

Breaking the Mould: Multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*

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Abstract: This article looks at the affordances of multimodal poetry and how multimodality crosses and broadens poetry's conventional generic boundaries by discussing the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019) and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017). Both works are examined as postcolonial engagements with, and attempts at writing back to, the (trans)national histories explored in these volumes and are compared to one another in their capacity as multimodal poetry volumes. The article demonstrates the versatile ways in which non-lyric modes can be used either to lend poetry a sense of authority or to question the notion of authority.

Keywords: Multimodality, poetry, Jay Bernard, Koleka Putuma

1. Multimodality and Multimodal Poetry

What is poetry? When does something stop being poetry? Our conventional, textual conception of poetry as a set of lines arranged so that they adhere to certain patterns of rhyme and meter does not do justice to the generic hybridity of contemporary poetry. Dubbed “a multimodal era”, the 21st century has seen an “increase in the popularity of multimodal forms [that can be] closely related to the zeitgeist of their era of creation” (Gibbons 3), most notably to the era's technological developments, which have resulted in “a thoroughly changed media landscape” in which media and medialisation (especially mass media and digital media) have a strong impact, also on literature and its form, “fostering the emergence of new hybrid genres” (Nünning & Rupp 203). This influence can also be observed in the poetry of today, most notably in its willingness to cross its own boundaries and absorb other media and modes. Contemporary poetry's generic hybridity, however, cannot be divorced from its content, as this article will demonstrate in its exploration of the interaction between the aesthetic and political functions of multimodality in Jay Bernard's *Surge* (2019) and Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* (2017).

Multimodality, “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (Kress and van Leeuwen 20), is still a rather recent concept in both narratology and literary research (“Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Gibbons). These modes are numerous and vary widely; common examples include photographs, paintings, drawings, maps, charts, and diagrams (Albers & Harste, “Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Kovalik & Curwood). Critics have also noted the use of colour, transcripts, recordings, interviews, handwritten letters, lists, footnotes, multimedia archives, or even hashtags in multimodal works (Alghadeer, “Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes”, “The Multimodal Novel”, Senior, Paquet). In multimodal works, a dominant or main mode “may be chosen to represent meaning” (Albers & Harste 11). While poetry's main mode is arguably the lyric, as this is the mode in which our conception of poetry is grounded, all modes “jointly contribute to

the production of one whole meaning in a single act of communication” (“Non-Verbal Semiotic Modes” 642). As my exploration of the use of archival materials (such as photographs or transcripts of interviews), footnotes and lists in *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* will show, modes other than language can prove just as crucial to poetry, both in individual poems and in the volume as a whole.

Both works are debut poetry volumes by young Black queer authors from Britain and South Africa respectively and share a decolonial engagement with history. *Surge* presents a creative reimagining of the disastrous fires of New Cross (1981) and Grenfell (2017) in London, which Bernard anchors in (Black) British history. The British non-binary author (pronouns: they/them/their) infuses their text with archival materials and also makes reference to the Windrush Scandal (2018), when especially the Black British community responded with outrage to the government’s wrongful deportation of at least 83 members of the Windrush generation after many years of UK residency (Rawlinson). Bernard’s narrative poetry collection, which has overlapping thematic interests with writers of African heritage (Lowe 3), “offer[s] [...] not just counter-histories but explorations and re-imaginings of what truth and history might usefully mean in twenty-first century Britain, and how such knowledge can be passed on and kept alive” (Potts 117). Similarly, *Collective Amnesia* – which is advertised on the back cover as an “exploration of blackness, womxnhood and history” – is “concerned [...] with the exploration of forgotten memories and histories” (Burger 23) and “resonate[s] with the political and social zeitgeist of disillusionment and frustration in post-transitional South Africa” (Haith 38). In this volume of lyric poetry, Putuma (pronouns: she/her), provides what reads as versified memories to “ask what has been learnt and what must be unlearned” (Putuma back cover), drawing on various (non)lyric forms (e.g. dictionary entries, interview) to do so.

While both Bernard and Putuma have been hailed as exciting and important new voices in Britain and South Africa respectively (Woolf, Pieterse), neither *Surge* nor *Collective Amnesia* has received much scholarly attention. Criticism on *Surge* has focussed primarily on the volume as a response to recent historical changes (Lowe) and the role of the ghost (Chokesey, Lawson Welsh) and, formally, on the role of the archive (Jayakumar-Hazra, Lawson Welsh). Criticism on *Collective Amnesia* has explored the role of knowledge, learning and memory in relation to history (Batra et al., Haith, Pieterse) and the role of water, especially the ocean, “as a metaphor for repressed historical trauma” (Burger 23). Some critics have also pointed to Putuma’s use of different (non-)lyric forms and devices to enhance the thematic concerns of the volume (Batra et al., Byrne, Pieterse). This article complements these analyses by taking a more profound interest in the ways in which these poets broaden poetry’s conventional generic boundaries by infusing their volumes with non-lyric modes. More than offer a simple extension of the existing scholarship on the individual volumes, this first comparative reading of *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* provides insight into the special affordances of multimodal poetry in criticising established systems of knowledge and learning. It explores how precisely the multimodality of their volumes enables Bernard and Putuma to write back to their respective countries’ (trans)national histories and propose a more inclusive understanding of their respective societies, with their diversification of the prevailing perceptions and discourses concerning these (trans)national histories and societies mirrored in their generic diversification of conventional poetry.

2. Multimodality in Jay Bernard’s *Surge*

Surge’s multimodality is directly linked to the archive, which is “central to both the aesthetic and political project” of the volume (Lawson Welsh 2). In her discussion of the archive in *Surge*, Sarah Lawson Welsh pointed out that ‘archive’ can refer to several concepts, namely

“‘archive’ as a repository, ‘archive’ as the physical place where records are stored, ‘archive’ as the totality of these records more generally (e.g. the archive of slavery) and ‘archive’ as a process of filing and recording which necessarily involves selection from a wider body of documentation and thus necessary exclusion and/or potential erasure or destruction of certain records” (Lawson Welsh 9–10).

Where Lawson Welsh focusses on the archive as textual inspiration in *Surge*, this article adds to the discussion by exploring the ways in which the inserted archival materials function in their interaction with individual poems and the volume as a whole. The volume's link with the archive becomes clear early on in the volume as it is perfused with archival materials, namely reproductions of a movie still of a sign (10), a poster (21), a photograph (27), a text message (33), a quote from a book (40), and a transcript from an interview excerpt (44). These materials are crucial to Bernard's poetic exploration of two fires in recent (Black) British history, as indicated by their rather even distribution throughout the volume – there are never more than seven poems between these archival materials – and their overall influence on, and interaction with, the volume. In their interaction with the poetic texts, the non-lyric materials take on a poetic function themselves. This poetic function notwithstanding, the archival materials are not included in the contents page.

Bernard's volume begins with an introductory "Author's Note", in which they shed light on the volume's genesis (i.e. a performance piece called *Surge: Side A* which Bernard wrote at the George Padmore Institute¹), provide some context surrounding the events of the New Cross Fire and its consequences and also make mention of the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush Scandal. The New Cross Fire, later renamed the New Cross Massacre, took place on 18 January 1981 in London's eponymous south-east area, when a fire broke out during Yvonne Ruddock's sixteenth birthday party, killing thirteen people between the ages of 14 and 22 and leaving many more injured.² Although the fire was believed to be a racist attack, as was supported by local history (Andrews), there is, to date, no official cause. This tragedy had far-reaching consequences as it inspired the Black People's Day of Action in 1981 and partially contributed to the infamous Brixton Riots. In a similar tragedy in 2017, a social housing tower in Grenfell (West London) caught fire, leaving over seventy dead, due to poor renovations and the use of highly flammable and combustible materials which "had been installed primarily to enhance the aesthetics of the building for the white wealthy people living in the surrounding area" (El-Enany). In their "Author's Note" Bernard establishes a link between both fires, commenting on "the lack of responsibility and the lack of accountability at the centre of both the New Cross Fire and Grenfell" (xi). As this "Author's Note" precedes the poems, readers of the volume are bound to come across it when starting the volume. Therefore, the "Author's Note" influences the readers' understanding and interpretation of the volume, allowing them to decode both (subtle) in-text references and the visual archival materials used in *Surge* (e.g. the poster mentions the New Cross Massacre by name) – as they will be (better) able to make connections between the volume and the historical events described in its "Author's Note".

Bernard reaffirms the crucial role the visuals play in *Surge* by disclosing their inclusion in the printed volume as a conscious decision on the poet's part, aimed at representing "the instant, the action and the victory" of a social movement (Marks and Bernard). The still of a sign outside Newcross Road can here be seen as the instant that set the New Cross Massacre Action Committee (NCMAC) and their social movement in motion, while the poster on the Black people's Day of Action refers quite directly to the action undertaken by the NCMAC and the photograph of the 1982 vigil provides us with a visual of their bittersweet victory as we see John La Rose walking hand-in-hand with friends and loved ones' of the victims who died in the fire, remembering them even when the press wouldn't (see also Andrews). While each of these visuals comments on specific moments in time surrounding the New Cross Massacre, they also interact with one another in ways that point to the long(er)-term consequences of the fire. The visuals become integral parts of the volume and take up both an authenticating and a poetic function of their own. The photograph of the vigil, for example, shows the "silent crowd" referred to in the preceding poem ("Washing", 26) and, in so doing, its visualisation enhances the sense of community that the poem evokes. The text of the poem, in turn, offers an emotive background against which to interpret the photograph. Bernard thus combines textual and visual modes to remember a forgotten, and possibly even consciously erased, part of (Black) British history. By inserting the archival materials into their poetry collection,

they draw attention to a tragic incident that, despite the fact that these materials are all publicly accessible at the GPI, has largely been overlooked.

Throughout *Surge*, the inclusion of visual materials is perhaps the most obvious use of multimodality. However, Bernard also uses textual elements in a multimodal manner to relate the stories of Grenfell and the Windrush Scandal, and to link these back to one another and to New Cross. Bernard makes the connection with Grenfell by inserting the transcript of an interview with Nazanin Aklani, the daughter of one of the Grenfell Fire victims, which originally aired on “BBC Newsnight, July 12 2017” (44). In this interview, the daughter deplores not having any remains of her mother to bury or identify and how this is even “more horrendous than being burned alive” (44). Here, the readers are reminded of the earlier complementary narrative poems “+” and “-”, which deal with the New Cross Fire and in which Bernard talks about the experience of a father having to identify his son’s burnt remains and of a son waiting on his father to come identify his remains, respectively (13, 14). In having the non-lyric mode of the interview echo earlier poetic texts and depict the same specific experience regarding both fires, Bernard establishes an emotive link between the horrors of New Cross, (re)presented and poetically reimagined in the poems “+” and “-”, and those of Grenfell, presented through the interview. According to Kate Potts, in so doing, they “shift[...] ‘personal’ truth into a broader, more public context” (113). The combination of lyric and non-lyric modes is crucial, as both the poems and the interview allow Bernard to connect the traumatising experiences of fires occurring at disparate moments in time. In the poems, Bernard opts for first-person speakers (father and son) whose accounts strongly resemble a stream of consciousness, creating the impression that their accounts are both lived experiences even though “-” is written from the dead son’s perspective and clearly poetically (re)imagined. The combination of first-person speakers and stream of consciousness not only lends more credibility to the speakers in their personal recollection of the New Cross fire; it also adds to the poem’s emotional impact on their readers. The interview about the Grenfell fire, likewise, is rooted in personal recollection and lived experience, lending a space for the daughter to share her perspective on the events and showing, as the poems do, how she is affected by the fire and its circumstances. With these multimodal resonances Bernard encourages their readers to establish connections between different critical moments in the history of (Black) Britain and understand the tragic continuation of Black Britain’s traumatising.

Bernard also uses a multimodal approach in *Surge* to draw the readers’ attention to the Windrush Scandal and the problematic historiography of slavery. By inserting a quote from “C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*” (40, italics in original) into the volume – a book looking at neglected Black transexual narratives, tracing back understandings of gender as unstable by drawing on archival materials, including fugitive slave narratives – Bernard implicitly links the fires to other previously forgotten or overlooked (aspects of) Black histories. This is not the only moment in the volume when Bernard reflects Black Britain’s past, as the volume opens with a poem pleading with the readers to remember the horrors of the slave trade: “remember we were brought here from the clear waters of our dreams/ that we might be named, numbered and forgotten” (1). Both the poem and the Snorton quote point to histories of slavery; including each at different points in the volume indicates that, for Bernard, slavery is not a distant past event, but that its consequences are still present in contemporary Britain, showing up in the racial bias with which the New Cross and Grenfell fires were met. Having been published in 2017, quoting from Snorton’s book also contrast its recovery of overlooked histories with the 2017 Grenfell Fire, thus pointing to the continuous need for excavating forgotten parts of history.

However, while historiographic accounts like that of Snorton use photographs as visual proof, Bernard’s use of visual material is characterized by a vagueness. The visual materials are only explained in the “Notes”-section at the end of the volume, which leaves them open to the readers’ interpretation. In the “Notes”, Bernard offers bibliographical information, such as the date or the name of the photographer, as well as content-based information, namely what each image depicts.

They do this not only for inserted visual materials, but also for other archival material or other published texts used in the poems, either directly or as inspiration. While this section of the volume is included in the table of contents and immediately follows the poems, some readers may not be bothered to read on at this point and may be less likely to read it than the "Author's Note" that opens the volume. Furthermore, while the information presented in the "Notes" is important for a more contextualised understanding of the images (e.g. the photograph of the vigil is of family members of the New Cross Fire victims), and thus a more accurate understanding of the incident they depict, the images can still fulfil their informative function even without this additional knowledge, as the readers are able to fill in the gaps by means of the poems as well as prior knowledge (including information they have gleaned from the "Author's Note" and the volume's cover which briefly talks about the New Cross and Grenfell fires). The absence of on-page information about the photographs and the ensuing vagueness surrounding them increases the materials' poeticity while also reminding their readers that historiography relies heavily on processes of interpretation and the filling in of gaps. The lack of captions (typical of history books and other factual sources) makes the photographs more evocative, as it leaves more room for the reader to interpret these visuals.

Yet, while explanations for the visual images are only provided at the end of the volume in the "Notes", the explanations for the textual elements (text message, quote, transcript) are provided in footnotes at the bottom of their respective pages. Bernard's on-page referencing of the inserted textual archival materials through footnotes allows them to lend their volume a sense of authority often associated with academia. Even to those not working in the field, footnotes "are clear markers of an academic mode" (Hallet, "The Multimodal Novel" 130) of referencing the words of others that is generally used to corroborate one's own point or to provide additional thoughts or information. Their introduction in academic use "signalled an epistemological shift from credulous scholasticism to analytical and historical methodologies" (Senior 45), as a result of which footnotes have become signs of trustworthiness and authority. In *Surge*, footnotes are strictly bibliographical and, thus, contrast with the endnotes on the visual materials, which often offer more contextual information. The presence of the footnotes on the same page, moreover, makes them virtually impossible to ignore. Indeed, this on-page presence serves as an indication of "the significance of the notes and [as] an invitation to read [them] simultaneously and interactively with the poem" (Senior 45). Following academic conventions, readers will assume that the speaker in the quoted material is not the same as the speaker quoting these materials. Furthermore, while the speakers differ for each of the cited materials, the speaker in the footnote remains the same, thus framing the multivocal account of the quoted voices throughout the volume in one account, the annotation of the author-academic, which lends a sense of credibility and authority usually associated with academia to all speakers. Bernard's integration of the speakers in the author-academic's overarching discourse makes these individual voices converge in one collective voice through which the volume speaks (up/out), which, in turn, lends an additional sense of continuity to the volume as a whole. Indeed, it is only by looking at the volume in its entirety that its inclusion of different modes and speakers can be fully appreciated. By integrating the individual voices within the overarching discourse of the author-academic and by including materials from and about different periods in (Black) British history, ranging from slavery over the New Cross Massacre to the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush scandal, Bernard's multimodal poetry highlights that these are not isolated tragedies, but that they accumulate throughout (Black) British history. In so doing, the volume as a whole takes on a collective character, assuming a collective significance too powerful to ignore. This collective significance is also highlighted in Putuma's volume.

3. Multimodality in Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*

Similar to Bernard's *Surge*, Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* relies heavily on non-lyric modes, including lists and footnotes (Batra et al. 1112, Byrne 4-5, Pieterse 38-39). Drawing on and comple-

menting Annel Pieterse's analysis of Putuma's subversion of Eurocentric systems of knowledge through a decolonial lens, my article explores this aspect through a multimodal lens. It argues that the volume's "preoccupation with history and memory" (Batra et al. 1112) is not only thematically present, but also realised through Putuma's varied use of non-lyric modes associated with such systems, focussing especially on footnotes, different types of lists and interviews in selected poems.

The volume's concern with historical amnesia is already clear from its title. While critics and reviewers tend to place this collective amnesia within South Africa's (trans)national context (e.g. Burger, Haith, Phalalfa), Chelsea Haith points to the importance and potential necessity of the title's ambiguity as this raises the questions of "whose memory is being explored [...] and to and for whom the poet is speaking" (42) – a question that resurfaces throughout the volume. Similarly, the volume's division into three sections – "1. INHERITED MEMORY" (10–54), "2. BURIED MEMORY" (55–73), and "3. POSTMEMORY" (74–111) – draws attention to different ways of remembering the past (Haith 41). While these larger sections "centralise memory as a sum total of complex historical processes" (Phalalfa 251), Putuma's engagement with, and critique of, the coloniality of knowledge³ also occurs on the level of the individual poem (see also Pieterse 39). However, it is the repetition of this multimodally achieved critique throughout the volume that effectuates Putuma's subversion of the coloniality of knowledge.

A central means in this respect is Putuma's use footnotes. In her 'footnote poems', the poems' titles are accompanied by a superscripted number and the texts of these poems are written out as a single line in the footnote, leaving the rest of the page blank. Her use of footnotes allows Putuma to stylistically represent the 'coloniality of knowledge'. While *Collective Amnesia* features five such footnote poems – "Storytelling", "Footnote", "Love", "Suicide", and "Apartheid" (11, 34, 46, 73, 109) – this section will focus on the first two as they exemplify how Putuma's use of footnotes and the content of the footnote poems are interwoven in her multimodal critique and subversion of Eurocentric systems of knowledge.

The first poem of the volume, "Storytelling^{1/} 1) How my people remember. How my people archive. How we inherit the world." (11), "cements [Putuma's] approach to knowledge firmly within the oral tradition" (Pieterse 39), but – through the poem's 'footnote' form – she immediately also confronts this oral tradition with the Eurocentric context of academic writing – a context which often excludes precisely the people Putuma is talking about and with whom she identifies, as her use of "we" indicates. The poem's speaker is literally reduced to the footnotes, as Pieterse (39) has also pointed out, but refusing to remain unheard. Furthermore, by relegating the poet-speaker and the text of the poem itself to the footnote, Putuma is inviting readers to question, if not outright abandon, Eurocentric systems of knowledge symbolised by the conventional academic use of footnotes and follow her to the margins instead. While there are very little indicators of who exactly this speaker is, readers conventionally assume the author to be the speaker in the footnotes.

The emerging blank page in Putuma's footnote poems can be read as a stylistic representation of the silence with which histories from the margins are often met and to which they are relegated. In "Storytelling", this blank page is representative of the silence/silencing on/of "[Putuma's] people" (Putuma 11). In "Footnote", which reads "2) Some poems show up to undo your silence." (34), this blank page can be read as precisely the silence the footnote poems show up to undo. Whose silence is referred to depends less on who is speaking (although the speaker is literally and presumably also figuratively situated in the margins), and more on who is being addressed. On the one hand, we could consider the addressed 'you' as (someone from) the centre, arguing that these poems speak up against the centre's collective amnesia. On the other hand, we could also consider this 'you' as (someone from) the margins, with the poems speaking on their behalf. While the result is similar (undoing the silence on/of the margins), this difference in potential interpretations of the addressee assures the poem's emotional impact on the readers who, whether from the centre or from the margins, can identify with this 'you' and thus feel directly addressed.

Putuma not only represents the silence(s) in history through these blank pages, her 'footnote poems' also break these silences in and through the footnotes, which are literally undoing the silences on the margins *form* the margins. This is most evident in "Footnotes", whose self-reflexive title already highlights Putuma's use of footnotes in/as poems. Indeed, her "invocation of the footnote [can be seen] a decolonial play" which helps Putuma "oppos[e] the privileging of the printed word in Eurocentric culture" (Pieterse 39; Byrne 4-5).

Lists form another example of Putuma's use of multimodality in *Collective Amnesia*; in her list poems, as in her footnote poems, Putuma criticises and subverts the 'coloniality of knowledge'. Lists abound in *Collective Amnesia*: almost one in five poems either in its entirety appears as a list or contains one or more lists.⁴ These lists include bullet lists ("No Easter Sunday for Queers", "Oh Dear God, Please Not Another Rape Poem" (25-33, 89-93)), numbered lists ("Twenty-One Ways of Leaving", "In the Emergency Room" (39-45, 66)), a combination thereof ("Black Solidarity" (80-82)), a list of dictionary entries ("Teachings" (78)), a list of meanings of a term ("Pharisee", (78)), and a list of names ("Lifeline" (83-85)).

"Teachings", for instance, features entries on "*writing* (n): a doctrine used to deliver one from the ills of silencing" and "*archiving* (v): a FUCK YOU to the canon" (79, italics in original), which demonstrate that, once again, Putuma is taking formats associated with a traditional Eurocentric systems of knowledge, the dictionary, and subverts their coloniality by providing critical comments on these systems' silences and, more importantly, on how to undo them. It is no coincidence that the terms Putuma expands on – 'transparency', 'talk', 'writing', 'share', 'publishing' and 'archiving' – all have to do with practices of passing on knowledge and with academia and historiography specifically. The final term, 'archiving', also refers back to the first poem, "Storytelling", where the latter was described as "[h]ow my people archive", making storytelling and her people's way of remembering "a FUCK YOU to the canon" as well (11, 79). In linking these poems thematically, Putuma also allows for their modes to interact, thus establishing a link between her multimodal use of footnotes and lists to write back to systems of knowledge and to undo their silence(s).

This multimodal focus on writing back to systems of knowledge can also be seen in "Oh Dear God, Please Not Another Rape Poem" (89-93), which is about an 'Uncle' who – as is known in the family – is a sexual predator, but they ignore it because "*some family members would rather describe the smoke than smell like it*" (89, italics in original). While this poem thematizes 'collective amnesia' that occurs at the level of the family, the form of this poem resembles that of an academic paper. Tying its discussion of familial amnesia back to Eurocentric systems of knowledge and their silences, the poem has been split into six sections – "PREFACE", "INTRODUCTION", "BODY", "CONCLUSION", "ADDENDUM", and "REFERENCE LIST/BIBLIOGRAPHY" – which typically structure an academic paper. The last section's title especially is a reference to academia and the importance the latter attaches to acknowledging others' contributions – a significant choice when writing back to Eurocentric systems of knowledge and their silences. The poem ends on a list of imperatives such as "*Hug uncle*", "*Stop being antisocial*", and "*Sit on uncle's lap*" (93, italics in original). The suggestion that 'uncle' is a sexual predator makes this list of instructions highly problematic. The family's silence attains an extra layer of meaning in a South African context, implicitly relating to how the memories of the historical period of slavery "have been comprehensively suppressed by 'shame' of that enslavement and sexual exploitation" (Burger 16), and to the "continuing (and often suppressed) influence of South Africa's colonial and more recent apartheid past" (16). Hence, Putuma's use of academic modes of writing criticises systems of power, responsibility, and knowledge both in a private, familial context and in a larger (trans)national one.

A third non-lyric mode that Putuma employs in her poems is that of the interview, which, like the footnotes and lists, "evokes the methodologies of Western knowledge frames" (Pieterse 41) only to reflect on the coloniality of Eurocentric systems of knowledge. The aptly titled poem "Interview" (76-77) can be divided into two parts: On the left page, there is a single question with a detailed

answer by someone from the margins who identifies as a “black womxn” (76). On the right page, there are three questions, followed by “A:” and a blank page (77), which, similarly to the blank page in her footnote poems can be read as a stylistic representation of silence. While the first question reads “Why are you always murdering our narratives with your gaze” (77), the silence or blank page as answer can be read as this gaze, as a way of answering with/within their silence. However, if the question is read as being asked from the margins, the silence takes on a different meaning, then denoting an inability to answer, a refusal to do so, or, the oppressive silence with which the histories from the margin are often met. This latter reading would be in line with the meaning of the blank page in Putuma’s footnote poems. However, the blank page, which is made possible through the incorporation of the interview as a mode, can be read in a more interactive manner as well, namely that it denotes a gap (silence) the volume invites the readers to fill. In this way, the blank invites readers from the margin to provide their own answers, while it could also incite people from the centre to consider their privilege and reflect on these questions. This ambiguity resonates not only with the ambiguity of the volume’s title, but also with that of the ‘you’ in “Footnote”, which potentially allows both readers from the margin and those from the centre to feel directly addressed. Once again, Putuma’s critique of Eurocentric systems of knowledge is made possible precisely by her multimodal adoption of forms related to these systems.

4. Conclusion: *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* as Multimodal Poetry Volumes

Despite their volumes’ shared thematic and formal concerns, namely their use of multimodality in writing back to, and undoing the silence in/on the authors’ respective (trans)national histories, Bernard and Putuma’s use of multimodality in *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* differs in three main regards: 1) Bernard and Putuma apply different modes, 2) they deploy the same modes in different manners and 3) the multimodality takes on different meanings, or has different effects. The difference in modes is partially due to the fact that *Surge*’s multimodality is rooted in the archive, whereas *Collective Amnesia*’s multimodality is rooted in Eurocentric systems of knowledge, especially academia. Bernard’s use of visual archival material has a double purpose; it serves both authenticating and poetic functions, allowing Bernard to make visible forgotten parts of (Black) British history with a sense of authority, while also enabling them to establish a link between different events in (Black) British history – one long past, the other contemporary. In doing so, multimodality’s interconnectivity acquires a political meaning, revealing the continuity of institutional racism in Britain. Putuma’s multimodal use of lists in *Collective Amnesia* is equally political as her adoption of formats associated with Eurocentric systems of knowledge, especially academia, allows her to question precisely these systems. The differences in their use of the same modes, then, can be seen in how directly they incorporate these modes. Where Bernard incorporates modes more or less directly, which then take on poetic functions, Putuma adapts and poetically repurposes them *as poems*. This is closely tied to the differences in the meaning or effects of their multimodality. Where Bernard systematically deploys multimodality to lend their poetry volume a sense of authority with which to write back to and about the histories that *Surge* deals with (especially the New Cross Fire, the Grenfell Fire and the Windrush Scandal), Putuma systematically repurposes forms associated with authority and credibility to question precisely these concepts in relation to systems of knowledge and to subvert the ‘coloniality of knowledge’. While Bernard uses footnotes to write back to historical amnesia with authority, Putuma, conversely, questions, if not outright rejects, footnotes’ association with credibility and authority. Bernard employs footnotes *as footnotes*, according to academic conventions, to provide bibliographical information on the inserted textual archival materials. Their use of footnotes allows them to bring into the volume an author–academic who is speaking from and in those footnotes and whose overarching discourse brings together the individual voices of the different poems’ lyric speakers, lending the resulting collective voice the sense of authority usually associated with academia (rather than poetry – which often has a more subjective connotation).

Putuma, on the other hand, uses footnotes *as poems* and, thus, poetically repurposes the mode she incorporates. In her footnote poems, both the footnotes and the blank space they create subvert the 'coloniality of knowledge' by undoing the silence(s) within Eurocentric systems of knowledge. In short, Putuma questions the very systems that inform Bernard's incorporation of non-lyric modes (e.g. photographs, interviews, footnotes) and allow them to poetically explore, reimagine and build on the archive and/as history with a sense of authority. Putuma's poetically repurposed academic modes (e.g. dictionary entries, Q&A, footnotes), by contrast, question and subvert these systems and their perceived authority. *Surge* and *Collective Amnesia* thus use (academic) modes in different ways to achieve a similar result: exposing, questioning, and undoing silences in the authors' respective (trans)national histories.

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Notes

- ¹ The George Padmore Institute (GPI) is "an archive, library and research centre dedicated to radical black history in Britain" (Bernard ix). The archive holds a collection specifically on the New Cross Fire and the surrounding events ("George Padmore Institute").
- ² The victims were: Andrew Goodling, Owen Thompson, Patricia Johnson, Patrick Cummings, Steve Collins, Lloyd Hall, Humphrey Brown, Lillian Roselind Henry, Peter Campbell, Gerry Paul Francis, Glen Powell, Paul Ruddock, and Yvonne Ruddock. Two and a half years later, Anthony Berbeck, one of the survivors, took his own life and became the fourteenth victim. ("New Cross Massacre Campaign, 1980-1985")
- ³ The coloniality of knowledge "denotes the ways in which Eurocentric knowledge systems are privileged over other knowledge systems" (Pieterse 36).
- ⁴ The recent state of the art on lists in literature discusses their role in a narrative context specifically (see Richardson 2016, Von Contzen 2016). A proper discussion of lists in a lyric context requires further research.

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