodology*. This article brings together Afrofuturism and decolonisation, which Becker argues are both 'temporal dislocations and discursive disruptions'. Combining these two theories into one "conceptual space" she investigates them, by asking if, and where, they overlap; and how they may both be useful for the study of visual culture in contemporary South Africa, which is currently experiencing the "decolonial turn".

All the articles critique the film, use Afrofuturism as their lens or theoretical framework, and have several elements in common. The overall consensus is that despite some of the failings of the film, *Black Panther* is also very successful as it raises issues of black identity; serves as a receptacle of black historical traumas and memories, reinvigorates discussions of Afrofuturism, interrogates Afrofuturist theories, raises political and ideological questions about black history/ies, works as a form of counter-

hegemonic cinematic production, and is also a form of epistemic destabilisation of the current film status quo (the overbearing Hollywood system).

Conclusion

In concluding the editorial for the special themed section of *Image & Text*, I would like to argue that *Black Panther* makes several contributions to cinematic history. Firstly, it encourages discourse about blackness, identity and Afrofuturism (blacks' history). Secondly, it serves as an "archive" or memory repository for the collective, cultural and historical history/ies and traumata, of blacks. Thirdly, it transcends the "tawdry versus art" binary, and because of, or in spite of, its resplendent technical prowess, it is aesthetically more than simply "low-art" or "trash". Fourthly, it resonates with decolonisation, in that it has actioned change in its narrative. And finally, it suggests powerful, reimagined counter-histories and counter-hegemonies, despite having several colonial and neo colonial tropes (such as liberal capitalism). As such, I end this article with a positive quotation from Duncan Omanga (2016:273), who postulates that *Black Panther* has, through some of its characters, such as Nakia, a 'political imperative ... a decolonizing mission' to alter the world beyond Wakanda. And this is its true value, which I believe will become more apparent as time progresses.

Notes

1. "Glocal" is a combined term for globalisation and localisation, (or global and local), and was first referenced in the *Harvard Business Review* in the late 1980s (Sharma 2009).
2. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is the title given to a constellation of films produced since *Iron Man* (Favreau 2008) began the era of the MCU.
3. Pauline Kael's anti-communist statements against numerous film plots throughout her career are highlighted by Capshaw's (2017) *Liberty Conservative* article, entitled Pauline Kael: *Seeing Through the Propaganda*.

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