

1 **Ingrid LaFleur speaks at the Utopian Studies Society meeting at Michigan State University**

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3

4 Julian Chambliss: Well I wanna thank...

5

6 Female #1: Keep talking[inaudible 0:02].

7

8 Julian Chambliss: ...[laughter] [Sonja 0:05] for, uh, that nice introduction. Of course, thank
9 you for coming to MSU. I, I'm new to MSU. I just – this is beginning my
10 second year. I came from Florida, so I survived my first year, [laughter]
11 which is always the important part of the process. Um, I was really
12 intrigued by, uh, the fact that we're gonna have the Utopian Studies
13 conference here at MSU. We had a-, actually quite a few conversations
14 amongst the faculty about the conference and the really important
15 questions represented by utopia and, of course, as someone who's very
16 interested in Afrofuturism, uh, I'm very interested in those, those
17 narratives. And it's a really complicated concept – right – there's a really –
18 very complicated, uh, timeline associated with Afrofuturism. And when
19 the time came to think of a, of a keynote, I immediately thought about
20 Ingrid in part because Afrofuturism is so complicated as a theory but
21 Afrofuturism is so provocative and hopeful as a practice. And so there are
22 very few people who are really sorta like providing us a pathway for that
23 practice and Ingrid LaFleur is one of those people.

24

25 When you think about Afrofuturism as a practice that is going to
26 transform, redeem, perhaps create a better future, there are very few
27 people who have done as much to sort of realize that [inaudible 1:28]
28 Ingrid. Because she's a Michigan native and [she] [inaudible 1:31], she's
29 based in Detroit, this a really unique opportunity for us to think about what
30 the future might hold. So Ingrid, of course, is a curator. She's also a
31 pleasure activist – ask her what that means – [laughter] and a, and a, and a
32 leading Afrofuturist. [knocking] Her mission as she a-, lives it every day is
33 to ensure equal distribution of the future to explore the frontiers of social
34 justice and to think about new technologies, new economies and new
35 modes of governing that are going to help us have a better future. She was,
36 of course, one of the first – no, the first mayoral candidate to have
37 Afrofuturism at the core of her platform. So what she understands about
38 Afrofuturism perhaps is a roadmap for all of us to think about the future.
39 So it is with great pleasure that I introduce Ingrid LaFleur as our keynote
40 here at the Utopian Studies Conference. Ingrid. [applause] [knocking]

41

42 Ingrid LaFleur: Thank you so much, Julian. You just made my mama proud. [laughter]
43 Um, I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to do this. How are you guys,
44 doing this afternoon? [audience speaking] You're good? And you've been
45 enjoying the conference? You know when I been tell-, when I tell people
46 that I'm gonna speak at the Society of Utopian Studies, they're like that

1 [you know 2:59] – perfect for you. [laughter] Of course, right? I wear
2 heart glasses. [laughter] Where else would I be. You guys are my family.
3 Yeah? [laughter] Awesome. I only have 1 slide today. Forgive me. I know
4 I'm a curator. I'm supposed to be visual but. I thought 1 was enough. So
5 when I was asked to give the keynote for this conference, I began to re-
6 equate myself with notions of utopia happily. As a black American
7 woman, I've had a unique almost desperate relationship to the idea of a
8 utopia, that it could be established and it could serve good for all.
9 However, in my adult years, I've come to understand that the ideas of
10 utopia not only influence our individual direction but also policies that
11 affect the collective. If the utopian vision is narrowly focused, then a
12 dystopia is created for those who stand outside of that vision. So what
13 does utopia mean today and for our futures? I want to begin with a short
14 journey through my relationship with utopia.
15

16 As a child, I had many ideas about what a utopia may look like as
17 probably you may have as well. As I travel in time into my childhood, I
18 invite all of you to also consider what your utopia was at each stage of
19 your life. I hope it is a welcomed memory. But first let's make sure that
20 we're on the same page about what a utopia is. I hesitate to offer any
21 definition in front of this illustrious society. But I will say this: I want to
22 go to the definition my 7-year-old self thought utopia was, an imaginary
23 place of beauty and perfectness. It was – always seemed to come down to
24 a feeling than an actual place. I guess that can explain the nowhere-ness of
25 its original definition. My 7-year-old self thought the Love Boat was pure
26 heaven. That was a TV show for those of you were not born after the '80s.
27 [laughter] Um, [laughter] I loved it so much, I turned my parents' king
28 sized bed into a cruise ship and would image the luxury of living at sea.
29 [background speaker] The cruise was always filled with loved ones and
30 the ship staff was always happy and friendly and always felt valued.
31 [background noises] But the perfect that fascinated me most – I still
32 become wide-eyed when it comes up in conversation – is the mystery of
33 Atlantis. Sorry.
34

35 It was my father who introduced me to Atlantis and it was the start of my
36 path towards Afrofuturism. My father would tell tales about the city of
37 gold where fruit te-, fruit trees were planted everywhere and there
38 [banging] were no – there was no need or want for anything. When he
39 described the mythical island, I would often image the Atlanteans floating
40 as they communicated with each other telepathically while picking the
41 ripest, most delicious fruit. But my father would emphasize with a
42 wagging finger, greed overtook the Atlanteans and the island sunk as a
43 result. I would have so many questions. Like why, if Atlantis was so
44 perfectly ba-, balanced and abundant, why would someone want to hoard
45 and limit access to resources? It saddened me. It was as if humans were
46 incapable of creating a peaceful world. My father, an avid reader of the

1 psychic Edgar Cayce, told me one weekend that there was another island
2 called [Leluria 6:47]. He would become filled with glee when he would
3 tell me of this ancient island that preceded Atlantis by millions of years.
4 Lemuria or Mu, the motherland, was said to be an island of darker-skinned
5 people. While Atlantis was in the Atlantic Ocean, Mu resided in the Indian
6 Ocean and connected what, what now is India and Africa. [Mumori-ans
7 7:14] possessed unforeseen powers and they maintained a culture based on
8 love and compassion. My child's mind burst into curious joy – a black
9 mythical island? Wow.

10
11 And Mu was the beginning of us all? I was fascinated. Fast forward to
12 high school. I was introduced to a version of Atlantis by the short story A-,
13 *Afrolantica* written by civil rights activist and legal scholar Dr. Derrick
14 Bell. His fictional ver-, version of Atlantis was perfect for me at the time
15 as I began formulating my own black politics beyond my parents'
16 influence. Dr. Bell's *Afrolantica* [throat clearing] told of an island where
17 only black people could survive. I was so enamored by the story that I
18 suggested, I suggested it as a model for a high school presentation to
19 address the theme Economic Development in the Black Community. This
20 was for the annual BASE conference at the University of Detroit's High
21 School. Our high school group, Renaissance African Perspectives,
22 presented the black national's premiss that black people can only build
23 economic wealth if we had a place where white people can come. Living
24 at the time in a 99 percent black Detroit with the largest black middle class
25 in the nation definitely influenced me. I knew what black wealth looked
26 like and how it functioned and maintained. I was proud of our
27 presentation. I was the minister of education and enjoyed imaging building
28 an education system for an all-black island. But as you can imagine, the
29 presentation didn't go well. People didn't like that their mothers or fathers
30 can come our island. It was a long debate. [laughter]

31
32 My young mind didn't consider all the ramifications from separating
33 humans based on race. It was a lesson I quickly learned. We cannot live
34 right in silos. A civil, civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer aptly stated
35 nobody's free until everyone is free. But the question remained how do
36 black people build economic wealth under the weight of systemic racism. I
37 decided to attend an HBCU, a historically black college and university.
38 HBCUs were originally created because white institutions wouldn't allow
39 for blacks to attend their schools. Now HBCUs provided a place where
40 black bodies could voice opinions without fear of being blackballed. I
41 heard of the alienation that many of my high school friends endured at the
42 start of their freshman year of a white college. My parents didn't think I
43 should have to deal with the hassle of racism at the start of my career
44 making. HBCUs were a great option because they were a nurturing
45 environment for young black bodies with all of the intellectual rigor
46 necessary to compete in the world. I attended Spelman College

1 intentionally. I wanted to be among black women and to learn the
2 leadership skills Spelman is known for. Spelman is nestled in a cluster of
3 black colleges and a university. The entire area is beaming with black
4 students from all over the African diaspora. I cannot express to you how
5 much fun it was. [background noises] Spelman wasted no time in
6 shattering our young realities.
7

8 The summer reading before freshman year shook me to my core. There
9 was an essay by the feminist theorist Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall that
10 basically told me that all of the institutions – marriage, education, religion
11 – were to control my black body. Of course, I didn't even know marriage
12 was an institution. [laughter] My entire matriculation at Spelman
13 reoriented my world and brought so much harsh clarity. I graduated no
14 longer naive. I could no longer claim ignorance about the global effects of
15 white supremacy and patriarchy. I could no longer say I, I was not
16 exposed to the movements of resistance [throat clearing] and the long
17 legacy of decolonizing within the United States and around the world.
18 During this reprogramming, I realized that people were not only fighting
19 to be free but also to create the dream they've imagined. Liberation
20 movements of all kinds had leaders with a vision that extended long
21 beyond their life. Resistance to power structured involved the careful
22 crafting of a new reality where those power structures are weakened if
23 they exist at all. As we learned about [throat clearing] systems of
24 oppression, we learned the ways in which people have not only opposed
25 the limiting systems but also developed something new, never perfect but
26 hopefully more peaceful. The dehumanizing of the black body ended at
27 the gates of Spelman and every HBCU. It was definitely 4 years of an ac-,
28 intellectual utopia. It was then in my HBCU bubble I was introduced to
29 Afrofuturism.
30

31 My brother, [Fred Crenshaw 12:42], who's also a curator, was attending
32 Clark Atlanta University and DJ'd broken beat from London. Me a few
33 years younger, eagley-, eagerly absorbed all the tales from London's
34 music scene in his tiny college campus room filled with stacks of records
35 and books. Amongst the clutter of curiosity, he told me about
36 Afrofuturism. It was as if within my black utopia I found more people, a
37 global community to play with. I dove right in and was introduced to the
38 [Yahoo] [Inaudible] [launch 13:17] by Paul Miller and Alondra Nelson
39 that gathered black geeks and nerds from all corners of the multiverse to
40 convene, converge and converse about all things Afrofuturist. Although
41 the term was c-, coined by cultural critic Mark Deri, a white man,
42 Afrofuturism centers black bodies and gathers the lovers of black
43 speculative fiction and aesthetic. In the beginning, it was fun to be
44 introduced to cosmologies and gnathologies and legends that I never heard
45 of, such as the jazz musician Sun Ra being from Saturn [laughter] and the
46 Dogon cosmology that tells of the amphibian-like beings, the Nommo,

1 who came from the star Sirius to impart sacred knowledge that they still
2 use today. It was Atlanta, it was Atlanta-based artist Kevin Sipp who
3 would indulge me and informally give short lectures about the time before
4 patriarchy. My mind would explode. There was a time before patriarchy?
5 [laughter] I was born in the wrong time [inaudible 14:25]. [laughter]
6

7 My utopia quickly sharpened to include this matriarchal arrow where the
8 Nubian temple pres-, priestesses were said to be caregivers of the
9 community. They harvested food and did [the accounting 14:37] for the
10 entire village. It was said they possessed all the knowledge of our
11 mysterious universe. It's – I still like to imagine what that time period
12 looked like. My notion of utopia was formulating and expanding. It also
13 became clear to me there was a logical way to attain this utopia I was
14 imagining. But as I mentioned earlier, I didn't fully understand that 1
15 person's utopia is another person's dystopia. Moving to Detroit revealed
16 this truth to me. When I returned home to Detroit in 2010, the
17 transformation was slow in the city but it was steady. People had access to
18 spaces downtown we could only dream of now. The neighborhoods were
19 reorganizing and fortifying. But there was a billionaire, a white cis man
20 who had his utopian vision in mind to create a place that he felt at home in
21 and that h-, where he could prosper. [tsk] That dream does not include the
22 current Detroit, which is 85 percent – with its 85 percent black population.
23 As comedian and commentary – commentator D.L. Hughley said, the
24 most dangerous place for black people to live is in a white person's
25 imagination. [background noises] I see someone nodding. [laughter] Over
26 the past, eh, over the past few years, there has been a crackdown on street
27 artists of Detroit.
28

29 They are fined and, and receive a felony charge when caught. Even a
30 black muralist was arrested for painting a mural that the city
31 commissioned him to make. He forgot his license that day. [laughter] It
32 was later explained to me that there is a whitewashing of the city that is
33 happening. They are not, they are not only literally painting over the
34 murals with white paint but also trying to make the city more palatable for
35 suburban whites. That is why the police is ig-, is ignoring all the requests
36 of building owners to leave murals unmolested. I suppose the murals are
37 too urban, which equals black. A thorough whitewashing will take all that
38 urban [and 16:55] urbanness out. [tsk] Based on the policies of spatial and
39 structural racism and the policing of black bodies, it is clear the
40 whitewashing of Detroit is intentional. Americana structured a utopian
41 vision of civility and organization, a place where respectability, politics
42 reins and communities are littered with white picket fences. The white-
43 centered fantasy of an American utopia cannot exist where black bodies
44 roam free, especially in the Make America ga-, Great Again era. You see
45 the black body is uncontrollable, which equals uncivilized. Black culture
46 allows for natural forces, an evolution that cannot be contained or

1 controlled but as the paintings of Normal Rockwell illustrate, there's no
2 space for black bodies to reside in this sterile vision.
3

4 Dr. Bell wrote as a preface to, um, Afrolantica black people are the
5 magical faces at the bottom of society's well, even the poorest whites.
6 Those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their self-
7 esteem by looking down on others, on us. Surely they must know that their
8 deliverance depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working
9 together is escape possible. Over time many reach out but most simply
10 watch, mesmerized into maintain-, into maintaining their unspoken
11 commitment to keeping us where we are at whatever cost to them or to us.
12 Can you blame white bodies? For over 400 years, white men, women and
13 children have been programmed that America is their utopia to mold and
14 cultivate, where white men will forever be empowered to control the
15 destiny of this nation. However, these black and brown bodies must
16 remain servants in this s-, scenario, invisible and silent. Black bodies only
17 serve most useful when producing a product or when leveraged to be sold,
18 mortgaged or used as collateral. And if those enslaved persons are
19 disobedient, whites are imbued with the power to violently dispose of
20 them. And we can argue they still have that power. The white man
21 remains master in these lands is what they were told. [Inaudible 19:33] the
22 Emancipation Proclamation along with the reconstruction era, civil rights
23 movement, black nationalism and Obama becoming president are just a
24 few moments of history where rebellion and coarse correction has
25 disrupted the white supremacist utopian vision.
26

27 When football player Colin Kaepernick took a knee in 2016 during the a-,
28 American anthem at the start of a, a game [tsk] to protest police brutality,
29 he disrupted the American leisure pastime where nation pride and city
30 pride is celebrated collectively. He broke the Americana trance and ended
31 the willful ignorance. The horrors of America's past and present could no
32 longer be denied. Each knee taken over the years questioned time and time
33 again the authority and vision of the white man as master in this domain.
34 The constant demand by black and brown bodies for freedom to be seen
35 and heard and to be humanized counters the colonial narrative that has
36 been centered for so long. The United States of America is a perfect place
37 for whites to be free and grow and prosper. So it should not be shocking
38 that Detroit is being aggressively colonized because of the value of
39 Detroit. It's immeasurable. There are policies to further marginalize black
40 and brown populations of Detroit. Although Detroit is surrounded by 20
41 percent of the world's fresh water, which is the new gold, Detroiters are to
42 contend with the reduction of resources. Weekly the city government shuts
43 off water in thousands of households, especially in the summer, to force
44 people to pay their bills. The water bill is one of the highest in the nation.
45 With Detroit facing a 64 percent poverty rate, how exactly does the mayor
46 think we, we are to pay these water bills?

1
2 The racial, [throat clearing] the racial wealth gap is front and center in
3 Detroit. You can see the effects of the lack of capital, which not only
4 reduces ability, um, to access resources but also prevents residents from
5 investing in their own neighborhoods and simply denies them the power a
6 billionaire would have. For instance, our white mayor, first in 30 years,
7 has been advocating for the police department to adopt biased facial
8 recognition software. This facial recognition software is to identify
9 potential criminals but instead, it reads the faces of darker-skinned women
10 as men 31 percent of the time according to a report by Massachusetts
11 Institute of Technology. Black women are the largest population of Detroit
12 and head of most households. A case of mistaken identity could be
13 devastating to a family. The tracking of black people and their potential
14 imprisonment is intentional and in line with the colonial need to contain
15 black bodies and keep them in servitude. But as Detroit's power structure
16 tries to blatantly control black bodies, the Afrofuture rapidly approaches. I
17 was just in Lagos, Nigeria, where I was told of a report that stated 1 in 4
18 Africans are Nigerian and 1 in 3 people will be African by 2100. We're
19 about to be Nigerian. [laughter] W-, [laughter] what we have been
20 asserting since the start of the Afrofuturism movement and so has Alicia
21 Wormsley with this wonderful billboard, there are black people in the
22 future. It's statistically true.

23
24 We are all about to live in the Afrofuture. To be clear, white supremists
25 around the world are not comfortable about the idea of the world
26 becoming African. Even f-, even for some of you, it might be
27 uncomfortable. I'm uncomfortable as I consider how the world is plagued
28 with anti-blackness. Right now we have a president that emboldens a part
29 of the American population that completely rejects any black and brown
30 future because that was not part of the deal. The American dream did not
31 include reparations, closing the racial and gender wealth gap, affirmative
32 action, reproductive rights, gay rights, everything. As this – [laughter] as
33 the country grows and expands and leans towards inclusion, Trump
34 supporters continue to carry out their white utopian vision regardless of
35 what people think. How can we create new visions of a utopia that can
36 prepare us for a peaceful Afrofuture? Our collective perception of Africa
37 has been shifting and trending in some cases. Africa is the hotspot for
38 contemporary art, fashion, music and food. African culture is rapidly
39 spreading with the help of social media and the internet. Public gatherings
40 like the International [Inaudible 25:11] Series, Afropunk help us to
41 collectively celebrate the diversity of blackness within the African
42 diaspora. The online magazine *OkayAfrica* highlights the latest trends
43 coming out of [Inaudible 25:22], Johannesburg and Nairobi to name a few,
44 a few. But it was the Disney produced movie *Black Panther* that
45 established Africa as a power place within the global public imaginary.
46

1 Wakanda, the utopian African country Black Panther is – the superhero
2 Black Panther is from helped to visually illustrate a world where black
3 people are not only the warriors but also the innovators. Definly-,
4 definitely not without critique, it must be admitted that *Black Panther* has
5 reoriented our idea utope-, a utopia and introduced an Afrotopia based on
6 black desire, vision and ingenuity. Through the years, we have seen
7 attempts of creating a Wakanda, a wealth-producing black utopia similar
8 to Dr. Bell’s Afrolantica. [throat clearing] [tsk] In 1907, W.E.B Du Bois
9 documented 154 African-American-owned cooperative businesses – 14
10 producer cooperatives and 3 transportation cooperatives, 103 distribution
11 and consumer cooperatives and 34 real estate and credit cooperatives. In
12 1918, Du Bois created the Negro Cooperative Guild, which provided
13 cooperative economics education. However, in the summer of 1921 in
14 Greenwood area of Tulsa, Oklahoma, a fire brought an end to an era of
15 black prosperity. At the time the w-, the wealthiest black community in the
16 U.S., the business dictri-, district of Greenwood otherwise known as the
17 Black Wall Street was set ablaze damaging \$1.5 million in real estate,
18 \$750 thousand in personal property. That amounts to \$32 million today
19 and left about 10,000 peop-, black people homeless. These are just a few
20 examples of enclaves of blackness explicitly built to improve black life
21 and provide a way for black people to exist within a system that decades
22 ago thought of the black body as property to be traded.

23
24 A report by Prosperity Now the Institute for Pol-, Policy Studies
25 calculated that the median wealth for black Americans will fall to 0 by
26 2053 if we continue on this path. And with the leading cause of death for
27 black men between 25 and – [throat clearing] between the age 25 and 29
28 because of, uh – excuse me – and [laughter] with the leading cause of bla-,
29 of death for black men between the age of 25 and 29, um, it’s because of
30 police-related fatalities, it’s hard to imagine the Afrofuture becoming an
31 Afrotopia. What is made evident is that it is impossible to collectively
32 build economic wealth within this economic system as a black-bodied
33 person. I am clear that this current economic and political system was not
34 to – was not created to serve black bodies. As a mayoral candidate in
35 2017, I definitely had a utopian vision. All of my naive love for, for and
36 belief in humanity poured into my political agenda. I knew that Detroiters
37 were capable of manifesting a city that cares for every single resident as if
38 they were family. I’ve witnessed the resiliency [tsk] and collaborativeness
39 of Detroiters, so I have confidence that we can build our utopian destiny
40 despite the constant aggressive attack on black and brown bodies.

41
42 That is why I call Detroit my Afrotopia. Afrotopia is my version of a
43 perfect place but instead of being no place, it’s every place, even within.
44 My political agenda was my attempt to create policy centering black
45 bodies and their need for protection and service. This utopian v-, vision
46 looked like independence from u-, utility companies and building

1 hyperlocal systems for reen-, renewable energy sources. I wanted to
2 completely stop poverty in Detroit while also eliminating crime through
3 restorative justice practices. I wanted Detroit to own the water system
4 again. I believed every resident should have acces to fresh, clean food and
5 fresh air. I want the city to grow hemp so that we could use it, um, for
6 cement for our roads, clothing, rehabilitating the soil and so much more. I
7 also want us to own our salt mines again. Artists would be able to thrive
8 and focus on their practice with ease. And the governance system would
9 be horizontal bringing more power and granting, [banging] and granting
10 system back to the black clubs and neighborhood associations.
11 [background noises] And the economy would have a strong local focus.
12 Essentially, I want Detroit to become autonomous, completely
13 independent from state and federal government, so they no longer push
14 their racist agendas through our city governant.
15

16 Sci-fi writer and godmother of Afrofuturism, Octavia Butler, tells us how
17 to construct, eh, these small autonomous communities through the
18 construction of the Earthseed community, which she talks about in her
19 books *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Butler’s character,
20 L-, Lauren Ola-, Olamina leads, leads this intentional community and
21 states it's about learning to live and partnership with one another in small
22 communities and at the same time working out a sustainable partnership
23 with our environment; it's about treating education and adaptability as the
24 absolute essentials that they are. A dear friend of mine has created a
25 compound that I would definitely hide out in if an apocalypse comes to
26 visit. [laughter] They have, um, rain catchers that recently caught 11,000
27 gallons from 1 inch of rainfall. [laughter] They also – and they’ve also
28 placed those rain catchers in neighborhoods throughout Detroit. There is a
29 hydroponic fish system, solar panels, 3D printers, laser conter-, cutters and
30 an internet speed that is faster than lightening. [laughter] And the entire
31 neighborhood has free access to all of these things. Their neighborhood is
32 filled with gardens and farms and parks and even a putt-putt golf course,
33 [laughter] all of which respects the local ecosystem. The artists of the
34 neighborhood – and this is how I came to learn about the neighborhood –
35 have created a community land trust to help guide the development in the
36 area.
37

38 This is what I would call an Afrotopia. Understanding the constant sub-,
39 subjugation of the black body, my friend freely constructs safe spaces with
40 all of the accessibility. This is when survival mode turns into thriving into
41 the future. What if we try to create these portals of peace and collaboration
42 within our neighborhoods instead of [inaudible 33:18]? What would that
43 look like? Would it be possible? Emerging technology tells us yes, it is
44 possible. I have learned how emerging technology, especially blockchain
45 technology can support our utopian visions. If we want a world where we
46 can be free, where resources are abundant and efficiently managed, then

1 blockchain technology is what we seek. Blockchain technology was
2 introduced to the world with the launch of Bitcoin. Bitcoin was created by
3 Satoshi Nakamoto as a sharp antidote to the 1 percent and their greed. And
4 the Genesis Block of Bitcoin, they posted an article of the UK banks being
5 bailed out, um, when the recession hit in 2008. [throat clearing] This
6 critique was to illustrate that this technology intentionally eliminates the
7 needs for banks to act as intermediaries and, thus, can no longer take
8 advantage of the 99 percent. This digital ledger relies completely on
9 machines and complicated equations to verify transactions.

10
11 [background noises] It allows for currencies to exist that aren't tied to the
12 whims of government and the global economy. It also allows for the
13 creation of an economy that is based on the values and the needs of
14 communities. This means that as black bodies, we can finally get to
15 choose to not participate in a capitalist system that was built for white
16 prosperity and the enslavement of the black body. The digital ledger
17 blockchain was supposed to course correct us so that we do not need to
18 create the dystopia we love to depict over and over again in movies and
19 literature and music where resources are scarce and competition is deadly.
20 We are programmed for an apocalypse, an unimaginable dystopia because
21 we know collectively we are not heeding the warnings of, say,
22 climate change. Some of us are resigned to and even desire time of every
23 man for themselves because we know those in power will continue to want
24 free and forced labor and will choose profits over children and the earth.
25 That's the capitalist way. How can blockchain technology fortify our
26 resource-rich, rich communities and bring us closer to our Afrotopian
27 vision? The goal is neighborhood self-sufficiency, collaboration, trust and
28 transparency and shared accountability.

29
30 Blockchain technology can provide this to us via a decentralized,
31 autonomous community, otherwise known as a DAC. Decentralized
32 autonomous communities are digital communities that, that develop their
33 own currency. Members of the DAC are able to build and control an
34 economic system based on their values and shared vision. Because
35 blockchains are [unible 36:31] and copies, [throat clearing] copies of them
36 are everywhere, the decentralization and cryptography keeps it secure. So
37 even if like in Tulsa a hub for the DAC is burned to the ground, copies of
38 the DAC are digitally held elsewhere. The decentralization also means
39 there is no one person leading the group, only the collective. The shared
40 and often rotating leadership model allows for new versions of governance
41 and since many aspects of DACs are automated and transparent, then the
42 administration could potentially be minimal, allowing for members to
43 spend their time engaging in other interests. [throat clearing] We – I – are
44 deploying a DAC in Detroit to help people access meshnets going up in
45 neighborhoods and to service those 40 percent adults, 70 percent youth of
46 Detroit who do not have access to broadband internet access. By

1 increasing internet access for black and brown people, they will be able to
2 increase the [inaudible 37:49], protect their communities and learn to
3 innovate with the emerging tech that is currently crafting our lives.
4
5 Essentially, Detroiters will have more control over their destiny. By
6 actively reestablishing a new utopian vision that no longer excludes or
7 subjugates a people for whatever reason, then we can strategically create
8 this utopia based on shared values and vision. It is still possible. We don't
9 have to be like Atlantis and sink because of greed, oppression and
10 antiblackness. Love is the way forward into the Afrofuture. Detroit is
11 ready for the Afrofuture. I am certainly ready for the Afrofuture.
12 [background noises] Are you? So if you will indudge- indulge me, would
13 you please stand up if you can [thumping] and we are going to usher the
14 Afrofuture [music] and with a bit of movements. [laughter] This is Burna
15 Boy. He's Nigerian. Enjoy. Thank you. [applause] Dance with me.
16 [laughter] Thank you. I see you. [music and singing] [laughter] [music and
17 singing] Don't be shy. [laughter] [music and singing] [laughter] [music
18 and singing] [Inaudible 41:08]. [music and singing] [laughter] I love you
19 ladies over there. You're awesome. [laughter] You guys are ready for the
20 Afrofuture. [laughter] [music and singing] [Inaudible 41:38]. [music and
21 singing] [laughter] Thank you, guys. I appreciate that. [applause]
22 [laughter] [tapping] And we forgot about the question. [laughter] Yes?
23
24Male #1: Um, well I wanted to know – I w-, I, [I've] [inaudible 42:54] Detroit
25 [laughter] but, um, I've known a few people who live there and they talked
26 about how great it was having Canada so close by.
27
28Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
29
30Male #1: [Where 43:03] people say, oh, I get my coffee in Canada...
31
32Ingrid LaFleur: Oh.
33
34Male #1: ...[or I get my 43:06] healthcare...
35
36Ingrid LaFleur: Mmm.
37
38Male #1: ...from Canada.
39
40Ingrid LaFleur: Eww.
41
42Male #1: And so I'm, I'm wondering, uh – I mean I think to, to a lot of Americans,
43 maybe if you think about the sort of national health service in Canada and
44 you say wow, that's a huge improvement over what we've got. [43:23]
45 Um, to what extent does having this country right next door very close to

1 Detroit that in some ways might seem [laughter] utopian, to what extent
2 has that, if at all, influenced the sort of, uh, Afrofuture?
3
4 Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah. I mean...
5
6 Female #2: [Inaudible 43:39].
7
8 Ingrid LaFleur: Oh, man.
9
10 Female #3: [Inaudible 43:44].
11
12 Ingrid LaFleur: Okay. [laughter]
13
14 Female #4: [Inaudible 43:45].
15
16 Ingrid LaFleur: [43:46] Um, basically Detroit being next to Canada how does that
17 influence our city...
18
19 Male #1: Yeah.
20
21 Ingrid LaFleur: ...generally speaking? Well I think, you know, it's really interesting when
22 my mom and I go to Toronto, [laughter] my mom is always like aww, this
23 feels so amazing [background noises] but you can feel the change
24 immediately. Uh, so that speaks to the fact that it doesn't exist in Detroit.
25 [laughter] It doesn't really, uh, influence us. I think that, you know, our
26 conversations like when talking about [inaudible 44:17], we're right next
27 to Canada, we just take a boat over. [laughter] Uh...
28
29 Male #1: Yeah.
30
31 Ingrid LaFleur: ...so, eh, so, so that is like, you know, uh, more of a relationship but
32 because now that you, you have to have a passport – so back in the day
33 when I was growing up, you only needed a driver's license to cross the
34 border and now that you have to have a passport, it makes it very, um,
35 [tsk] cost prohibitive, uh, for so many, uh, to be able to actually get the
36 passport and to cross those borders. And they're heavily policed. So back
37 in the day, [thumping] you would just be like I'm going to have dinner and
38 they were like cool. And now they got dogs out. Eh, this is all on the
39 American side. The Canadian's are so sweet. [laughter] But, uh,
40 [background noises] but, but yeah, the, the Americans are very harsh, so it
41 makes it very – so, eh, it actually, uh – Canada no longer kind of resides in
42 our imaginary because it's difficult to access it, uh, from – for majority of
43 the [tapping] Detroiters.
44
45 Male #1: [45:15] But has it had like through the – a lasting influence? [tsk] I mean
46 given it's, it...

1
2Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
3
4Male #1: ...[inaudible 45:20] long history?
5
6Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah. The lasting influence. I mean I think, you know, recently I've been
7 doing a little bit of research about, um, black people escaping to Canada.
8 And so in Detroit like it – that's how the, the conversation just like ends
9 there. Like you escape to Canada and everything's okay. [background
10 speaker] But then you get to Canada and you find out that 80 percent of
11 those who escaped to Canada came back. And, um, and that the KKK was
12 there and they were lynching there and, you know, uh, slave catchers
13 would go into Canada and, and grab people. So the, the – this idea, I mean
14 it had its own utopian feel of like freedom and liberation, um, quickly
15 erodes when you actually know the history. And it just becomes yet
16 another place, uh, for black bodies to contend with in just a different way.
17 [Hm 45:14]. Yeah?
18
19Female #5: Hi. Uh, I loved your book, um, so much. Um...
20
21Ingrid LaFleur: Oh, thank you.
22
23Female #5: ...I, I was recently [in Canada] [inaudible 46:22] the last question. I
24 recently had [inaudible 45:25], um, on the idea of [landing 45:32], uh,
25 which is centering theatre and performance, um, as a practice in which
26 [inaudible 45:37] knowledge, skills and culture kind of [went in 46:41],
27 um, [inaudible 46:42] process.
28
29Ingrid LaFleur: [Da 46:44].
30
31Female #5: And I was just wondering as, as a curator yourself [inaudible 46:47]
32 creates [and taken it through what 46:48] seems like an emotional process.
33 [46:52] Um, I was just wondering if you talk a little bit more about the
34 frontier between like life and reality and performance and like utopia
35 [inaudible 47:03]?
36
37Ingrid LaFleur: Uh...
38
39Female #5: [47:06] [Inaudible 47:06], [laughter] you know, [the 47:08] – like some of
40 us dancing...
41
42Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
43
44Female #5: ...and then some of us not [inaudible 47:12] is there a frontier there?
45
46Ingrid LaFleur: Is there a frontier? I don't know if I understand what that means?

1
2Female #5: Like, um...
3
4Ingrid LaFleur: I apologize.
5
6Female #5: Like kind of a [inaudible 47:22] of separation of sorts. [47:23] Like how
7 do you get there?
8
9Ingrid LaFleur: [tsk] I see. From the imaginary into the reality. Um, so how do we move
10 from imagination to reali-... I think...
11
12Female #5: [Inaudible 47:34].
13
14Ingrid LaFleur: Mm-hm. I, I feel like the, the communities that I spoke of or like my
15 friend that I gave an example, um, we're actively manifesting that w-, w-,
16 which we imagine. We're not satisfied to just imagine it. Um, but also you
17 have to understand this is a state of emergency. This isn't like, you know, I
18 get to kind of think about creating new economic systems. It would just be
19 fun. Like no. People are dying because [laughter] they're poor. You know
20 people are mentally, um, eh, you know, unstable because of the, the
21 economic violence that we've been enduring for so many – for centuries.
22 Uh, so I th-, you know, we are constantly trying to figure out what is that
23 connection and that's why I work in blockchain technology because I'm
24 trying to make that which we theorize real, uh, and I do believe that it's
25 very, very possible. Um, but, yes, the transition point is, uh, tricky. Right?
26 So just thinking about DACs, I think a, a person, once y-, you say you can
27 have a digital corop-, cooperative [creature 48:48] of money and it's based
28 on whatever you guys want, need, people are like dope.
29
30 But if I have to tell you that's it's based on blockchain technology, that's
31 when it gets a little complicated. Right? And there's a learning curve and
32 there's a belief that you don't – you shouldn't maybe t-, teach people that.
33 But I believe – I want a fully educated consumer base. Like I am tired of
34 being passively a consumer. They still don't understand [banging] how the
35 internet works. Like, you know, and, and – but every-, we all use it 24/7.
36 And so, um, but that then means that a entity like Facebook can make
37 billions off of me because of ignorance. Uh, so always, uh, you know,
38 thinking about what are those steps; how much do I need to know; what
39 are the skills I need to gain in order to get to that point, um, is the trickiest
40 part of it and being – have enough money and access to be able to get
41 there is probably [tapping] the biggest hurdle actually, not brain space. I
42 got lots a space up there. [laughter] [background speaker] Uh, I don't
43 know. I'll do man, woman, man. [laughter]
44
45Male #2: [Inaudible 49:54].
46

1Female #6: [Inaudible 49:55].
2
3Ingrid LaFleur: If you identify as a man, you can go. [laughter]
4
5Male #3: [Inaudible 50:02].
6
7Ingrid LaFleur: Okay. [laughter]
8
9Male #3: [50:06] Well, uh, so my question is, um, like, uh, can you talk more about
10 the, the utopian possibilities that we see in different currencies? 'Cause
11 when I think of like Bitcoin, I imagine like [giant] [inaudible 50:15].
12 They're...
13
14Ingrid LaFleur: Yes.
15
16Male #3: ...[inaudible 50:17]...
17
18Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah. It looks very dystopian.
19
20Male #3: ...like al-, almost [inaudible 50:20] you know, weird [specular 50:23]
21 finance, things that are happening there and so I, I, I'm, I'm somewhat
22 skeptical about the, the Bitcoin but I, I see that you see a lot of potential
23 [in Bitcoin] [inaudible 50:30]. [50:31] Can you say more about it that
24 because that seems like...
25
26Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
27
28Male #3: ...a very, uh, concrete, right, like way of moving? But, but I, I don't know
29 how that would really work.
30
31Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah. Um, so the question is I – how can digital currencies lead us to that
32 utopia or, or our – in my estimation. Um, I think that, uh – so what's
33 interesting about digital currency, anybody – we all could have our own
34 token right now. So that's a thing. So I don't think that before we ever
35 imagined creating money necessarily. Um, I know that we have
36 community currencies but that's still an entity doing a thing and it's very
37 centralized. Uh, in this scenario, everyone gets to participate and
38 everybody gets to experiment [laughter] with creating a new economy,
39 which is kind of wild actually. It's like the Wild West. Um, the utopian
40 part of that is me thinking that eventually the USD won't hold any more
41 power and we specifically need the USD [laughter] to not hold any more
42 power. It is currently the global currency. Um, if you want oil as a
43 country, you have to, um, convert into USD in order to buy. Um, so
44 although it's not backed by anything, it still gives you access. Um, so I
45 think that by eliminating that central power, that central economic power,
46 um, and then redistributing it can create an equalizing effect.

1
2 This is why the newspapers and, um, politicians will speak negatively
3 about cryptocurrency because it does take away their power and it –
4 because there’s governance models attached [laughter] to it. Um, it takes
5 away their power and it takes away a bank’s power. But on the flipside
6 what's happening is that you have [tsk], uh, Walmart adopting blockchain
7 technology for their food supply system so that they can identify if
8 something was wrong with a lif-, a leafy green, the exact factory it comes
9 from. You have JP Morgan creating their own digital token, um, for
10 internal use. Uh, you have Facebook creating [Lebercoin 52:58]. So, you
11 know, understand that when they start demonizing a thing – they meaning
12 media and everything – it's usually because it's challenging a power
13 structure. Um, and, yes, a-, at the moment, we got like mining farms with
14 Bitcoin but there’s so many cryptocurrencies that are trying to be more
15 environmentally friendly and they're active intentional about that
16 approach. Um, so once we get that together – and I think that the
17 chunkiness will actually go away after a while. It's kinda like the first cell
18 phone. You remember it was like this big?
19

20 Probably gave you cancer within the first 5 minutes. [laughter] So, eh, but
21 now [clapping] we have like touchscreens [clapping] and it's small and
22 ble-ble-ble. I mean [thumping] we're still using child labor to get [Colton
23 53:39] to get our phone but let's skip that part. Let's just look at the fact
24 that [laughter] it's not as clunky. [laughter] Lord. So everything is tainted.
25 So [laughter] it does like – it's j-, you know, your utopia is gonna have a
26 little, you know, uh, spice to it. So, [laughter] you know, I think that, um,
27 there’s that but then thinking about forced labor, um, these kind of supply
28 chains help us to eliminate that so that then y-, a company can say I got
29 my chocolate free-trade and I can actually show you. Um, and I think that,
30 huh, and then – so then companies will start having a moral ethic maybe
31 that they want to – I mean that’ll be part of the branding and it’ll just make
32 them more money but at least, you know, it will say hey, you know, we're
33 not using sweatshops to, to build a thing and we can show you.
34

35Female #7: [Inaudible 54:32] 2 more questions.

36
37Ingrid LaFleur: Okay.

38
39Female #7: [Inaudible 54:36].

40
41Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.

42
43Female #7: [Inaudible 54:37].

44
45Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah. You [2 54:39]. [laughter].

46

1Female #8: Okay. Um, hi. [Inaudible 54:42].
2
3Ingrid LaFleur: [Eh- 54:44], whatever you wanna do.
4
5Female #8: Uh, um, my name is [Reese 54:47]. I had [inaudible 54:48] from what I've
6 heard [inaudible 54:49] talking about. [54:52] Uh, one of them would be,
7 uh, how do you talk about these type a issue? Like when you talk about
8 racial issues and the different things that goes, uh, goes on in more a the
9 majority of a, a white country, how do you feel about that? Does it make
10 you uncomfortable to talk about these issues – [yeah 55:10] – so [laughter]
11 ...
12
13Ingrid LaFleur: [55:13] Like in a white room? [laughter] Nope. [laughter]
14
15Female #8: [Inaudible 55:18].
16
17Ingrid LaFleur: No, it doesn't. [laughter]
18
19Female #8: [55:19] And another thing is [laughter] like what would you say to people
20 who like – 'cause I've ran into like issues [clinking] where it's like
21 [inaudible 55:26] like the racial issue with the, the [inaudible 55:30] would
22 you say [inaudible 55:32] it's like, what you mean? Like there's no
23 disconnect. Like [everyone] [inaudible 55:36]. [55:38] [So 55:38] how do
24 you, how do you go about that [thumping] in a way that [you very 55:41]
25 like, like how do you talk about it and say everything's very uplifting,
26 very bubbly? But in a way, I mean, like some of those people frustrate me.
27
28Ingrid LaFleur: Right.
29
30Female #8: And even especially when it comes to my own community saying like...
31
32Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
33
34Female #8: ...[inaudible 55:53] like...
35
36Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.
37
38Female #8: ...we live in the same community and you don't see the – you know,
39 [inaudible 55:57].
40
41Ingrid LaFleur: The in-, inequities. Yeah. Um, so talking about racial issues, uh, with a
42 white audience, um, I think you might have to like build up to that because
43 it does take a lot because you don't know how people will respond. Uh,
44 but what I've come to understand that more and more people want to learn
45 and are more open to trying to, uh, confront maybe their own racial biases
46 and issues. Uh, so it's a good time. You're in a great time to talk about

1 [laughter] racial issues in a majority [tapping] white space. Um, I wouldn't
2 say like in my mother's time [thumping] it would be like [thumping] the
3 easiest thing to do but now I think it's much easier. Um, I will say that
4 Afrofuturism helps to bring something super heavy into a non-threatening
5 kind of space because that's the thing – you don't want people to feel like
6 it's a personal attack.

7
8 We really want to talk about the system because it's beyond the individual
9 person. No one in here has the power to end any of the things that I was
10 talking about. But individually we can work towards it and hopefully
11 collectively it will come to a point and something, um, will emerge. Um,
12 but Afrofuturism, um, is my portal and, uh, it just seems to be more
13 welcoming and more fun, uh, and, uh, and it talks about some really
14 heavy, heavy things. But because you're talking about science fiction or
15 fantasy and mag-, magical realism, it kinda comes at it in a different way,
16 um, and it kind of expands the conversation as well, I think. So, you know,
17 kind of how you frame it is – but then it also depends on who you're
18 talking to. So, yeah, it's tricky. Yes?

19
20Female #9: Uh, so [thank you] [inaudible 57:51]. I was really thinking maybe about
21 the [spice in your interviews] [inaudible] [strategy] [inaudible 57:54]. I
22 would just like to hear a little bit about how you see that play into [the
23 work we're doing 58:06]...

24
25Ingrid LaFleur: Yeah.

26
27Female #9: ...[inaudible 58:08].

28
29Ingrid LaFleur: Sure. I hope I don't repeat myself from the book but, [laughter] uh – since
30 you're reading it. [thumping] But I – so, uh, eh, I'm a pleasure activist and,
31 uh, that means that I live by the pleasure principle. That means every
32 moment of every day should be pleasurable. And, uh, in terms of my, my
33 work, I think it's really important to introduce ideas of pleasure when
34 you're in a tech space because they're all about function and just trying to
35 get things done. Um, and if we do not think about pleasure – so that means
36 that if we don't talk about how something looks, the aesthetic, the design,
37 the feel, the smell, the taste of thing, um, then were kind of negating the
38 humanness of it [tapping] in a way and it's like kind of a way of, um, eh,
39 keeping us disconnected from a thing. Um, and so for me that thing would
40 be life and I like to be fully in it and I like when people experience joy. It
41 feels good. Uh, and when I'm giving out the joy, I receive it, um, and that
42 is really the kind of cyclical nature of pleasure, uh, hopefully, um, that
43 really should exist continuously. And I think it really would serve our
44 society more if we were to value, play [in 59:36] delights [and 59:38]
45 pleasure and joy and laughter and dance. [laughter] Well I'm gonna wrap it
46 up. Thank you so much for having me. [applause] [laughter]

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2
3/lo