

Edited Collection: Afrosouthernfuturism

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Afrosouthernfuturism

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Afrofuturism continues to be a critical point of inquiry in the Black speculative arts, offering a framework with which even those who are deeply critical of it must engage. Since Mark Dery coined the term in 1994—and Samuel R. Delaney immediately pushed back on the terms of his definition—many scholars and creatives have levied their own definitions of the term. Isaiah Lavender III defines Afrofuturism as “a narrative practice that enables users to communicate the interconnection between science, technology, and race across centuries, continents and cultures.” And yet Lavender also argues that Afrofuturism can and has taken many forms, including afrotopia, afroalienation, steamfunk, Imhotep-hop, black quantum futurism, Afrofuturism 2.0, speculative blackness, Africanfuturism, blackutopia, among other iterations. Hugo award-winner N.K. Jemisin expands Afrofuturism to include musical productions (think Toshi Reagon’s *Parable of the Sower* Opera or Sun Ra’s performances) and visual aesthetics (consider the art of Betye Saar, April Bey, or Wangechi Mutu) “meant to evoke thoughts about the future, meant to encourage people to imagine paradigms, new ways of living, and so on— but not explicit.” Most importantly, Jemisin articulates a distinction between Afrofuturism as a theoretical and intellectual framework and Afrofuturism as a creative, artistic practice.

We build on these frameworks of Afrofuturism to generate sustained engagement with southernness as an Afrofuturist practice, and the South as an Afrofuturist space. The northern United States displaces its anti-blackness, political practices of disenfranchisement, and ongoing issues with public infrastructure, resources, and bodily autonomy onto “backward” US Souths, despite, as Jarvis McInnis has argued, the diffusion of these issues throughout the entire country. This collection seeks to place newly emerging work in Black Southern Studies—including L.H. Stallings, Regina Bradley, R. Scott Heath, among others—in direct

conversation with Afrofuturism to consider and explore what the South has to say about its possible futures. To that end, *Afrosouthernfuturism* examines how politics of and from below transform our understanding of Southern resistance, and Southern ways of being and knowing by examining how Black southerners collapse time and space through their ongoing interrogation of chattel slavery and its afterlives.

Afrosouthernfuturism actively contends with what Saidiya Hartman has described as “the routinized violence of slavery and its aftermath through invocations of the shocking and terrible,” while also shaping worlds within conceptual frameworks of ontological freedom, articulated by Frank Wilderson III as “freedom from the world, freedom from Humanity, freedom from everyone (including one’s Black self).” By imagining Blackness beyond and within the boundaries of the human body, the US South, and the planet, *Afrosouthernfuturist* texts are vital explorations of the (un)certainly of Black survival and the promise and potential of Black futures.

Topics can include but are not limited to:

- Black Souths as comprised of manifold spatiotemporalities, as times in contradiction to each other
- Resistance to constructions of the south as antimodern, eternally antebellum
- Black Souths as constructed of several diasporas, forged in and of and by them
- Black Southern history and experience with migration as worldmaking
- Exodusters, interstellar travelers, (im)migrants, aliens
- Can you take the South with you?
- Queering (or quaring) Black Souths, and the impacts of gender and sexuality on region and speculation
- Black Southern aesthetics of futurity and speculation
- Black Southern engagement with technologies
- Cultural Souths versus regional Souths
- Relations between Black Souths and (dis)ability, (especially as it relates to crip time and space)
- The South as a space conducive to Afrofuturist practice and worldmaking
- The under-studied Southernness of Afrofuturist artists including Erykah Badu, Sun Ra, Missy Elliott, Beyoncé (and those with adjacency to the South or the South’s diasporas, such as Janelle Monae, Stevie Wonder, Prince, Michael Jackson)

For inclusion on this collection, please submit abstracts of 250-300 words and a brief bio to afrosouthernfuturism@gmail.com by February 3, 2023. Contributors will be notified by May 1, 2023. Full essays of 5000 words to be due by January 15, 2024.

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Kristen Reynolds is a doctoral student in the department of American Studies at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. She studies the role that Black speculative art plays in decentering the human in dominant technologies.

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