

CHAPTER 1

Queering the Black feminist psychoanalytic

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We are embedded in and socialized by colonial history and culture, and much of mainstream therapy is based on Euro-centric theories that replicate this same colonial history. This mindset is not inclusive of other cultures or ethnicities. On the rare occasions that other cultures are acknowledged in the literature or elsewhere in our field, they are often based on the racist stereotypes that have existed since the early days of our profession at the turn of the twentieth century. As sensitive clinicians, we need to interrogate and investigate how these ideas show up in therapeutic practice. There are, however, notable exceptions, says Dr Gail Lewis, who offers new ways to think about what colonial era psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion can offer to queer white and QTIPOC clients.

Wilfred Bion and Audre Lorde: queer bedfellows

JANE CHANCE CZYZSELSKA: I'm really interested in what you find valuable in Bion's work. I'm curious about how you queer or decolonize his thinking. I want to know about a queer Black feminist analytic.

GAIL LEWIS: I'm a Kleinian. I was trained at the Tavistock. I align to it, it makes sense to me in its own terms, but it makes sense to me in the way that any learning that I've done through institutions and the fields of theory and practice they teach, you know, pedagogical practice, makes sense to me, in that they *all*, all of them, come from a framework of modernity, and modernity produced the hierarchies of value of

personhoods and instituted all the normative subject positions that we could occupy.

Theory and practice come from a framework which produced hierarchies of value of personhoods

JC: Yes, true.

GL: Including obviously the racialized one that I think is quite primary, I think that gender comes out of that because I think it's also central to racial capitalism. So just as we can really be critical of any mode of psychanalytic, psychotherapeutic learning, all the schools we went to – even now, though there are attempts now to make changes – they are not really fundamentally trying to change, I don't think. I mean, some people in them are making inroads but is that really radically different from anthropology, from sociology, philosophy, history or literature studies? I mean, I don't know whether anything is innocent or more innocent in one disciplinary area than others. We can do our own hierarchies of value and say, 'Oh well, the psychoanalytic orthodoxies are more toxic, more about instilling the normative than the stuff we get in the university, or in the school that's guarded by police', and you know all of that, so I'm aligned in that way, in that I've learned from all of them and I'm suspicious of all of them.

JC: Right, OK. So, under racial capitalism, the economic set-up is structured to privilege white people and that makes race a primary subject position which creates further hierarchies – is that what you're saying?

GL: It is the economic set-up as *part* of the whole social set-up – a 'social' set-up that includes the psychic, cultural, epistemological 'set-ups'. And within that are the 'ontological' set-ups – the range of subjectivities and senses of self that are possible. Racial capital is a structure/manifestation of the organization of the world through the prisms and knowledge frame and hierarchies of value of human and non-human life. Within that there are categories of gender but increasingly – in the wake of Atlantic enslavement, I think – gender is

finally understood as a category of whiteness and thus as a structure of power and normativity. So, it's in that sense.

JC: Yeah, OK.

GL: So that then requires of us, I think, a kind of insistence on trying to do two things: the first thing is to know what it is we are being taught. So, for me, it's 'what is it that Klein and the Kleinians are saying?' Let me take it at face value and learn it, pay due respect, and learn from it, with it, through it.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Respect the theory and put it in critical but creative dialogue with other thinking

GL: So pay due respect and then when I feel I've learned it – and I in no way, Jane, think I'm an expert on any of that, on any particular body of theory really – so I get what I can from it, take it seriously and then having taken it seriously, put it into real critical but creative dialogue with these other ways of thinking; bodies of theory that also deliver something and steal something.

JC: Yeah.

GL: But, of course, the other thing is to put that under the scrutiny of the lens of lived experience and activist claims, actually not just claims but activist modes of saying, 'We can be different, something different can happen so different personhoods can emerge.' So, when you try and scramble all that and you're in your consulting room, and in walks someone who says, 'X or I found you through Y, they said you might be good' and you know immediately you hear that that they are really putting you under scrutiny to test whether they can reach you and you can reach them.

JC: Mm, yes.

GL: Then they come in and they say, 'Well, I came here because something's not right. I'm not feeling OK, I'm under pressure, or I'm at the point of collapse,' or whatever they present with, but they come because something is not quite working for them in their lives, and we know immediately if we have a queer person before us or someone who doesn't even necessarily know that, but you feel a bit of a vibe ...

JC: Right, right.

Part of the trouble is we're just being minoritized

GL: Or someone who has been racialized as minority and maybe has a racialized identity, but you also get a vibe just being 'minor' isn't OK. Part of the trouble is we're just being minoritized: as queer, as Black, as trans*, as feminine – in whatever body – that somehow that's not OK, or a particular kind of masculine as well. All the ways in which the normative structures of power are impacting on this person's life, and they come in and say, 'And I am hoping you can walk with me and get me somewhere different.' And you think, 'This is really a big task.' So, for me what's really important then and this is why – thinking about that bringing-together – why I feel Bion, a very strange, interesting man from what I gather, gives us the first tool that we need, I think, and it's built on Klein and that's to stay open to curiosity, to be open but without having a desire for a particular outcome.

JC: Oh, yes.

Lorde and Bion both seem to be saying that we need to be open enough to ourselves

GL: Who do we have before us? In a real way, not in a kind of 'let me pathologize', but really who do we have before us? What is it that they are asking me to walk with them about, and can I think, Bion says, again building out of Klein and post-Kleinian thinking around counter-transference, can I stay open enough to know what I can and can't offer? My capacities and my limitations? I think of that and

Bion and that's like his container/contained idea, his idea of maternal reverie, all of that. The capacity to really stay with someone in their pain, hold it, receive it from them, process it and give it back in a way that feels more bearable for them; that's what they mean by that container/contained and maternal reverie. And then immediately I think of Audre Lorde and *Uses of the Erotic* (1984) because she – it seems to me – is saying exactly the same thing. We need to be able to be open enough to ourselves and the ways in which feeling – the capacity to acknowledge and use feeling for understanding, a capacity that we've been cut off from – those feelings help us to know something that structures of power don't want us to know.

JC: Yes!

GL: That the normativities through which you're supposed to be a proper, adapted person, like of 'respectability' and 'self-possession' – talk about a discourse of property! – and rationality, etc., etc., all the things through which all of us are judged and we judge ourselves, as 'proper', 'adjusted', 'deserving'. Of course, through a Black queer feminist lens, these normativities are named 'whiteness', with the accordant economies of gender, and once we see that, then it's clear that the powers that be – including the epistemological powers within theoretical positions – don't want us to know our queer selves and the creative potential of that. They don't want us to know so curiosity is cut off. Lorde says we need to touch our feelings to get back in touch with that, but so does Bion (not perhaps in explicit terms about queer subjectivities but in terms of what he calls O, that cannot be represented but is 'the truth' of us. See *Attention and Interpretation* [Bion, 1970], especially Chapter 11). So, Bion's theory of thinking is all about how thinking comes from, is a product of, a capacity to stay with the feelings that feel unbearable, and Lorde is saying the same thing and it's like 'what the fuck?!' How come these two, seemingly, radically different people, with radically different experiences, come to such similar positions?!

Through a Black queer feminist lens, normativities are named 'whiteness'

JC: Yeah. I wonder if she read Bion or if she came to a similar way of thinking through her lived experiences?

GL: Yeah, that question is really begged, isn't it? I guess this is just an example of how we and all things are connected, and there are certain metaphysics that 'know' the world and the space/place of the human in it, in ways that are radically different to the normative frames of modernity we were talking about a minute ago. African and/or Indigenous metaphysics. And that's one of the paradoxes for me of psychoanalysis: that it is so much a discourse of modernity, yet its radical outside (well, inside – the theory of the unconscious!) declares its link to more ancient understandings – as Audre would name them – or what Bion would call O, as I said. But to get back to the point! When I started my training, I knew Lorde first and then I go into my classes, and I get this thing called a 'theory of thinking' (1962) or 'attacks on linking' (1959) from Bion and I'm thinking, 'God, this sounds really like Audre. How can that be?' Because he is, I assume, upper class English, an Indian colonial aristocrat. And then I learn, ah, but he had his first eight years with his Ayah.

JC: Yes, the Indian woman his parents paid to mother him!

GL: So this is another source of knowing I expect through her practices of care that help him to tap into what Audre would call the spiritual-stroke-psychic-stroke-emotional that for her is the erotic – that's what the erotic is for her.

JC: Mm yes, a more expansive idea of the erotic than the popular usage, that's only connected to the sexual?

GL: Yes, for sure. In fact, if you read the essay 'Uses of the erotic: The Erotic as power' (1984), you'll see that she explicitly says that this is far wider than the sexual, though it incorporates this as an aspect. But it is, in perhaps more psychoanalytic terms, a deeply libidinal impulse that reaches out from within and is 'ancient'. And so now I'm

thinking, 'Oh, lesson learned here, Gail.' Sometimes, to our surprise if we're open enough, if we can hold that stance of curiosity, those who are positioned as our antithesis – who we are other to – can really reach us and teach us. I now think that is a 'truth' despite the concrete social realities of normative power and its multiple regimes of epistemological and ontological violence, but because as persons those social realities are never totalizing, we always exceed them, that's why we exist, otherwise we couldn't exist. Black life as – I don't just mean as anti-racist life – but Black life as living for itself, under the radar, you know, outside the stereotypes of us, Black life couldn't exist if all this was totalizing as it were. So, the lesson is, can I learn something then from this figure who is apparently the opposite to me? Older – of course, I'm already old – dead, white, male, aristocratic part of the imperial, at least his family and whatever he did, and he was in the army. And here's this man who's speaking to me with a different terminology but a similar language to Audre Lorde.

JC: Yeah!

GL: Wow!

JC: I know, I know and I'm just thinking back to Audre Lorde and bell hooks, both of whom talk about emotionality and how white people project their own inability to be emotionally expressive onto Black people.

GL: Yeah, yeah.

JC: And Black life being the site of so-called 'unruly' emotionality; that's being shut down as well.

GL: Exactly! So for both of them, Bion and Lorde – obviously it's my interpretation, who knows? – both of them are saying, if we are going to allow ourselves to find and hold on to, in a way that doesn't feel like it fragments us, what we might for want of a better word call an authentic self – slightly bringing in Winnicott (1982, 1990) – in a sense, that kind of feels like who I am; this kind of feels like I'm not having to split myself up to be this here and that there, to be secret

about aspects of me, you know, to be the compliant Black girl, you know, because of the stereotype of the angry Black woman?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: ... to hide my queerness, whoever I'm lovers with, because it is under very real attack but somehow I need to be able to hold these together, and being able to do that requires being able to touch deep into the forms of knowing that come from our emotionality, our capacity to feel and not just have sensation. Our capacity to feel, know and seek connection.

JC: Yeah, so what you're saying is there is some kind of expansive potential, as Bion says, and both in his ideas and in Lorde's there's something of the spiritual, and entering that realm?

GL: Totally, totally.

JC: And openness?

GL: Totally. As long as we don't think of the spiritual as about some kind of thing called God, that isn't about life, isn't about the totality of connectedness, because what the logics of racial capitalism, the frameworks of modernity require is that we mustn't have interdependency, we must have the capacity to dominate and have others know their place, and to command, and everything; whereas when you get into the realm of the spiritual where it is about the interconnections, that is frightening because they make us vulnerable. I mean, we know in the room sometimes the moment when you've got someone – well, it doesn't even have to be someone, it can be me in my distress, when I was in my first analysis. Let's turn it the other way round. In my absolute distress, in a way not even knowing what it was at some level, not able to articulate it, or having an intellectualized sense but not a *felt* sense of just what was my deep pain and trouble; and trying to be able to be with a white woman therapist and I'm finding myself talking about right up-close everyday racism inside the family. And I am literally collapsed in a heap on the floor, cowering in the corner of the room next to a

blanket box, sobbing because suddenly something's happened, that the knot of feeling and pain and agony and fragmentation really has been pierced a little bit. Of course, what do I do after I get up off the floor and go out and come back for my next session? I completely attack: 'Don't you ever fucking come near my family again in your talk. You fuck off!'

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Containing clients and offering back what they can bear

GL: Because actually she'd gotten up close and she'd hinted that we could stay with it. And in that moment – and there were several moments like that over the years – in the early years, it was unbearable and eventually it could become bearable, and we could stay with it. And when I'd say, 'You're just not getting this,' she could admit it and say, 'No, I'm not getting it. I can't know what you're talking about in terms of micro-aggressions of racism, the pain you felt and feel about that in your family.' Because people can get the big sociological patterns of racism – let's hope therapists can anyway – but the micro-aggressions, I don't know whether they can because they are right in the room. But because she could say, 'You're right, I can't be there or know it, but you have the feeling and let's work with that,' we could stay with it and gradually put me together a bit. I have to say my presentation was much more around the terrible effects of racism on me than homophobia, anti-queerness in a way, but in reassembling me and detoxifying the racism, even the less acute internalized homophobia could get nullified because I was able to say, 'But this is me, not all of me – yes, all of this stuff has produced me but I'm more than it and therefore I can be more authentically me. More of a sense of an alignment.'

JC: So there was something about your analyst's – to use Bion's understanding – containing capacity?

GL: Yeah, absolutely, and to sort of show me and use with me what I came to understand as my projections and projective identifications, and

she could use her counter-transference. I was trying to communicate something about the unspeakability, almost the unthinkability, of some of the micro-aggressions around racism, so I could communicate that and she could kind of receive it and hold it and stay with it until she and I, we together, could think it through more and begin to articulate it but also to know when I was doing a whole set of projections or projective identifications that were much more evacuative, chucking into her. 'Don't fucking come near my family,' I said because I was thinking, 'How can I go near them? How can I dare to reveal and speak that this was also an aspect of our domestic life? Not just the loving bits or the socialist bits.' And in my training, I came to know this through a kind of Kleinian approach – an approach that insists on the need to hold both 'love' and 'hate' as a prerequisite or process really toward and in the 'Depressive Position' and what Bion thought of in terms of K and -K (where K stands for 'knowledge' and the desire and capacity to seek knowledge from experience; and -K is the opposite, the destruction of that capacity and desire for an ongoing process of transforming experience into knowledge) – a reaching toward the unknown and a capacity to see and hold 'links' and to find a place of quietude inside, kind of thing. She could contain and I could increasingly hold together the 'love' and 'hate': mine as well as that of beloved family members – not that of those family members who were not beloved. But what was vital for me, you know, in both my being on the couch and then in the clinical seminar, supervision and psychoanalytic theory room, was that I had Black feminist thinking like that of Audre to build this new learning upon, learning as a patient in analysis and as a trainee.

JC: I love how you describe your process. Can you say more about the origins of projection?

GL: So the tiny infant in the paranoid schizoid position from birth to three or four months is constantly projecting, has to split and project in order to survive because it is such a tiny helpless dependent infant human. Then Bion picks it up and says we have to take this really seriously and use these projective identifications in our technique because if we close ourselves to them, we won't be able to take the communications that are coming from the patient or client and

that are trying to tell us something. Just as the infant projects into the maternal figure, whoever that is – the maternal object – the unbearable feelings, the fear of death, and that maternal figure needs to be able to receive this and not give it back straight away, not just say, ‘Oh, there, there, baby, here you are; feed you.’ But just as in the feeding or change, you attend to the physical needs of the baby, in the psychological aspect of that process, you hold on to what’s being projected into them – let’s use that pronoun – and try to make sense of it enough to understand what the infant is feeling, just as you do when you say, ‘Oh, why are they crying? What is it?’ And then you think, ‘Oh, maybe it’s this?’

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: I mean, I’ve only done it as an auntie, not as a birth mother, but it seems to work, you’ve found something. So Bion says just as that happens with the infant and there’s a maternal reverie where the maternal object can act as a container of what’s being projected out, process it and give it back in a digestible form. So, he is saying we need to be able to do the same in the room with the people we are sitting with and trying to walk with – listen to them, watch them, take all the modes of communication that they are giving to us and say, ‘I can receive it. I can hold it and it can help both me and you process it, and then we can work further with it.’ And Bion says that sometimes, even when we receive it, we might work so fast and give it back that for the patient it feels like we have not stayed with it at all. We have again broken down the link between container and contained, analyst and patient, because we have not been able to hold onto what they have brought to us, to try to help us feel as well as think about.

JC: Right. So, basically you haven’t metabolized what the client has projected into you or the field sufficiently in you.

GL: Yes, exactly, and then the feeling of it is unbearable and that might be a repetition, so you walk into the room, and someone says, ‘You know what? I’m gay, I’m lesbian, I’m bi, I’m trans, I’m non-binary and I’m trying to tell my parents or whoever and they just went crazy and chucked me out or went cold and said, “Do you want chicken with

your potatoes?” Cut it off? And then if in the room, we do the same, in some form or another, either turn away or say, ‘Well, I can give you this food but I can’t give you the food that says let’s talk about this, let’s think this through, that’s OK, that’s OK for us to think about and then what we think about might be all sorts.’ It’s not about thinking to change them; it’s saying, ‘What has it meant to you to bring that to us today? What’s the pathway we need to walk to feel and think this thing through further, to hold this container/contained relationship in a way that helps you to integrate, embrace, redefine whatever it is that happened? But yes, it’s OK for you to be right here and we’ll stay looking at it on the table.’

JC: Yeah, yeah, beautiful.

When the activist bodymind speaks to/with the analyst bodymind

GL: And for me, you see, what’s extraordinary is that capacity, despite some of my teachers saying things like, ‘Oh, X doesn’t know whether they’re Arthur or Martha’ – that awful phrase – to show me in a room when they were talking about a clinical process note, an actual clinical sample of how to stay open with curiosity to that same person that in the theory lecture they’d said Arthur and Martha about – an extraordinary disjunction.

JC: Wow! It’s interesting to hear that sometimes a therapist’s lack of awareness or their political insensitivity won’t necessarily negatively impact on the client or the work.

GL: I think the training that I got – even with aspects of my teachers who thought questions of racism were wider cultural/culture and not of any relevance to their unconscious effects, as though there was a difference – showed that kind of disjunction between their ideological/theoretical position and their position actually in the room. It’s weird and maybe I am being too generous, yet that is what I think. But I think, too, that what I had as a resource was that I heard people like Audre Lorde (1984) and Hortense Spillers (2003). I had

my activist history which was like, ‘You know what? You taught me something but you ain’t getting this and we’re going to have to do this work, do this theoretical development and practice, we’ll use what’s good from you and we’ll not take everything. We’ll alloy it with other stuff, and we’ll develop it ourselves.’ But just as I’ve not thrown all my sociology away, or all my Marxism or other things away, I don’t throw the Kleinian theory away that I was trained through.

JC: I can relate to what you are saying because I was an active Marxist when I was at uni in my twenties and for a few years after that. I got involved in campaigning against Section 28 and the anti-abortion Alton Bill.

GL: Yeah, yeah.

JC: So I have been aware of how lives are politicized by those who aren’t like us for a long time – those who are not queer and female and, in your case, those who are not Black – so then as editor of *DIVA* magazine I developed a greater awareness of lesbian, bi, queer, trans, intersex, QTIPOC lived experiences and then gradually also becoming more aware about whiteness and trying to address that. So that was what was going on in and around me when I was doing my training. My life has been a political training of sorts. So, I’m interested in this thing about politics because for me, as a girl, a lesbian, there were times when I felt as if my voice didn’t matter as much as boys’ or men’s. So, meeting a communist and Marxist ideology shortly after I had come out, almost being given the words to say by comrades, words that were powerful and ‘won’ arguments, I finally felt my own insides. I had structure internally: my voice *did* matter, and I could be listened to and have impact, effect change.

GL: Yeah, yeah.

JC: It was like scaffolding for my personhood. In recent years, I’ve noticed that when I have challenging conversations with cis-het people about transness and some white folk about whiteness I often move away from my emotional into my political discourse. In those moments, it can sometimes feel difficult to talk about the emotional aspects. Have

you had something similar? Is it to do with becoming politicized as a young person when you feel your voice isn't heard in your family? I became a journalist to have a voice and then as an editor commissioned others to give them a voice. I suppose you could say therapy is about creating a space for clients' inner voices and being heard. Our lives are politicized whether we want that or not, but how do we bring it into the room? It's about bringing it in with care, isn't it? I know I sometimes do it in a clumsy way: I might say, 'Is there something about race going on here?' with some clients of colour or 'Is there something about gender or something transphobic going on here?' to create space for that to be talked about.

GL: Yeah.

JC: Does that speak to you?

GL: Yes, it does, it really does, and I suppose a bit like you I was an active activist. It was manic actually. It was absolutely needed, just as now, you know, we need to be pressing, pressing, pressing, even though we need to rethink a lot. I don't think we know how the political reformation and structure of ideas would be exactly, or what shape our demands would take, how we could articulate across all those demands because things are so changed, it seems to me.

JC: Mm.

GL: The old off-the-shelf things just don't have resonance but that is not the same thing as saying you can't learn from them. I was really active in anti-racism, all London anti-fascism within feminism and Black feminism and the lesbian Left back in the late 1970s, early 1980s, all that kind of stuff, all the time. And I think it was because that was needed in the world out there but, in my internal world, I needed to avoid the very thing that I collapsed on my analyst's floor of, by the blanket box in the corner weeping, weeping, saying, 'This is all that stuff out there but fuck, it's been inside me and it's just messed me up. There's a bit of me' – and that was the mania – that was the thing I was defending against. So, within Black feminism now, absolutely put at the forefront by the younger generation with thinkers/activists, has

been the need to not only practise care but to understand that self and collective care is a powerful politics. It absolutely is in Marxist terms. We could think about that practice of self-care as a rejection or refusal of the very alienation that comes from racial capitalism – which is to say ‘capitalism’ because it *is* racial capitalism.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: Trade union struggles to shorten the working day is about shifting the balance of power but care, that’s what the women do. Now the younger Black feminists have put that on the agenda and they link it to a much more environmentalist consciousness about the destruction of the world, so there has been a real shift and what that helps me to do is think ‘OK’ – this is to think not necessarily to succeed in the consulting room. ‘Then what does it mean to really slow down? Because obviously the work is there – because from a Black feminist field of practice and a therapeutic practice we try to go slow.’ If someone wants to move too fast, we might say, ‘You’ve moved rather fast, we might think about it.’ You know? We do that so we slow down but to slow down in a way that enables connections between inside and outside, the so-called ‘outside’ that in some therapeutic or analytic minds feels as though it is a completely separate world. Not in our minds precisely because of what we are trying to struggle with: the toxicities of normativities of all kinds. And we are not trying to fix the people we work with in a way that makes them more so-called normal, whether that is white normal, hetero normal, gender normal, ability normal. We are trying to say, ‘This is a reality. The world out there with its toxicities and how it can get inside us. And what we’re trying to do here is make it that you can feel legitimate and relatively whole. Authentic. Stitched-enough-together to feel you can manage your life and you come to try to manage something that feels unmanageable. We are trying to help you manage that. Not to make you “normal”’.

JC: Yes, and not to fit you into the small shape that is created for you.

GL: Yes, exactly, that’s what I mean exactly. To hold onto your own capacities, your own ‘good enough’ self, while, just like Black feminism

theorizes and shows, if we can be constantly open to the learning that comes from understanding that normativities are toxic because they construct and materialize hierarchies of human value; while *also* knowing that those outside the normative live anyway, live otherwise, then transformation and change can follow, and therefore expansion and growth. It's kind of like a model of what we might achieve in the room (with 'clients', 'patients', 'analysands' or whatever terminology we use), what we might help produce in the room between us. And by extension we get it too, they give us that, but it can be really hard. I think I find my manic political voice starts to get going almost like it's the slogans on the march rather than, 'Am I really thinking about why that slogan has come up now in my mind in the light of what you said? Can it help me to think about what it is you're telling me?' I don't always make that move successfully at all!

JC: No, I don't think I do either!

GL: But I know it has to be done and one can try and retrieve it and that's OK because otherwise we are trying to model ourselves in the image of whiteness, which is to be perfect.

JC: Well, yes, that's it. That's why I love what Bion says about not knowing. It is something that Robert Downes often says: 'What if it's OK to not know? Let's try and hang out with that feeling and where you're at right now' (Downes, personal communication).

GL: Yeah, and usually something will come then.

JC: Yeah, but I also notice what he refers to as 'Empire Mind', which is often present in me when I'm with a client who doesn't know and who really wants to. Those moments seem to demand of me that I need to know, I need to get it right.

GL: Exactly, exactly.

How can we think together about a queer Black feminist analytic futurity?

JC: What do we do with the ‘Empire Mind’ when it comes? If you think about Munoz and queer futurity (Munoz, 2009) and also Afro-Futurism, the idea of a future that we fantasize about because the present isn’t ours, is not made for us: it’s made for white straight, cis – it’s made for white people more than people of colour (POC) but not so much if you are queer female or gender non-conforming – how can we touch into this future? Is that what Audre Lorde means when she talks about the possibility of what could be? She describes the kind of world she wants to live in and co-create in the present.

GL: Yes, and within a Black feminist logic, theory, practice, the idea of futurity is about what we want that isn’t now. OK, but it’s understood as what has to happen now to make *then* possible?

JC: Yeah.

GL: And what has to happen now to make *then* possible is things like you getting together this book as a resource. It is things like people going on the streets and saying not anti-racism but Black Lives Matter. That is such a profoundly different kind of slogan.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: The ways in which trans* is both a declaration of people saying that binary is fluid and also unintelligible if you’re non-binary – it makes no sense – but that both holds open the possibility of a different kind of future. So, there are all sorts of ways that there is a future in the making by the stuff that’s going on now that gestures towards – not with guarantees – something being different, while claiming that the status quo is not liveable, it is not liveable. You know?

JC: Yeah, that’s really powerful. The present structures make lives not liveable.

GL: Anti Blackness and its consequences is not liveable. Gender tyranny

is not liveable and the way that segues into queer suggests something in the making. It is outside the bounds of intelligibility. It can't be fixed and yet there are traces. There is a wonderful article by a Black anthropologist called Vanessa Agard-Jones called 'What the sands remember' (2012). It is all about the ways in which she does some ethnographic work in Martinique as a queer of colour anthropologist scholar and starts noticing queer bodies around her. Then somebody says, 'Oh no, you have to go to ...' and then she goes to this beach and on this beach, which is just the sand and the trees, is a cruising ground but it's more than a cruising ground. It's not just about moments of sex but it's moments of coming together.

JC: Right.

GL: And it's all in the sands and it's got a long, long queer history. So, it's those sorts of traces that we are trying to lay down.

JC: I would love to read that.

GL: It's a really nice piece. And then there's Tina Campt's talk on futurity and fugitivity (Campt, 2014, 2017). Do you know her work?

JC: No.

GL: She talks about futurity as being what has to happen now for *then* to happen, to be a bit simplistic about it. She has done a couple of books, but one is called *Listening to Images* and she looks at photos and listens to them. That is the kind of thing when we are in our therapy room – someone comes in, in whatever distress, upset that they need to think through, work through, and sometimes what you get before is really a stereotype – a kind of performance of a stereotype, that's what I mean by that. Obviously because they think they have to be in front of you, but they also give you a sense of who they think they have to be in front of several people. And if you think about that thing – about listening to images, as Tina Campt does – she sees mugshots or reads passport photos and she listens to the frequency of the images that suggest, 'You think I'm here to get my passport photo done, but I'm just going to show you a little of

who I am,' and that's the kind of listening that we do in the room, no? We listen not only to words but to all the other ways in which we are being communicated to.

JC: Yeah, and I like the sound of her work – no pun intended!

GL: And that again is all from Black feminism and a Black feminist approach to the world that says we can be brave enough to sit with what you know and what you don't know. Be curious about it and listen for it, as it links – to go back to Bion – with this person in the room with you today and tomorrow and next week. And in that linking, can you bear the linking to happen? Not just can *they* bear it, but can *you* bear the linking to happen, so that something creative can emerge from it? And that's what he has done with the Kleinian idea of the epistemophilic instinct.

JC: Woah! What's that?

GL: Klein talked about a kind of instinct of enquiry and curiosity and wanting to get into the mother's body's contents and all of that and that's what generates our thirst for knowledge, but can it be borne because it can be too frightening and hence Bion's theory of K and minus K.

JC: Right, OK. Yeah. I'm curious about the impact of only having heterosexuality mirrored to queer kids by their primary caregivers. Obviously, there are queer people today who have been brought up by lesbian, gay or bi and/or queer parents, but I wonder what kind of a lack might be experienced by queer children brought up by hetero parents who – even if they are openly affectionate – don't experience a mirroring of their queer desire? Being queer is still shamed in our culture, after all. I'm thinking of Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* (2011), as in we have failed at being heterosexual.

GL: Yeah.

Working with our ancestors

JC: But also what freedom and joy that can be created if we can somehow challenge that experience. For instance, me learning a few years ago of a queer ancestor who was lovers with Freud's lesbian patient.

GL: Oh wow! Really? That's amazing!

JC: I know! Completely amazing. It was my grandmother. She invited Freud's lesbian patient to stay with her a few times and they had an affair.

GL: And where was this?

JC: In Vienna and Prague.

GL: Oh right, wow.

JC: It blew my mind! Discovering that changed something in me in that moment forever. She existed. I never met her: she died before I was born, but there is something about a repair of the lack or absence of mirroring within a culture that doesn't celebrate non-normative love and desire.

GL: Yeah.

JC: You know? And my Black queer friends talk about how Black queer love is celebrated even less.

GL: Yes, totally.

JC: And most of the relationship stories you get – often made by white people, that is – they don't work, or it is difficult. It is so rare to see Black gay or lesbian love stories represented in film or TV about queer Black love.

GL: Yeah, yeah. It's interesting. It is part of why Michaela Coel's *I May Destroy You* (BBC One, 2020) was important: it was showing the quandaries of what's abusive and what's not.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: Different people negotiating sexual lives, and that was the queer guy as well, and so I thought that was important. I don't know. What's running through my mind is two tracks of a response. One is to not know the possibility, or to not see echoed in the world out there the possibility, of one you can feel; it is totally distressing, erasing, negating, all of that, and casts one adrift until you start finding – as you did, say – or being able to see the signs of you in family histories, in community life, in the ways in which X is spoken about, you begin to hear. But that absence can be part of what brings people into the room, and one hears of so many stories, a bit like yours, of finding someone back in the family tree and thinking, 'Oh, I see.'

JC: Yeah.

GL: Or it reminds me of the first time I went to Jamaica as an adult in the village really and realizing that everyone was clocking me. I went with the woman who was my partner at the time, and it was her village. I wasn't saying anything, everyone was clocking us.

JC: Yeah.

GL: We weren't out. And so you start realizing as they are clocking us, they are clocking another two women who are living in the village, not visiting from London. So that there's a way in which queer life is there but disavowed. So there are those things: yes, it can be really hard and you have to develop a lens and discover things, but the other response in me is to say that even when there is a severance and the painful costly severance of a kind of legacy of our existence, even when that happens, and in some senses there is no greater collective manifestation of that than the Black diaspora in Europe and the Americas where we don't know where we came from. Enslavement was a legitimate severing of that. We don't know.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

GL: And we can go in search of it and start to clock it. So, what I'm saying is there is a whole collective experience of not having a mirroring or a history and even within that a capacity to build life, not life without loss – it's not life absent of the experience of profound loss and severance, but to build life in a way that taps into forms of knowledge that we forgot we knew. Which goes back to Audre Lorde and Jacqui Alexander (Alexander, 2005), for example. In which we tap into a source of knowing that is deeply rooted in our capacity for feeling and tapping into the ancestral that helps us to not know for certain, but to know through feelings of a presence that is perhaps ghostly, a presence of ancestors. Ancestral spirit. Where this stuff about 'these two genders only' and 'have to be lived in that particular way in the image of whiteness', is meaningless.

JC: Right.

GL: And could we bear to travel between that as a framework of understanding our present here and now, which is very much in terms of everyday Black life – under-the-radar Black life, Black life not lived through the stereotypes, of knife-crime and baby-mother, baby-father and all this stuff, but another kind of Black life?

JC: Yeah.

GL: Could we travel into queer community, into gay and lesbian experience that says we can know our presence even if we haven't had it mirrored to us in the immediate family context?

JC: Yeah.

GL: So, it is two responses: yes, it's deeply painful but then there's something else as well about surviving. I hate the word surviving really but living through and with absence and finding ways to touch into a knowing presence in us.

JC: I generally only hear Black therapists talk about the ancestors. I guess some therapists talk about intergenerational trauma, and that, I think, comes from post-Second World War Jewish psychoanalysts. But it

feels like it's rarer to hear about the strength we might glean from our ancestors. I would like to be able to talk about my ancestry which is part-Jewish and part not-Jewish.

GL: But that's part of the Black life lived otherwise. Saidiya Hartman (2021) talked about that, under the radar of the status quo that would say you are not legitimate life at all, hardly life at all. And that sense of ancestral connection or touching the ancestors' spirit – they are all part of everyday terminologies that speak to what Lorde would say, 'tapping into that source of generativity that we've been so severed from', that that white hetero-patriarchy wants to sever us from. That.

JC: It is interesting but there are two kinds of not knowing: there is the way we have been forced to not know, particularly if you're a straight white male, our feelings, and ancestors whatever and then there's us talking about the value of inhabiting a not-knowing approach; it's a different kind of not knowing.

GL: Yes, it is a different kind of not knowing. The second version is an ability to stay with not knowing and not turn away from it and in the consulting room – thinking with Bion – we need to notice when there is a turning away from not knowing and, even more than that, an attack on the potential of knowing.