

Afrofuturism

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Abstract: *The term "Afrofuturism" refers to a thriving current movement of authors, artists, musicians, and thinkers who are African American, African, and Black diasporic. Afrofuturism is a body of creative work and academic thought that imagines greater justice and a freer expression of black subjectivity in the future or in alternative times, places, or realities. It includes literature, visual art, photography, film, multimedia art, performance art, music, and theory. Additionally, it makes assumptions about a society in which black people are the norm. Afrofuturism may also envision dystopian futures in which current inequalities are extrapolated and frequently made worse. However, Afrofuturist art frequently challenges ideas of linear time rather than simply focusing on the future. Afrofuturism, as it is more generally defined, reimagines not just new temporalities but also new black experiences and identities via science fiction, speculative literature, and other forms of creative and intellectual expression. It frequently does this by examining the advantages and disadvantages of techno-culture and posthumanism. Although the movement has undoubtedly grown significantly in recent years, particularly around 2000, its philosophical and artistic roots may be found in African American books from the middle and late 19th centuries that envisioned alternate worlds and societies for black people.*

Keywords: Afrofuturism, Science-Fiction, Cyber-space, Black-Culture, Afro-diasporic

I. INTRODUCTION

“Little did we know at the beginning of this term that Afrofuturism would become now, as we’ve been forced to adapt to new uses of technology — not just to complete the school term, but just to go about our daily lives.”

— Tananarive Due, lecturer on Afrofuturism in UCLA’s Department of African American Studies, speaking at the department’s virtual commencement on June 12. Professor Due followed by paraphrasing one of UCLA’s most well-known professors, Angela Davis, who said that to work for a better future, we must have faith that it is possible. Afrofuturism is investigating these possibilities for many people. (Jacobs)

Science fiction is a tool that modern and current African American writers use to reframe concepts about the history, present, and future of black culture. African American writers started to consider how racial relations were changing in light of technological advancements in the post-World War II and post-Civil Rights Movement eras. Technology’s transformation into a source of new African American fiction is explained by this change in the mechanization and digitalization of the black experience. Transhuman anamorphosis, cyberspace, and digital souls are a few examples of future topics that touch on the interactions between people and their surroundings. These thematic strategies give African American authors the means to debunk deterministic conceptions of race since they investigate humanity outside of its phenotypic confines. Afrofuturism is a race-specific response to the conceptual change of humankind that places black culture inside a high-tech setting. Technological and scientific advancement has given modern theory valuable resources, but these theoretical focuses have too seldom been integrated into critical racial discourses. This difference is a result of technical and scientific advancement, which has been used for centuries by global capitalism to justify scientific racism.

The term "Afrofuturism" refers to a thriving current movement of authors, artists, musicians, and thinkers who are African American, African, and Black diasporic. Afrofuturism is a body of creative work and academic thought that imagines greater justice and a freer expression of black subjectivity in the future or in alternative times, places, or realities. It includes literature, visual art, photography, film, multimedia art, performance art, music, and theory. Additionally, it makes assumptions about a society in which black people are the norm. Afrofuturism may also envision dystopian futures in which current inequalities are extrapolated and frequently made worse. However, Afrofuturist art frequently challenges ideas of linear time rather than simply focusing on the future. Afrofuturism, as it is more generally defined, reimagines not just new temporalities but also new black experiences and identities via science

fiction, speculative literature, and other forms of creative and intellectual expression. It frequently does this by examining the advantages and disadvantages of technoculture and posthumanism. Although the movement has undoubtedly grown significantly in recent years, particularly around 2000, its philosophical and artistic roots may be found in African American books from the middle and late 19th centuries that envisioned alternate worlds and societies for black people.

African American science fiction is where the word "Afrofuturism" first appeared. It is now commonly used to refer to writing, music, and visual art that examines the African-American experience, particularly the impact that slavery played in it. The science fiction authors Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany as well as the jazz singer Sun Ra, who developed a legendary figure that combined science fiction with Egyptian mysticism, are essential to the idea of Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism's core values are centred on this otherness. The filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu, the artist Ellen Gallagher, and the singer George Clinton have all been influenced by Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic, as well as a science and history philosophy, that investigates the intersection of African diaspora culture and science and technology. It addresses African diaspora themes and concerns through techno culture and speculative fiction, encompassing a variety of media and artists with a shared interest in imagining black futures based on Afro-diasporic experiences. While science fiction is most associated with Afrofuturism, it can also include fantasy, alternate history, and magical realism.

The term "Afrofuturism" was first used in 1994 by cultural critic Mark Dery to describe science fiction that explores African American themes and issues within the context of twentieth-century techno-culture, and, more broadly, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a future with prosthetic enhancements. Afrofuturism was primarily conceptualized by Dery in terms of Black people's interactions with science fiction and technology, but epistemologically, the term refers to Black people's future as a whole. In his Afrofuturism thinking, Dery questioned the black community's capacity for seeing the future due to Northern White Europeans' deliberate mass erasing of their history. Numerous academics have accepted variants of Afrofuturism since Dery first introduced it to the academic discourse, extending its ideological influence beyond the sci-fi setting. Adding to Dery's definition, Kodwo Eshun described Afrofuturism as a program for reclaiming the histories of counter-futures developed to resist Afrodiasporic projections. According to Eshun, the goal of Afrofuturism is for Africa to more and more frequently serve as the starting point for futuristic interventions that influenced social and political power. Afrofuturism and Black feminist philosophy, which both stress the significance of Blacks in the future knowledge and cultural creation as well as resistance to oppression, were integrated by Susana Morris to expand on Dery and Eshun's work. The pre-colonial history of African people may be used to create postcolonial futures that put Africa at the center, according to modern Afrofuturists. (Boyd Acuff, 2020, p-14)

In 1994, when Mark Dery first used the term "Afrofuturism," his main focus was on the postwar aesthetic strategies used by African American artists about contemporary American technoculture. To describe "other tales" of black communities that discuss culture, technology, and the future, he developed the phrase. African American artists were able to see the images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future and challenge the epistemological tendency where dominant rubrics of Eurocentric imagination have engineered and haunted public imagination thanks to the expansion of global capitalism, in which western culture's scientific rationales established themselves as a neutral standard of post-ideological order. Afrofuturism was born out of this historical setting. The modern techno-world became a place where new modes of cultural, political, and social signification redefined racial, gender, and sexual experience in a culture where market principles were seen as a natural outcome of historical progress and modern technologies were incorporated into consumer practices. (Dery, pp-180-182)

Dery's description of Afrofuturism suggests that the African American diaspora was a crucial source of a futuristic imagination in addition to focusing on the techno-aesthetic practices of contemporary black culture. According to Dery, because African Americans are the "descendants of alien abductees" who were sacrificed by the colonial west, their history of captivity has always prevented them from living in a "sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment (Dery, p-180).

African American literature has included futuristic ideas in the sense that it has ruminated on the uncharted territory where black bodies have been sub-humanized as a primordial site of terror. In the imaginary gap between, Black American culture has repeatedly reenacted its racist experience. This fantastical setting, like the haunted mansion in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the haunted vineyard in Charles Chesnutt's *Goophered Grapevine* draws on Afrofuturist themes to reimagine black realities that conventional reason may consider to be imaginary. It has been a significant source of artistic expression for the racial experience as a rhetorical tradition found in narrative genres including African folklore, hoodoo magic, and conjuring.

One of the least researched areas in African American study is Afrofuturism. However many Afrofuturistic memes the modern American pop-culture scene has produced, critics and the general public still tend to categorize this genre as a subgenre of science fiction and fantasy. These memes combine "science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs" to discuss the Afro-diasporic experience (Womack 9). Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, Samuel Delany, and Charles Saunders are well-known black science fiction authors, but they have received less attention from literary critics than William Gibson, Neal Stephenson, and Ray Bradbury.

It is not problematic in and of itself to read science fiction and fantasy written by African American authors within traditional general and theoretical frameworks. Afrofuturism, like its Euro-American counterpart, uncovers a reality in imagined eras and places that conventional epistemology had overlooked. Posthumanism, cybernetics, and cyborg theory are appropriated as the most trustworthy sources for the academic interpretation of contemporary black culture's aesthetic endeavor, and this is where black futuristic artworks gain consonance with "post-" theorizations that laid the groundwork for bringing science fiction and fantasy into academic focus.

Afrofuturism is a cultural philosophy that aims to recreate "Blackness" in the culture. It has been developed by generations of artists, singers, academics, and activists. It was created in the imaginations of Africans who were held as slaves and hoped for an oppression-free society. Through the use of technology, it assesses the past and future to improve conditions for the current generation of Black people. This is frequently done through the presentation of art, music, and literature. It serves as a manual for advancing civilization toward a time of Black emancipation. Black men and women have been motivated by Afrofuturism to give back to their communities, excel in STEM disciplines, and provide opportunities and leadership for their young people. It has also been used in social movements to combat racial supremacy and forge a future in which radicalism is viewed as a positive force for society. (Crompton, "What Is Afrofuturism and Why Is It a Blueprint for Our Future")

In the words of Nova Sparks, author of the Dome trilogy:

In Afrofuturism, we imagine ourselves and create whole worlds where we not only achieve greatness, but we are thriving in our own culture. There is a reason why films like Black Panther and novels written by Octavia Butler resonate so much in the African diaspora. We see the possibilities of a society of Black men and women that is steeped in our history, but also embraces our advancement while protecting both as a means for survival. Seeing this can and has inspired more of us to invest in our communities, to continue to dominate in the STEM field and the arts, and to move forward in our quest to reach back into our communities by creating opportunities and guidance for our youth. (Crompton, "What Is Afrofuturism and Why Is It a Blueprint for Our Future")

According to Tim Fielder, a graphic novelist, and creator of INFINITUM: An AfroFuturist Tale and Matty's Rocket:

We have the power to show what an inclusive future looks like. We can show what ergonomic housing and transportation, food, and water equality, as well as the dismantling of systemic racism, looks like. When a narrative is embedded with those visuals it takes on a more powerful connecting tissue. That is Afrofuturism." Whether intentional or not, Afrofuturism has been woven into social movements that worked against white supremacy to move toward a future where radicalism is viewed, not as something to be fought, but as a societal good. (Crompton, "What Is Afrofuturism and Why Is It a Blueprint for Our Future")

Afrofuturism shifts the focus of notionally theoretical fiction away from the white Anglo-centrism of conventional sci-fi and much of cyberpunk. There are tangible denotements that this destiny is constructed on a more culturally diverse terrain than the current one. They are macrocosms centred on Africa's history, heritage, and cosmological theories.

Many writers (especially the genre's progenitor, Octavia Butler) investigate counter-stories and cumulate science fiction and fantasy to engender incipient imaginary futures, not just for ebony folk's modern lives, but for everybody's lives. Science fiction has a history of excluding non-white persons from its portrayals of cutting-edge technology and the future of humanity. Less than one-third of the top 50 science fiction movies by box office since 1977 included a black protagonist. The absence of non-white characters in the genre has significant ramifications for how Africans and people of African descent are portrayed. Dr. Helen Klus wrote an article titled "Imagining the future: Why society needs science fiction", the impact of science fiction on people's conceptions of humanity is discussed by Dr. Klus. In conclusion, science fiction enables people to envision an idealistic future, which is one of the first steps toward creating a future for humanity that is more desired. So it's a problem that there aren't any black stories in science fiction. The absence of black characters in well-known science fiction movies sends the message that black perspectives are unimportant when thinking about humanity's future. Even if it may not be the movie's explicit message, viewing the future only through a white perspective simply marginalizes those who identify as black. When envisioning alternate futures, Afrofuturism allows black directors to prioritize black narratives. The movie *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler, is most notable for popularizing an Afro-futuristic representation of Africa and Africans. For the first time, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a multibillion-dollar property, included an idealized portrayal of an African nation ruled by a black superhero. (Lowe)

Afrofuturism can be defined as a movement in literature, art, and culture. It is a subculture that seeks to highlight the plight of black people. Although it started as a small colligation of an uprising, it has expanded into a fully-fledged subculture that is recognized and practiced by most Africans and African Americans (Lavender 12). It is manifested and communicated through music, written literature, paintings, and other works of art. (Lavender 14).

It began as a genre of music called Afrofuturist music which was popular in the 1950s (Adlakha). It was followed by Afrofuturist stories that were composed by African American storytellers including Charles Chesnutt and Edward Johnson (Bould 5). By the 1960s, the subculture was popular such that it had attracted and assimilated into jazz and popular music which had already been firmly established in American society. Afrofuturism is still evolving; it is in the middle stage of evolution. It is not yet at its advanced level but with the growing membership, it is guaranteed advancement in the future. One of the factors responsible for its longevity and attraction of more members is that it is passed from generation to generation. Afrofuturism is practiced not only as a subculture but as a way of life.

Afrofuturism is one of the most unique subcultures in American history. It is rich in the values, traditions, and norms of the African American community. It is also original since it draws its principles from the African American culture (Bould 8). The process of joining the subculture is not complex, all one needs to do is follow the values, norms, and traditions of the subculture. It is not discriminative of any particular people; anyone can join it if they wish to do so. One of the greatest motivations for joining this genre is that its members are accommodative, and it is aimed at enhancing unity in the community. Afrofuturism also seeks to encourage gender equality. It does not discriminate against any gender. Although African American culture was largely associated with masculinity in the past, the development of Afrofuturism led to women being incorporated into the practice of the culture (Lee).

Despite the subculture being often linked with the African American race, it accommodates members from other races as well. Members of the genre are drawn from all socio-economic classes. However, most of the ideals, norms, values, and traditions are largely from the African American community. Afrofuturism's consumer culture is largely controlled by African American culture. Afrofuturists are known to be conservatives, hence, they are less likely to consume fancy and luxurious products. It is associated with the production of indigenous products such as cereals and grains. Capitalism has a profound influence on the development of the subculture as it encourages members of it to fight for the recognition of their property rights.

One of the most dominant stereotypes held against the subculture is that it belongs to members of the African American community. Although it is largely driven by the norms, cultures, and values of the community, it involves participants from all races and ethnic identities. This stereotype has affected the way people view the subculture with people who are not African Americans shying away from joining it (Broadnax).

The subculture utilizes its media presence; it often appears in the media with Afro-futurists communicating the ideals of the subculture to the audience from the screen. The media has been highly cooperative and responsive to the values of the subculture. Its treatment of Afrofuturism is with respect and dignity of its members. It has represented the

subculture as a culture rich in values, norms, and traditions of the African American community. Despite the media being one of the channels used to spread propaganda against the community, it has also played an important role in communicating and spreading Afrofuturism. It has had a profound influence on the development of the culture with most of the participants recruited and joining the subculture through the media.

Afrofuturism is a representation of both ideals of the past and mainstream society. It has played a crucial role in passing the African American culture from one generation to the next. Through the subculture, Americans and the world at large have been able to understand and appreciate the African American culture (Lee).

Fortunately, the culture has not been resistant to change, and it has utilized mainstream media to pass on its values, norms, and traditions across the globe. Mainstream media has enabled the subculture to reach a wider audience and through it, Afrofuturists have been able to recruit more members (Broadnax). Despite it being used as a platform to propagate some of the derogative stereotypes, it has also enabled Afrofuturism to develop. Mainstream media also guarantees its future and that the subculture would not be extinct or assimilated into other cultures. Afrofuturism has become an important part of mainstream society and is still practiced in contemporary American society.

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