



Introduction to the Special Issue When is Wakanda: Afrofuturism and Dark Speculative Futurity

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We see the need to deepen, as Kodwo Eshun has phrased it in his article *Further Considerations on Afrofuturism* (2003), our Afrofutures “tool kit developed for and by Afrodiasporic intellectuals” with the imperative “to code, adopt, adapt, translate, misread, rework, and revise” visions of the black imagination and aspiration alongside a critical appraisal of the utopic, technologically sophisticated city state and space of Wakanda, the mythical black nation untouched by colonization in the film *The Black Panther*. As a historic, record setting film in terms of its cast and record breaking box office revenues, the *Black Panther* film simultaneously embodies and problematizes the Black Diasporic and Pan African imagination. At the same time, the *Black Panther* unfurls the curtain of Afrofuturism steeped in a stunning panoramic vision of African traditions combined with magic, technology, vibranium, fashion and fashionable wearables, multidimensional Feminist black women with careers, love interests and ambition, sensitive and vulnerable leaders, complex villains and flawed allies.

Coined by Mark Dery in the early 1990s, Afrofuturism has undergone a rapid theoretical expansion in the latest work *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*. In early 2000, Kodwo Eshun and Alondra Nelson were some of the first scholars to extend Afrofuturism by characterizing it “as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political [situation may be undertaken]. The manufacture, migration, and mutation of concepts and approaches within the fields of the theoretical and the fictional, the digital and the sonic, the visual and the architectural exemplifies the expanded field of Afrofuturism.” Eshun considered Afrofuturism “as a multimedia project distributed across the nodes, hubs, rings, and stars of the Black Atlantic”(Eshun, 2003).

Afrofuturism 2.0 represents a transition from previous ideas related to afrofuturism that were formed in the late 20th century around issues of the digital divide, music and literature. *Afrofuturism 2.0* expands and broadens the discussion around the concept to include religion, architecture, communications, visual art, philosophy and reflects its current growth as an emerging global Pan African creative phenomenon. Afrofuturism 2.0 is now characterized by five dimensions, to include: metaphysics; aesthetics; theoretical and applied science; social sciences; and programmatic spaces. In Afrofuturism 2.0, Astro-Blackness refers to “a person’s black state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities within the universe” (Rollins, 2015).

In this special issue, we aspire to expand and engage beyond the Black Atlantic to include the Black Pacific. This special issue encourages scholars to engage with Afrofuturism 2.0 perspectives, futures studies, Asian futurity, pan-African dialogue (*Scholars such as R.K. Edozie, Ali Mazrui and Kwame Nkrumah*) and the Black Pacific context (*with scholars such as R. Shilliam, E. Taketani, and B.V. Mullen*). Scholars such as Kodwo Eshun, Alondra Nelson, Julius Gatune, Ziauddin Sardar, Sohail Inayatullah, Jose Ramos, Jim Dator and others have challenged us to consider futures research outside of a Eurocentric perspective and inspire us to fashion new tools for Afrofutures speculative thought and applied research outside of a Eurocentric perspective and inspire us to fashion new tools for Afrofutures speculative thought and applied research. As a start, Afrofutures research begins with discovering weak signals of emerging future scenarios that Dr. Brooks has called Afrofuturetypes, that act as a basis for critiquing images of the future circulating as science fiction capital in popular culture by hacking and reimagining them with alternative agents and agency with black and other oppressed groups in mind. Black spirituals, rap and other black musical performances have envisioned the past, present and future to transform usually ghettoized dystopic spaces into domains of survival, redemption and openings for imagined futures. Afrofuturetypes help guide us in signaling and emphasizing black futures in process and on the horizon in the near to long-term futures.

Dark Speculative Futurity was defined by Reynaldo Anderson in the late 20th century and early 21st century development, as the emergence, and philosophical maturity of non-white people in regards to their own agency or significance in relation to humanity or other life forms. Furthermore, this futurity is about how they choose to describe or forecast phenomena in terms of their cultural purpose, principles, or goals in regards to global change, technological and social acceleration, ecological processes, and interstellar aspirations.

In this issue, we have five excellent peer-reviewed articles:

Amber Johnson acknowledges the significance of the Black Panther, and wonders how much of that reimagining required a return to dark matter or invisible labor for those bodies that live on the margins of the margins? This essay pinpoints the moments of invisibility and nostalgia that cloak queer narratives of existence as non-existent, uninhabitable, and undesirable. Richardo Guthrie builds on Johnson’s work by wondering how can Black speculative fiction re-fashion a de-colonial space beyond Wakanda, in the *current* nation-states and community places within which Afro-diasporic peoples struggle daily for sustenance, power, and joy? Hannah R. Stohry and Johnnie Jackson extend AfroAsian Futures to exist not just as bodies of land and water, but as embodied people. In this article, an African American male graduate student and a mixed Korean-American female graduate student, use autoethnography to explore their relationships with the movie *Black Panther*, and develop our concept of AfroAsian Futures. Jennifer Williams rigorously examines how the severe absence of blackness in media depictions of virtual reality and future media demonstrates the mistaken erasure of Black identity and culture within mainstream futurism. Douglas Taylor provides critical inquiry into the premises of the *Black Panther* film and echoes the expansion of Kodwo Eshun’s premise for Afrofuturism that resides at its core, a resilient mindfulness, where “[o]ngoing disputes over reparation [and police brutality] indicate that these traumas continue to shape

the contemporary era. It is never a matter of forgetting what it took so long to remember. Rather, the vigilance that is necessary to indict imperial modernity must be extended into the field of the future.” Confronted with technologies of oppression, Afrofuturism is born out of cruelty, and that cruelty of the colonial imagination was a necessary condition out of which the African diaspora had to reimagine its future (Brooks, 2018).

Powerful shorter contributions by speculative storytellers, designers and Afrofuturists Woodrow Wilson, Philip Butler, Craig Dirksen, Lonny Brooks, and Kalembe Kizito and tobias c. van veen bring an applied view of implementing Wakandan visions now and into the future with an added ironic satirical analysis of Saturday Night Live and the double entendre of finding ourselves on Black Jeopardy.

Inspired in part by the regional and global Black Speculative Arts Movement (bsam-art.com), these perspectives are advancing the state of futures studies and this issue reflects an expansion of Afrofuturism as part of a plurality of future visions to democratize the future.

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