Introduction

My name is Jumi Bello, and I am a Black woman writer, scholar, and psychiatric survivor. I come to you today not only as a researcher in Critical Disability Studies and Black Studies, but as a person who has lived through the systems I now critique. I've been institutionalized, misdiagnosed, medicated into silence. I've made mistakes while reaching for care in a world that makes that reaching dangerous. But I've survived—not through cure, but through witness. Through language. Through the act of building futures where we are not erased.

This talk is drawn from my creative dissertation, *HO(US)E*, a speculative novel narrated by a sentient halfway house in mid-century Chicago. The building remembers its life—from its construction during the rise of housing segregation, to its repurposing as a site of psychiatric re-entry, to the rise and fall of Black Panther health programs. It tells its story while burning in a fire set by a mysterious figure during a queer disabled wedding.

The novel asks:

What kind of care is possible after harm? What does forgiveness look like when built from the ruins of the carceral? And what might the future hold if we centered the lives and visions of people with psychiatric disabilities—not as patients, but as architects of care?

Live Reading + Reflective Framing: Excerpt from *HO(US)E*

The passage I'll read comes near the opening of my novel, *HO(US)E*, as the halfway house—my narrator—begins to catch fire in the midst of the wedding. As I read, I invite you to listen for the ways madness is not just described, but embodied in the form: the sentence structure, the voice, the rhythm. This is *Mad Futurism* not just in what the story says, but in how the story moves.

[Live Reading]

1999

There is a spin.

A metal wheel, tight and certain.

A *click*.

Then—a mouth of light opens in the dark.

Between the click and the glow, time stretches. Slows. Slips sideways. Because we are a house, *Hampton House* they call us, we are able to glean many things. We can see everything, everywhere all at once. The wedding guests outside holler and cheer in the golden heat from what feels to be far away even though we distantly know the humans to be within the reach of heartbeats. Then the windows tell us: Lana and Astra are kissing. They must be wife and wife now. The happiness feeds the heat and the fever wraps itself around us like a shimmering cocoon. The wedding guests swirl across our front lawn. Bronzeville sun presses against the porch railings. The sheer sense of joy convinces us that we are losing our edges. The corners of our frame have begun to soften in the heat, blur in the rapture. The music bends against the walls like light through rippling glass. The smell of grilled sweet corn and suntan oil drips through our floorboards. Our rafters swell with laughter and sweat and the distant, delightful perfume of collards cooking slow. For a moment—for one trembling, holy moment—we are less house and more pounding red, red heart.

And so, we don't notice. We do not feel the weight of a single footstep across the threshold. Do not register the breath out of sync with the others. We are too busy holding the sound of Auntie Sharon's voice harmonizing with the record player, too wrapped in the rhythm of bare feet beating joy into our bones.

The human slips away from the crowd like shadow through sunlight. They move past the half-eaten cake, the champagne flutes slick with sweat, the folding chairs beginning to lean like old men at dusk. They descend the stairwell that leads to our basement. We do not feel it. We are dreaming of our first brick. Of the way Xochitl whispered the names of her dead into the garden bed. Of Julius hammering nails with his knuckles bruised from protest. Of Lana, as a child, pressing her ear to the wall, listening for ghosts she hadn't learned to fear yet.

The temperature shifts.

At first, it's subtle. A breath sucked too quickly through the vents. A silence that doesn't belong.

Then—gasoline.

Not memory. The real thing. Acid-thick and stinging, threading through the copper pipes. We taste it on our tongue of steel, more acidic than base. Hear it slosh in the dark.

A lighter clicks.

The sound echoes like an infant's cry in a cathedral waiting for the water from God. A flash, then a flare. A tongue of flame rises—brief, hungry, unsure of itself—then growing into what it's meant to be.

The fire does not knock, does not ask if we are ready to open the door.

We remember everything all at once. Every scream. Every lullaby. Every slam of a door. Every kiss stolen in the pantry. Every ghost who refused to leave. Every child who ran back in.

We remember—and then we begin to forget.

Because now, we are burning.

Now, we are not Hampton crowned.

We are Hampton cracked. We are Hampton screaming.

Where are we? What are we now?

Does it matter?

We don't know. There is something we must tell.

So tell us.

Everything?

Everything.

We are a house, but today, we are something else. Hampton House is what they call us and today we are Hampton crowned. Astra and Lana are married now. The hum of music rises from our floorboards like heat off asphalt, a mirage of the future. The bassline thumps steady as a heartbeat. Light dances between the clinking glasses, wraps itself around the porch posts, slips between the braids of the children braiding each other's hair on the stoop. The wedding guests spread across our lawn like constellations caught mid-movement. Dresses swirl. Shoes dig into the hot earth. One girl spins with her arms out wide until she collapses into a patch of wild clover. Somewhere, someone is frying something that smells like summer itself. And we—once only walls and wood and wear—begin to shimmer.

Heat brings out strange things in us: the glass in our windows turn sheer, sounds of the outside world distill into stereo and something about our water tastes of brine. We see everything. The lines of grief pressed into foreheads still smiling. The lottery tickets tucked into

pockets, whispered between bites of cornbread. Sounds distill into stereo: the sizzle of meat, the soft slap of dominos on the card table, the wet pop of a kiss behind the garden shed. A toddler shrieks with joy, and the shriek ricochets across our beams until it settles into a giggle in the rafters. Even our water tastes different today—salted, brackish, something only a fish would swallow whole. As if the sea has crept into the pipes, as if the house remembers being something ancient, barnacled, adrift. It makes the softwood among us shiver, quiver at the memory of flood and drift and rebirth. We are no longer 2421 Delancey Street, Bronzeville, Chicago. Not quite. Not only. The numbers on the mailbox blur in the brightness of the day, dissolve into glyphs only the oldest among us can read. We are story now. We are nothing but spell.

The wedding ceremony was nothing grand, and yet it was. No orchestra, no aisle. Just two women under a swath of paper lanterns in our back garden, feet bare in the soft dirt that our first Xochitl once tilled. Lana's dress was wrinkled from sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor, whispering her vows to herself between sips of ginger tea. Astra wore a secondhand blazer, too big in the shoulders, the hem fraying, but oh, the way they looked at each other.

When witnessing such a thing, the world becomes fever. In its haze, we slip. When one dreams, one does not notice the breath they cannot place in their basement. They are too busy being caught up in the joy of the breathing dream to notice. We are aching dream. A quivering threshold. Our beams stretch wide in the heat, our rafters hum with a tremble not entirely from joy. Light bounces off our walls in unfamiliar angles, and the wind carries old names in its teeth. We see the past and the future at once, as if both have taken seats at opposite ends of the dining room table. But the present—the now—it flickers. Becomes ghost. The moment slips from our grasp like a veil caught on a nail.

We see Martha in the kitchen, slightly drunk and leaning the small of her back against the kitchen sink, smiling up into the milk man's laughing mouth as he holds her between his large, gentle hands. She doesn't look at him directly, not at first. The afternoon light softens the sharpness of her face, turning the silver in her hair to something almost holy. She used to avoid it, but now she wears the light like a shawl. She tilts her chin upward, the scar on her neck glowing a ruby purpled back against her Adam's Apple, eyes half-lidded, like the ceiling might have the answer to a question she isn't ready to ask. Or maybe she's just remembering what it felt like, once, to be touched with care. Before the years that taught her to disappear inside her own skin. Before the violence that tried to strip her name from her bones. Before the state, the shelters, the silence. Before the voices.

We see Atticus, and Nina, watching from the attic windows, two ghosts who after years and years of watching still can never seem to turn away. Atticus sits in the rocking chair no one else dares to use, one hand resting on the windowsill like he's still waiting for someone to arrive. He stares out the window as if the person he's waiting for might round the corner any minute, hands tucked in their coat, smile crooked with apology. Nina stands beside him, arms crossed, her figure cut sharp against the glass as if daring the afternoon to look away first, her back so straight it looks like she's holding something up. Maybe the past. Maybe herself. Her silhouette cuts clean against the windowpane, a haunted blade of certainty in the golden afternoon haze. She dares the light not to flinch. She dares the world to look away. She is still the kind of woman who believes slouching is how the state gets into your spine. In death, she's no different. They have been up there for decades—through winters that buckled our beams and summers that melted candle wax into the baseboards—watching. Not haunting. Not exactly. Just… staying. Bearing witness like they once bore hearts. We don't know what keeps them. Love, maybe. Or

regret. Or something simpler: the ache of unfinished stories. Neither of them notices the basement door shift open, just slightly, just enough for the air to shift.

In the dining room, the Coopers and Ellisons sit at the same table for the first time in a generation. Paper plates balanced on knees. Collard juice pooling under plastic forks. Drinks sweating in the August heat. They laugh at the same joke. They clink red cups. For years, they've offered each other cautious waves from the safe distance of their porches, their greetings more choreography than conversation. Always the polite nod wrapped in ritual, the too-late smile, the safe distance. But today, something moves. Maybe it's the bassline. Maybe it's the smoke curling from the grill. Maybe it's the babbling baby who belongs to neither family passed between them like legacy, too young to understand boundaries, too beloved to observe them. It's Lana's wedding, yes—but it's also the music, the smell of jerk chicken, the bitter tang of the wheat ale and the menthol cigarettes. No one says it aloud, but the street feels smaller now. The line between them—drawn in zoning maps and decades of quiet—softens. Today, they stepped over it. Or maybe it disappeared altogether. We are watching the past hold hands with the possible. We are watching the world make room for joy.

And like all dreamers, we are not watching closely enough. We do not notice the breath we cannot place in our basement. The soft shift of air where no one should be. The faint creak of a door opened in silence. We are too busy being adored, adorned. We are too busy watching Lana's aunt teach Astra's niece the electric slide in bare feet. Too busy catching the scent of jasmine from someone's wrists. Too busy being filled with the echo of "I do" sung not just in voices but in bodies, in gestures, in the way someone dares to cry in public and isn't asked to stop.

The air is heavy with heat and something older—rosemary smoke, shoe polish, a neighbor's sweetbread frying in oil. Someone laughs in the backyard and it reverberates through our beams like song. The floorboards loosen with joy. Today, the house dresses itself in light for Lana and Astra. Paper garlands loop from the porch rafters, and folding chairs cluster like gossiping aunties across the lawn. Because this is what it means to survive: not escape, but return. Not erasure, but witness. And we—cracked, humming, alive—we are witness. We are here.

Someone's tipped over the punch bowl, and a chorus of cousins erupts into mock horror and applause. Martha appears from the kitchen, big-lipped and beaming, waving a dish towel above her head like a victory flag. Astra is mid-spin on the lawn, skirt flaring like a hymn, and Lana stands barefoot on the porch steps, holding a plate piled high with everything fried, smiling in that crooked, quiet way she does when no one's asking her to perform joy—just letting her live inside it. We feel the thud of music ripple through our floorboards, the rhythmic stomp of two hundred years of hope and hunger dancing in time.

Someone starts singing. Someone else harmonizes. Everyone can't help but break into dance–with themselves, with each other, with the rhythms of this tiny world of rebellion and love and possibility because we are a strange house, but even strange houses can become homes, can have weddings, can be a place where one finds an open door that refuses to close no matter what you have done or who you have hurt. This is a place that would make Fred Hampton proud of what we have made.

Atticus tilts his head, eyes narrowed at the wedding below. "She reminds me of her," he says, meaning Lana, though he doesn't have to say her name. Nina nods, but doesn't answer. Her

gaze lingers on Astra, on the way her fingers tremble just before she takes the mic, on the way the sun catches in the curve of her shoulders. A body holding both wound and warmth.

"You think they'll make it?" Atticus asks, barely audible over the hum of the attic fan.

Nina doesn't blink. "They already have," she says, her voice unwavering even as her apparatus does. Still, they do not turn away. Because what is longing if not love with nowhere to go? And we, who are built of the remnants of both, keep the window open for them. Just a crack. Just enough for a breeze. Just enough to remind them that someone remembers they are still here.

Outside, Chicago does what Chicago does—hustles past without knowing what it misses. A horn blares down on Lake Shore Drive, impatient and anonymous, wanting to get to where it's going with no interference. The engine of the number 3 bus exhales just one block over, its brakes sighing like smoke-ridden lungs. Someone calls out across the street—laughter, maybe, or anger disguised as joy. It doesn't matter. The city breathes around us, never stopping, never asking who is allowed to belong. And yet here we are. Still standing. A *home.* We roll the word around in our walls like a song half-remembered, like something we used to know before the permits and property lines. What is a home, if not a structure that holds not just bodies but memory? Not just warmth, but contradiction?

The idea of us becoming a home—not just a house, not just Hampton with the number on the mailbox and the deed filed under Cook County, but something deeper—settles into our beams like a prayer we dare to believe. A home to someone. Anyone. Everyone, if possible. A home for the child who leaves school early to carry groceries and secrets. A home for the tired mother with bruises beneath her makeup and dashed dreams sewn into her pockets. A home for the quiet men with calloused knuckles and too much music trapped inside. For the aunties with

nowhere else to dance. For the parolees, the poets, the ghosts who do not want to haunt, only to be remembered. A home, yes. Not owned. Not sold. Not locked behind gates or gated behind fear. But something living. Something held open like arms.

If you have ever emerged from a shattered home and thought everything about life to you looked kaleidoscopic, we are for you. If you have ever dumped the shit of your life into a hole and then looked in the mirror without washing your hands, we are for you. This house is for the boys with the souls of wild horses despite the world's many hot-handed attempts to break them into a canter; this is for the girls who have drunk from that deep, long river of sadness that seems to live in us all, that moves down the bloodline from mothers and daughters through bottles and locked bathrooms and wandering women in the middle of the night. We are built for the people who have looked into a flame and imagined it was their destiny to burn. We were made for the people who have felt that great wind of sadness that sweeps through us all, lifting us from our very lives; us, for the wounded and sobered among you who spend nights dreaming of making themselves whole and days trying to be; us, for the young and angry among us who have the urge to break things but nothing to break. Do you understand the time we keep within our walls, our very wood and bone and ghost? We want to tell them, *Death is only change,* and change is nothing but a ripple to beings such as us, a ripple in time, and what is time to a house? "

Mad Futurism as Framework

I want to begin with my conceived framework of *Mad Futurism*. This is not a framework I invented in isolation, but rather one I am offering as the youngest cousin in a growing family of thought—one that includes Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurism, Latinx Futurism, Asian Futurism and Futurisms of the Middle East. Like them, *Mad Futurism* centers imagination, survival, and

resistance. But more specifically, it asks: what futures become possible when we center people with psychiatric disabilities—not as objects of pity or danger, but as visionaries, kin, and architects of care?

This excerpt sets the tone for the novel's speculative approach. It invites the reader into a sentient, communal memory space—where the narrator is not a single mind but a collective archive. What I hope this passage demonstrates is that *madness* is not just a subject in the novel—it is a methodology. In writing this way, I am resisting the impulse to "fix" madness—to give it a cause, a resolution, or a neat arc. Instead, I let the house speak in the way that trauma speaks: in echoes. In fragments. In repetition. This is a mad way of remembering. And it is also a mad way of surviving.

Mad Futurism begins with the premise that our current systems of care are not only insufficient—they are violent. It names the ways that the medical-industrial complex, involuntary psychiatric commitment, carceral logic, and white supremacy collude to isolate and harm those of us who are called "mad." It also insists that we are not disposable. That our experiences are not aberrations to be corrected but knowledge forms, survival technologies, and portals to other worlds.

This is not a metaphorical claim. Psychiatric survivors, mad-identified people, neurodivergent folks—we hold in our bodies and stories a map of what this world does to people it cannot control. But we also hold a map of what liberation might look like. In the absence of consistent care, we build *webs of care.* In the face of erasure, we tell stories. In the midst of state violence, we imagine other ways.

Mad Futurism takes its cues from disability justice, particularly as articulated by thinkers like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who calls for slow, crip-centered spaces of collective survival. It is informed by Liat Ben-Moshe's call to connect deinstitutionalization with prison abolition. And it is in conversation with Black and Indigenous thought—especially the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Robin D.G. Kelley, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson—who remind us that to dream beyond the state is a practice rooted in ancestral knowledge and struggle. It is not simply about representing madness in science fiction. It is about allowing madness to shape the very structure, logic, and temporality of the narrative. It is nonlinear. It fragments, loops, dissociates, relives, ruptures, returns. It mimics the very time of trauma and recovery. And it dares to ask: *What if the future is not "cured"? What if the future is beautifully, achingly, mad?* It's a way of writing from the margins of mental illness, not toward normalization, but toward an alternate horizon: a place where madness is kin, where healing is collective, and where the future is not built in spite of us—but with us, at the center.

Historical Fusion: The Black Panthers, Anti-Psychiatry, and the Roots of Mad Futurism

Mad Futurism doesn't reject history—it listens to the parts that have been silenced, discredited, or pathologized. It honors what the archive refuses. In that spirit, my project brings together two strands of historical resistance that are rarely considered in tandem: the anti-psychiatry movement and the community health activism of the Black Panther Party.

By the late 1960s, the Black Panther Party had established various community programs across the U.S., including free health clinics, ambulatory services, and sickle cell anemia testing, which the federal government was not offering at the time. What's less often remembered is that many

of these clinics also provided mental health support—informally, and with care grounded in the community rather than in pathology. Ericka Huggins, a leading Panther, has spoken publicly about the ways grief, trauma, and political surveillance shaped the psychic lives of Black revolutionaries—and about the need to process these experiences communally, outside the gaze of a carceral or medical system.

At the same time, the anti-psychiatry movement—led by thinkers like R.D. Laing, David Cooper, and Thomas Szasz, as well as by patient-survivor collectives—was challenging the very foundations of psychiatric diagnosis. They argued that madness could be a rational response to an irrational world; that involuntary treatment was a form of social control; and that the state used psychiatry to erase dissent. RD Laing even went as far as running the radical experiment of Kingsley Hall, which was a radical psychiatric residential home in London for people with psychiatric disabilities to live in an egalitarian society with their care providers. Doctors and patients and nurses lived in tandem, in a non-coercive relationship where they were free to choose to take or not take medication. It was the first of its kind, but certainly not the last.

Now, imagine the electricity of these two forces colliding: a Black-led movement confronting racial capitalism through communal care, and a global movement of survivors refusing institutional violence under the banner of mental liberation. My novel lives in that collision. It imagines a world where Black radical organizing and psychiatric resistance coalesce into something new—a speculative infrastructure of care, where the institution is no longer the asylum or the prison, but the *house* that remembers, listens, forgives.

This fusion is more than narrative—it's political. Because when we forget that the Black Panther Party was a healthcare movement, or when we erase psychiatric survivors from conversations on

civil rights, we perpetuate a fragmented history. *Mad Futurism* reweaves those threads. It tells a story of shared struggle—against state violence, medical racism, and disposability.

This is why my narrator is not a person, but a halfway house: a space both intimate and institutional. Through this perspective, I can trace the long arc of how Black communities—often excluded from formal systems of psychiatric care—crafted alternative networks of support. I can show how those networks broke down. And I can imagine how they might reemerge, differently, in the future we so desperately need. A future of radical care.

In the tradition of speculative fiction, I am not offering an idealized vision. I am offering a *complicated* one. A vision that acknowledges betrayal, burnout, grief. But also one that sees in the embers of a burning house, the possibility of something else: a future in which care is no longer synonymous with control, and madness is no longer a threat, but a call to imagine otherwise.

Narrative Innovation: Telling the Story through a Sentient House

Hampton House is not simply a setting. It is a witness. It has lived through decades of psychiatric re-entry programs, community-based rehabilitation efforts, and moments of radical experiment in collective care. It has sheltered parolees, patients, poets, organizers. It has also housed silence. Secrets. Surveillance. Suicide. The house has been complicit in harm, and it has seen what care looks like when no one else is watching.

By making the house the narrator, I'm refusing a linear, human-centered account of psychiatric experience. I'm also challenging the idea that madness is something that only lives *in* a person. In *Mad Futurism*, madness lives in spaces, in social systems, in histories. The house

allows me to show that. It remembers how institutional design has always shaped who is seen as mad, who gets locked away, and who is allowed to come home.

The narrative voice is plural: "we," not "I." That voice holds the experiences of every person who has passed through the house's doors, layered like sediment and yet it holds more than this–it has a relationship to time and space that transcends the human, and we are taken into memories of a world before it was touched by colonization and capitalism, a world of forests and grasslands, rivers and woods and mountain and valley. At times the voice is poetic, elliptical, looping in on itself like a trauma response. At other times, it is steady, rhythmic, like a chant. This form—nonlinear, haunted, embodied—*is* the politics of Mad Futurism in action. It defies the neatness of medical case studies or the redemption arc of mainstream mental health memoirs. It asks readers to dwell in ambiguity, to sit with discomfort, to feel the weight of time.

By giving voice to a building, I am also gesturing to a Black speculative tradition of animating the inanimate—what Toni Morrison calls "rememory," what Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe call the "residence of ghosts." This choice honors the legacy of enslaved and institutionalized people whose stories were never fully told. It gives form to the grief of generations. And it refuses to separate the architecture of madness from the architecture of racial capitalism, carceral care, and domestic surveillance.

In short, the narrative innovation of *Hampton House* allows me to tell a story that is bigger than any single character. It gives me a container for the multitudes that Mad Futurism holds: madness as rupture, as resistance, as radical prophecy. It lets me ask, *what does it mean for a place to remember you—even when the world forgets?*

Disability Justice Lens: Rethinking Care Beyond Coercion

At the heart of *Mad Futurism* is a single, urgent question: how do we provide care for people in crisis without causing more harm? This is not a hypothetical question for me. As a Black woman who lives with a psychiatric disability, I have been inside institutions that promised care but delivered surveillance, coercion, and punishment. I have survived involuntary hospitalization. I have felt what it's like to be seen as a danger before I'm seen as a person. And I know I am not alone.

That's why my creative dissertation is not just a story—it's an intervention. A contribution to what scholars and organizers call disability justice, a framework developed by queer and trans Black and brown disabled people like Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. It's a framework that insists on interdependence, collective access, anti-carceral care, and the radical reimagining of how we treat one another—especially in moments of breakdown, distress, or madness. This work also builds on the scholarship of thinkers like Sami Schalk, Alison Kafer, and Liat Ben-Moshe, who challenge us to reimagine both access and accountability. What does it mean to be accountable to those who've been harmed by psychiatry *and* to those who've harmed others while in crisis? What kind of infrastructure could hold that contradiction without defaulting to punishment or disappearance?

The house at the center of my novel becomes a kind of laboratory for this vision. It holds the history of failed interventions—of coercive treatments, forced medication, and disciplinary routines. But it also bears witness to moments of radical care: a peer-led grief circle, a night where the residents cook dinner for one another after a panic attack, an attempt to build a harm-reduction approach to psychiatric support long before the term existed.

These are not utopias. They are messy, flawed, human attempts to live otherwise. And that, to me, is the essence of disability justice: the belief that survival is enough. That care is complicated. That no one should be locked away or disappeared because they are too much for the system to handle.

In writing this novel, I am reaching for a new future. A future where mad people are not hidden, medicated into silence, or criminalized for breaking under pressure—but held. Remembered. Listened to. I am writing not only for scholars and readers but for the younger version of myself who needed to believe that madness was not the end of her story. That there could be a place for her in the world that was not a hospital, a prison, or a grave. That there could be, instead, a house—a house that speaks, that remembers, that says: *You will be loved as you are.*

Closing: Mad Futurism as an Invitation

So much of this work began with a question I didn't know how to ask out loud: *How do you live in a world that thinks you should not exist?* How do you survive involuntary commitment, psychiatric erasure, and racialized surveillance—and still believe in care? How do you write a future for people like us, when so many stories end before they ever begin?

For me, *Mad Futurism* is not an answer—it's a practice. A poetics. A refusal. A belief.

It's a refusal of systems that categorize, sedate, disappear. It's a refusal of the idea that survival must always look like recovery. It's a belief that madness, like Blackness, like queerness, like grief, carries with it a visionary potential. That the voices we've been told to quiet may be the

ones we most need to hear. That those who've been institutionalized, criminalized, shamed into silence—may be the ones best equipped to imagine a different kind of future.

HO(US)E is my love letter to those people. It is my offering to the canon, but also my offering to the community: to other mad, neurodivergent, disabled, and brilliant survivors who are already building the future every day, in kitchens and basements and community centers and shelters and halfway houses that no one ever thought to call sacred. But they are sacred. They are where care lives. And care, real care—not institutional protocol, not clinical procedure, but radical, accountable, everyday care—is a science fiction we're still learning how to write.