

Manifestos of Futurisms

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As a central conceit of illusory spatio-temporal epistemological mastery, the idea of the 'future' undergirds the speculative dimensions of science fiction. Given the extensive literature on the topic, this seems a truism. I raise this to articulate a different point: the twinned notions of the decolonial and anti-colonial, if invoked only for sf, serve to legitimize the existence of a cadaverous generic ideal, which needs some form of expiation/exorcism in its afterlife. Here, I am uninterested in exorcism. I am interested instead in dealing with challenges to the space of articulation *colonized* by sf: the idea of the future, as historical artefact and legacy of colonialism, and as an aesthetic marker of generic differentiation. Specifically, I am interested in the politics of what may (temporarily) be called 'futurisms' and the meta-theoretical methods employed to shape them.

In this article, I read select manifestos and manifesto-aligned texts of African, Afro, Arabic, Asian, and Indigenous futurisms, all written in the past decade, as political art forms, whose task is to recreate the fictionality of the future as a domain of complexity rather than one that can be described via the aetiology of progress, whether that future is utopian or dystopian. These manifestos seek or have the potential to fissure the generic space to which sf belongs, but sf itself, from the point of anti-colonial articulation of possible futures, might be irrelevant. Thus, these manifestos are not about the definition (or lack thereof) of sf or even its death. Instead, these manifestos alter the generic grounds of fictionality that restrict the motility of possible futures. By engaging with the form and function of futures directly rather than via accumulation tropes necessary for generic cohesion (by utilizing the advantages that the games of philosophy have over those of fiction), many of these manifestos refuse to acknowledge sf altogether except occasionally as a foil, since sf's generic pretensions are tacitly considered the form, mode, and example of colonialism.

Following a discussion of the nature of these manifestos and their construction of futurism as orienting component, I turn to three different markers: complexity, coevalness, and compossibility. I examine how they *play* with these markers to dislodge coloniality and restructure the aesthetics and politics of futures. For many futurisms, the positions advanced in these manifestos complement the political praxes of consolidating or supporting diverse communities, predominantly minority ones, within and outside the communities of creators of futurisms. Because these praxes and the aesthetic restructurings draw upon the experiences of the articulating communities and have (or can have) significant socio-political implications, I restrict myself to the general characteristics of such manifestos.

The Manifestos of Possibility

When thinking about the idea of futurism, scholars, primarily from outside BIPOC communities, often begin with F.T. Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto' (1909). However, Marinetti's influential text for the present purposes of discussing futurisms is as little productive as opening a laundromat in a nudist colony. I think it is much more useful to examine the contexts within which these futurisms are articulated and the arguments they make. In particular, two watershed moments within primarily anglophone creative communities, Racefail '09 and Puppygate (2013–16) became accelerants for recent futurism framings. While problems had long been visible to artists and fans from marginal/marginalized creator communities, especially non-Anglophone communities such as those from Latin America, China, or South Asia, who were already resistant to the centrality of sf in framing futurisms, these moments brought decolonization home to genre debates. While Racefail '09 arose as a debate around racism in sf writing outside one's ethnic boundaries, Puppygate resulted from resistance to diversity in sf publishing, marketing, and awards. These futurisms are a response to the fundamental inequalities foregrounded by these moments, as well as the rightward shift and nationalist upsurge in global politics accompanying these debates. They take shape as strategies of claiming space to develop futures that reflect the demands and desires of the margins. These futurisms do not occupy the vapid and vacuous space of 'crisis' imaginaries, whether 'climate', 'financial' or 'genre'. They recognize that crisis narratives are a privileged mode of dealing with the world, operating on the singularities of 'breaks' and 'ruptures', when for most of the world, the break would be a break from the horrors of the everyday. These futurisms *are* generative and robust, seeking instead a complexity of perspectives that can address the problems of jingoistic cultural and ethnic nationalisms, especially those built on genocidal exclusions and ahistorical identity politics of difference. To foster complexity, these futurisms engage in cross-movement measures of intersectional solidarities.

Futurisms in their own right, these manifestos communicate with each other to offer pathways to presents and futures built on different principles from the world of colonial and neo-colonial violence. They become meta-theoretical; their purpose is to alter the grounds for theoretical reflection by taking over the infrastructures of fictional futures. What ties them together is the notion of futurism as orienting component; that is, these manifestos politically and aesthetically call for futurisms and are themselves part of that call. The space occupied by these manifestos can have greater symbolic weight than even the fictions since these are unfettered by the considerations of marketability and generic cohesion. While theorists of genre have previously linked Wittgensteinian games to sf (Kincaid 2003: 413–18), these manifestos participate in philosophic

games of developing possible worlds, rather than fiction games of doing the same. This underlying difference turns the manifestos into critical frameworks that elide, move beyond, or reject sf studies altogether: the strength of the difference proportional to the distance from sf. Hence, within the fiction game, an Afrofuturist text may be marketed to readers of sf, be published by the same publishers as those that publish sf, and even get sf awards, but within the philosophic game, their differences can be better articulated as political and aesthetic positions. As meta-theoretical texts, these manifestos and manifesto-like texts rupture the genre body to displace sf's claims to the future. In the following sections, I discuss the nature of this displacement.

On Time Out of Space: Complexity as the Opening Move

The World Fantasy Award 2020 on the shelf behind me is a beautiful statuette by Vincent Villafranca. Until recently, the award statuette was a bust of H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's racism is inseparable from his genre fiction (Okorafor 2011), just as the sf imaginary is tainted by the violence of colonialism and early anthropology (Rieder 2008). Other towering figures of the field, such as John W. Campbell, have been challenged and pulled down from their heights; their ideas re-examined (Doctorow 2019). While to critics of these developments, these are considered efforts at rewriting the whole history of the fantastic genres, these developments, in reality, challenge the infrastructure of these genres, their nature and history: they dissect what counts as fantasy, what counts as science, what counts as horror, and what counts as fiction, what processes make these terms count and have value, what processes support their existence, marketing, and dissemination. The *future* might be seen to belong predominantly to one such genre space of sf, but it can occupy any other genre space. Thus these manifestos prioritize making the future flexible.

But first – what is this future? The future is not merely temporal; it comprises images given temporal values, images where time percolates: a flying car or a skyscraper is considered more futuristic than a bullock cart or adobe hut. These values, based on developmental paradigms, have little basis in lived experience. There is nothing inherently futuristic about either. Indeed, those are imagined possible futures in futurisms: one which turns the future on its head and projects more adobe huts rather than more skyscrapers – which can be considered a satiric mode common to post-apocalyptic models – and the other which rejects the temporal separation altogether, so that skyscrapers and adobe huts co-exist or even become fused, which can be considered a satiric and realistic mode typical to futurisms. This latter rejects the wish-fulfilment development paradigm and resembles the many directions of lived reality. If the teloi of sf were forged in colonialism, the teloi of these futurisms take on

board the lived experiences of those colonialisms from the margins, be it the experience of slavery, of linguistic hybridity, or attempts of cultural genocide. They target the *why* of things: why specific images are considered futuristic, or why things, in reality, are more muddled than simple developmental paradigms. Thus, they do not seek to decolonize sf but decolonize the infrastructural foundations of the images associated with the future. Instead of the future as telos captured in spaces and images, these futurisms restore to time its many temporalities by ejecting it out of space. Futurisms are the change, and foster change: and bidirectionally, change happens simultaneously to the past – as the histories of the many that have been unacknowledged or erased – and to the future, as futures that become possible when these many other histories are also recognized and acknowledged.

This complexity encapsulates the decolonial argument embedded in the manifestos. For Sulaïman Majali, who developed the term ‘Arabfuturism’, this aesthetic shift towards futurisms consistently blends into the spectacle of the ‘Other’ that is considered a European crisis. In his manifesto, the motif of ‘something’ that is ‘happening in Europe’ (Majali 2015: 151) is undercut by past and future concerns. Europe in the text serves as the foil against which futures are to be defined and the prison that traps possible futures: ‘Indefinable in the emergence of an autonomous hybrid sedimentation of identities that is dismantling the boundaries and expanding the borderzones between constructs of culture and civilization that have assembled a contrived European identity in opposition to an historic Other’ (151). Even without naming sf, these futures invoke and revoke that genre template offered by sf, with its colonial trap of Humans and Aliens, and which also serve as the point of origin and differentiation for different futurisms in the critical discourse on global sf. Futurisms target nationalism, even if its spectre threatens to erupt due to the fragmentation of historical knowledge. The manifesto’s own unfinished form underscores such fragmentation as a stylistic ploy. The nation is defined as a ‘citadel of illusion that has collapsed’ (151), while Arabfuturism is defined in emergent terms as something that is ‘beyond the logic of the state’ (151) but also, critically, as the ‘re-examination and interrogation of narratives that surround oceans of historical fiction’ (152). Such statements are strewn throughout the essay, and they function as teasers for possibilities for futures, meta-theoretical reflections rather than specific guidelines for the worlds to come. Because it is beyond the logic of the state, the Arab world is rarely invoked in the piece; instead, it becomes the ground for a new political aesthetic and cultural imaginary of possible futures.

Much more grounded in the sf field, Yudhanjaya Wijeratne’s ‘Ricepunk Manifesto’ (2019) does not evoke ‘futurism’ in the title. However, it similarly plays

with the future, both as a historical and prospective concept. The manifesto presents identity itself as something that is continually being dismantled:

We are the East and the West, the ancient and the new, the bastard lovechild of machined denim and handloomed cotton.

We are paradoxes. We live chaotic lives in chaotic worlds, born into difference, and we carry difference with us. We shift under identities that fall apart on closer examination. We take labels and discard them. We are at home in the highest office and the lowest tea-shack on the road. (Wijeratne 2019).

Ricepunk also uses the 'West' as a foil and as a prison: the duality of identity is used to rupture the notion of a singular history. Histories stretch into deep pasts and also cascade into deep futures. Rhetorically, the manifesto proliferates multiplicity on different scales: 'societies bound not by one utopia, or two, but by tens, hundreds, thousands', 'not one god, but millions', 'diversity taken to the thousandth power', 'centuries', 'thousands of years', 'teeming', 'scales never fully grasped' (Wijeratne 2019). The complexity highlights the underlying logic for the futures created in these other futurisms, which, explicit in the manifesto, can remain implicit in the fiction marketed as 'sf'. Just as the colonial logic of sf is buried in the images of the future devised within the genre, these new futurisms shake the grounds of that construction by decentring the logic of creation elsewhere: here, in the specific conditions of diversity and difference that are at the heart of Asian life. Hence the evocation of an Asian – specifically South Asian – aesthetic is much clearer in the 'Ricepunk Manifesto' than the Arab world in Majali's text.

Martine Syms's 'The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto' (2013) picks apart the images of past futures, one by one, forging possibilities for Mundane Afrofuturism. The manifesto riffs upon Geoff Ryman's 'Mundane Manifesto' (2004) and stylistically mirrors the former, but the concerns differ markedly. Unlike the former, where the rejection of colonial and racist tropes is taken up and dismissed in one line, the latter focuses upon Black diasporic artistic production and the different images of the future that imprison it and become its self-projection. Thus the manifesto rejects many of the images of Afrofuturism itself, for instance, references to Sun Ra, Drexciya or Janelle Monáe (which undoubtedly raises critical concerns about the importance of history to any new movement), and it also rejects the tropes based on Black populations and their experience. It dismisses analogies and tropes that have formed the bedrock of sf and science-fictional aesthetics, where colonial tropes can be enfolded in sf metaphors, irrespective of the artist and their reason for utilizing those metaphors: 'jive-talking aliens', 'white slavery' or 'sassiness', labelling them all

as unexamined and hackneyed tropes to be set alight (Syms 2013). Mundanity comes from everyday experience since racism and structural inequality cannot be wished away or inverted by magical thinking but require consistent efforts to be solved. The manifesto emphasizes the aesthetics of duality: 'The understanding that our "twoness" is inherently contemporary, even futuristic' (Syms 2013). It achieves its effects without mentioning sf, since sf too must be cast in the 'bonfire of the Stupidities' once the inherent multiplicity of futurisms comes to be recognized (Syms 2013).

All three manifestos offer a twofold argument: rejection, especially of past framings of futures that draw upon puerile and racist caricature (whether that past future is in a genre such as sf, or the deeper infrastructures that underlie fantastical genres); and proposition, futurisms in the sense of openness and fragmentation. By breaking apart the grammar of images that constitute futures, they reject linear temporality and even teleology itself; the future is no longer an inexorable trajectory towards Disney's Tomorrowland or Banksy's Dismaland. By not mentioning sf as a rhetorical strategy, these manifestos lay the foundations for futurisms that are simultaneously more realistic in being grounded in different people's experiences and more extravagant in the possibilities they offer beyond the singularities of generic prisons. If sf's imaginary utilized people of colour, the colonized and the marginalized for its aliens and robots, then the same tropes cannot be used within sf to imagine any form of emancipatory politics. Rather, they can only be vivisected within the critical space opened up by these new futurisms to make way for any such politics. These manifestos do not decolonize sf: they decolonize the singularity of the future. The colonial foundations and imagery of sf are indirectly decolonized as part of that process. The world becomes a richer and more complex cultural space.

On the Spaces Consumed by the Future: Coevalness as the Second Move

The future is not only constructed via images, it is also grounded in an understanding of physical space: where different parts of the world, and the people who belong there, are considered more advanced than others. Physical space is readily perceptible in political and social discourse but is also part of the spatial infrastructures of the future within sf. The marking of spaces as futuristic or backward is a political move of the progress-oriented teleology that underpins the linear model of economic development. In the colonial and neo-colonial myth that underpins this linear model and which spills over to characterizations such as the Global North and Global South today, much of the world outside the 'West' was and remains economically and socially impoverished, to be compensated by the export of liberal democracy, laissez-faire economics,

and technological artefacts and structures. This myth also often characterizes indigenous cultures as lacking in technology or science, primitive and never futuristic, making technologies and advanced political systems seem alien and otherworldly in their context (Chatterjee 1997). Such characterization elides the deeper entangled histories of these technologies and political systems, which have been a product of different kinds of entanglements between communities and peoples, including peoples and communities from the Global North and South. These entanglements have much to do with structures of colonial ethnic violence as well as structures of class violence experienced by the marginalized internally within different societies.

In the twenty-first century, these manifestos show that we need to dispense with snappy mantras like unequal distribution of futures: futures and pasts belong everywhere and everywhen. Even from the perspective of globalization, both North and South increasingly mirror one another: there is North in the South, and South in the North, which often makes many such distinctions meaningless even in the filing cabinet of development and aid politics. The widespread inculcation of linear models of economic development worldwide means that any hint of a breakdown of that linearity is labelled a *crisis* moment: when development comes to a halt and even begins to reverse. The post-apocalyptic imaginary within sf and neo-colonial politics represents precisely this: the Global South and its conditions *are* the dystopia that awaits the Global North when the latter is increasingly subjected to the threefold pressures of climate, demographic and technological change. This is the politics that drives the planning of futures built on reinvigorated nationalisms, border walls, and guards that resist the supposed dystopia raging outside, while police states destroy minorities with impunity within. Just as the nation-state's purity is maintained by erecting borders, gatekeeping maintains the purity of genre in what constitutes the future and the past of the genre. The appearance of these new futurisms goes beyond the question of generic borders and into the realm of political resistance – by proposing futures otherwise cancelled or denied by authoritarian regimes. The complexity of histories and futurisms cracks the authoritarianism of gatekeeping. While the analogy between the gatekeeping of the state and the gatekeeping of genre is not uniform, the questioning of the former necessarily takes on the latter since, in both cases, they contest the role of teleology. If teleological futures, which promise a trajectory towards utopia, appear increasingly dystopian, it also becomes difficult to imagine utopian futures that are not a manifestation one way or another of this dystopian mode. Techno-orientalism manifests as one iteration of this dystopian mode (Roh et al 2015: 1–19).

However, in addressing the spatial imaginaries of the future, these manifestos are also radically decentring by proposing spaces that are neither rigid nor

imposed. Nnedi Okorafor provides one such distinction between African- and Afrofuturism. For Okorafor, while Afrofuturism places African Americans at the centre of its definition, Africanfuturism puts Africa and African experience first, even as it claims globality: 'Africanfuturism is rooted in Africa and then it branches out to embrace all blacks of the Diaspora [...] It's global' (Okorafor 2019). As a diasporic writer herself, Okorafor's description of her powerful narratives as Africanfuturist recuperates an African identity that Afrofuturism displaces: 'the concepts of Africa and futurism cannot be separated (or replaced with something else) because they both blend to create something new' (Okorafor 2019). Importantly, unlike the manifestos discussed previously, Okorafor's Africanfuturism is defined by her as a branch of sf, specifically concerned with the future. Still, even there one notices the triple move, which roots the future to a space outside the west, carries a strong sense of history, and explicitly rejects the dystopian mode:

Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people), and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with 'what could have been' and more concerned with 'what is and can/ will be'. It acknowledges, grapples with and carries 'what has been'. (Okorafor 2019)

Grace Dillon's introduction to her edited anthology, *Walking the Clouds* (2012), advances a similar framing for Indigenous futurisms. Throughout the essay, Dillon pulls apart, breaks down, and reshapes different kinds of sf tropes and ideas: native slipstream takes on non-linear space-time; contact narratives deal with sf's colonial meeting of aliens and humans, Native apocalypse turns the idea on its head by exploring the mergence of the biblical concept with colonial genocidal violence, and Indigenous science dissects the concept of western science with Indigenous scientific literacies. In Dillon's framing, the idea of the future temporally realigns the historical past (that includes the more recent engagement with colonial violence as well as Indigenous histories predating it by thousands of years), deep time (the dreamtimes and cyclical histories that recur in Indigenous cultures) and the many possible futures that follow from these. The spatial and temporal realignments are inseparable in Indigenous futurisms themselves:

It might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves,' which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional

and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. This process is often called 'decolonization' and as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) explains, it requires *changing* rather than *imitating* Eurowestern concepts. (Dillon 2012: 10)

By exposing sf's colonial imagery, the future within sf as a straight linear arrow rather than a continuous process of violence in the present comes undone, and with it, the progressive narrative embedded into the genre's structural framework whose teloi are nostalgic utopia or future dystopia. The rejection of teleology makes space for deep futures that carry a recognition of all the violence of the past and the present, but which, for precisely those reasons, also carries a profoundly hopeful cultural memory of healing and renewed balance.

All these manifestos simultaneously relocate futures temporally, spatially, epistemically, and in terms of genre. These relocations build on each other and are inextricably linked. Temporally, the signalled futures draw upon deeper pasts, a function that integrates Indigenous cosmologies and socio-cultural roots and harnesses alternative pasts for alternative possible futures. Thus, the future is not an empty signal to the retrofuturist mode, but futures are pluralized to signal a more accurate historical mode. Spatially, these futures move the centre of production of the specific futurist imaginary and/or from the locations opened up by the deepening of time and history. Epistemically, the future is relocated from its basis in a narrative of progress, which is challenged for its societal effects, to its basis in a narrative of complexity, which uses alternative cosmologies and alternative ways of knowledge-making. In other words, they bring to the present coevalness.

Furthermore, these futurisms are not really set in opposition to sf. Instead, they envelop, encircle, inhabit and transform it. They create alternative ways of shaping the history of sf, which disintegrates the colonial paradigm of sf originating in Europe and America and then being transferred to the rest of the world. By fusing speculation with deep time, these futurisms promote a vision of sf as an artefact that predates the specificity and narrowness of these origin stories. This is an intensely political act that recognizes that neither the past nor the future is simple, that places and peoples belong to the same times, and that origin stories as systems for maintaining hierarchies need to be discarded. A history of human futurisms, complex and coeval, replaces the history of sf.

The Times of the All before the Time of the Few

The flexible mechanics of sf remain responsive to any temporal stretching, whether the deep past or the deep future, which is why futurisms resonate with it. However, this flexibility gets corrupted at the meta-theoretical realm, which

is where these futurisms diverge from sf. The hierarchies of sf also come into being at the meta-theoretical level. Hence origins, meanings and purity lend sf their story as an Enlightenment artefact, forged (depending on which history one turns to) by ‘founders’ such as Thomas More, Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Hugo Gernsback or John W. Campbell. Such questions of heritage and canonicity are rarely questioned except when historiography itself is transformed, and origin stories are made complex and endlessly deep without a starting-point. As numerous critics have argued, there is no such thing as sf (cf. Vint and Bould 2009). The idea of many possible futures – of futurisms – of time itself as flow is undoubtedly ancient, except that the kind of fiction designated as sf has in more recent history worked as a vessel for storytelling that involves the future.¹ Thus, when the history of sf is written, and new canons are built, many different futures and futurisms get realigned and colonized within the genre shell of sf, or, slightly more expansively, within the borders and boundaries of ‘global sf’. Consider, for instance, the recent *Cambridge History of Science Fiction* (2019) which, even at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, repeats the exact formula of previous histories, with a prefatory chronology that perpetuates the Euro-American origin story and then fits in everything else.² While the editors unreflectingly and blindly replicate what has gone before and thus deserve no extra censure, it is easy to see the deep conservatism of this kind of sf historiography and why other futurisms, whether Indigenous, African, Arabic, Chinese or South Asian, with their sense of deep futures, might consider that the best place for this form of conservative sf scholarship, along with other colonial myths, is the garbage-bin. Thus the meta-theoretical project that these manifestos outline is not merely a presentation for futures in fiction: it is a cancellation of the politics of sf historiography which does not recognize either coevalness or complexity.

Hence, sf ceases to be recognized as the form and content of these futurisms at the meta-theoretical level, even as they play with it as cognate futurism. They abandon the easy conflation of sf and the future regardless of location (the game played by sf historiography in order to give European and Anglo-American sf the edge of colonial conquest and philosophical control of the idea of the future) and play with many futures in reshaping histories as well as possibilities. New suns – new possibilities for genres – emerge in this playfulness that is not captured by the traditional origin story. Science fiction, where recognized or named, is made part of a large family of futurisms, rather than sf being either the origin or the head of that family. In other cases, it is simply discarded.

Perhaps the most extreme form of this rejection refutes the idea of the ‘future’, such as in the brilliant manifesto released by Indigenous Action in 2020, which rips sf apart without naming it:

Why can we imagine the ending of the world, yet not the ending of colonialism?

We live the future of a past that is not our own.

It is a history of utopian fantasies and apocalyptic idealization.

It is a pathogenic global social order of imagined futures, built upon genocide, enslavement, ecocide, and total ruination.

What conclusions are to be realized in a world constructed of bones and empty metaphors? A world of fetishized endings calculated amidst the collective fiction of virulent specters. From religious tomes to fictionalized scientific entertainment, each imagined timeline constructed so predictably; beginning, middle, and ultimately, The End. (Indigenous Action 2020)

This is the future within sf – utopias, apocalypses, origin stories – the continuing and continual colonial project. The manifesto eviscerates sf’s familiar tropes – its zombies, aliens, monstrous others – and reveals the irredeemable nature of a future imaginary that does not recognize a future beyond itself. Specifically, it rejects both absolutes of origin and apocalypse, and by doing so rejects the specific form of futures fostered by sf as well as sf historiography:

Our ancestors dreamt against the end of the world.

Many worlds have gone before this one. Our traditional histories are tightly woven with the fabric of the birthing and ending of worlds.

Through these cataclysms we have gained many lessons that have shaped who we are and how we are to be with one another. Our ways of being are informed through finding harmony through and from the destruction of worlds. The Elliptic. Birth. Death. Rebirth. (Indigenous Action 2020)

This opening of the temporal to futures that are not absolute or singular but multiple, which ‘exist without time’ (Indigenous Action 2020), is the meta-theoretical enterprise inaugurated by these futurisms. I find it hardly surprising that many of them that play with time are deeply conscious of mythic, mythological and alternative knowledges (see also Chattopadhyay 2016; Dillon 2012; Shawl 2019). Perhaps we need to enquire how and where these futurisms emerge and are recognized, what places, times, contexts do they come from, and how do they speak to each other. These questions belong to a framework of plurality that is permanently antithetical to a singular genre with an origin and an end. Here, the future is let loose in its timelessness.

Although seemingly less radical than the previous manifesto, Black Quantum Futurism (BQF), a project by Camae Ayewa and Rasheedah Phillips, uses the future strategically to design and shape pasts and possible futures. Like other Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist strategies, the project blends insights

from quantum physics and futurisms with 'Black/African cultural traditions of consciousness, time and space' (Phillips 2015: 11). It offers a different approach to the shaping of non-linear time:

Why BQF over the present state of reality? Because a linear mode of time, which dominates time consciousness in Western society does not allow access to information about the future and only limited information about the past. The ways in which we are situated in time comes to be reflected in how we think about, talk about, and conceptualize the community, world and universe around us. In a linear conception of time, which is built into our language, behaviour, and thought, the past is fixed and the future is inaccessible until it passes through the present. The present moment is fleeting, but ever-present. Time's asymmetrical, uni-directional quality, however, is not an inherent or a priori feature of nature. It only appears this way because we have learned to order and make sense of the world this way. (12)

BQF's engagement with non-linearity represents artistic creativity and visioning, which means they are interested in taking over the space of futurism as well as the space of practice dependent on futurism. They use non-linearity and non-causality to reshape and mould both presents and pasts, utilizing possible futures as the horizon. Thus their practice intersects with futures studies, specifically with community-oriented collective action, much as Indigenous Action seeks to do. These manifestos do not merely present fiction; instead, they begin to reshape and decolonize the infrastructures of which sf is a visible, albeit relatively small, part.

The Narrow Road to Deep Cofutures

The eruption of futurisms as theoretical lenses reshaping entire genre infrastructures has precipitated calls such as the one to which this essay responds: 'decolonizing sf'. As these manifestos show, decolonizing sf is irrelevant, not only because it does not exist, but because the lifeblood of what is known as sf, its history, foundations, origin myths, like its tropes, is colonialism. Instead, one can use images of decolonized futures as templates to transform our actions in the present and reject colonial histories and foundational myths of identities. Sf too – and its historiographies – may be freed from the colonial infrastructures that restrict possible futures by imprisoning deep histories. Decolonization is futurism.

Hence sf, beyond the point of its philosophical non-existence, serves as an ideal target for the decolonizing practices embraced by futurisms that seek to dismantle the very infrastructures of futures. Hence the logic of 'People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction', the title of *Lightspeed Magazine's* June 2016

issue. A manifesto from the five editors prefaces the volume. The plurality of voices echoes the plurality of futurisms and shows the fissures and possibilities in this destructive project. While Nalo Hopkinson and Kristine Ong Muslim think of the collection as a step in the history of the genre, a move away from white male-centric sf, for Nisi Shawl and Grace Dillon, the history itself becomes more complex. Shawl calls this project of destruction an old one, claiming that People of Colo(u)r have been destroying sf for centuries and will continue to do so, while Dillon uses Indigenous futurisms as a lens to reshape sf altogether, arguing that the experimental narrative techniques employed by sf authors have existed for millennia in Indigenous storytelling. While the project of destruction is welcome, it is but one step to these futurisms taking its place.

In the last two decades, but especially the one under discussion here, genre histories of sf have repeatedly tried to colonize these futurisms and de-/anti-colonial efforts, especially as global sf. Multilingual scholars, those who are fortunate enough to see the world from more lenses than just the anglophone, know implicitly that the formulation of global sf does not hold but still use it as an easy strategy to stake a claim to the same marketplace as those occupied by sf studies. However useful and critically important, these strategies only reinforce the hegemony of sf as a descriptor since tied to that remains the permanent taint of a colonial legacy and history. The manifestos show that a different way of thinking is possible, one more sensitive to context, embracing plurality over uniformity: one where not only does the future happen everywhere, it also happens differently – it does not arise in Silicon Valley and go elsewhere, it is born and forged in the street corners of Shanghai, in the open markets of Lagos, in the festivals of Kolkata, in the bazaars of Istanbul, in the carnivals of Sao Paolo. The similarity of these futurisms to phenomena elsewhere is not a generic resemblance that may be boxed in the prison of global sf. Their fundamental differences do not need to be erased to build up some neo-colonial design of comparability (comparison is what globalitarianism seeks to do), leading to a renewed closure of possible futures. Instead, they can be collocated as dissonant experiences that are the reality of life, both in terms of what speaks, who speaks, to what, and in which conditions. Instead of uniformity, we have instability; instead of prediction, we have the frisson of possibilities. Hence the meta-theoretical function employed by these manifestos. They are not fiction and do not seek cognitive estrangement: they seek cognitive reconstruction.

Critical formulations such as 'other futures' are perhaps worse since they seem to have learnt no lessons whatsoever from the last half-century of theoretical discourse around 'othering'. They reproduce the ahistorical colonial normativity of a future to which there are 'others'. There is no such singular future. Instead, there are only what might be more adequately called multiple

futures or multiplicity of futures – of human, non-human and non-biological life – to which futurisms stake a claim. Formulations such as ‘ethnofuturisms’ also fall apart under investigation since there are many other ways in which these categories operate: there are as many futurisms as there are us, hence the possibilities of different formulations such as Queer Futurisms, Solarpunk, Xenofuturisms. To imagine decolonization is to see futurisms as praxes rather than end-points, openings rather than closures. As closures, they fall into the trap of comparativism, of hierarchies, indeed, the closure of possible futures to the images of the future. As openings, they are new ways of gathering histories and making new possibilities. The manifestos simply take the tentative, critical steps suggesting such openings.

Not Other, not Global, something, but deeper and more diverse – it is not to be consumed by genre colonialism. Perhaps the best formulation we currently have is simply futurisms. I propose a further move, one which does not take away from these previous formulations but can be approached as the next critical step. I call this *cofutures* (no hyphen). *Co* represents complexity, coevalness and compossibility. This last acknowledges the dual realms of praxes and fiction and becomes a critical point that can allow us to differentiate between probable, possible and preferred futures. Compossibility is a state where two things are together possible. Different futures, while they may both be possible, may not be compossible; that is, they may not be together possible. Here, fiction diverges from praxes. In fiction, it is possible to maintain many different possible futures in the same stream. In praxes, it is quite different. For example, the nostalgia and demand for a future based on a monocultural past or that of a homogenized future of collapsed differences are not compossible with the vision and need for a more democratic, pluralistic, diverse, cacophonous, multicultural future. Nevertheless, both are equally valid, possible models of the future. To ensure diversity then, not merely within fiction but also the world, that is, to decolonize the infrastructures of the future, complexity and coevalness become the grounding principles for compossibility. Cofutures is a move towards a better world for all. By staking claims to the future at a meta-theoretical level, these manifestos simultaneously negotiate space for new futures that can be enunciated within fiction and space for the politics of de-/anti-colonial praxes for possible futures. Cofutures is as yet a distant step; even where complexity is acknowledged, coevalness remains a dream. Still, it must be dreamt before we can make cofutures real.³

Endnotes

¹ This was not always the case as Alkon (1987) demonstrates.

² What does not fit this origin myth is dispensed in an opening chapter, which

lists many of texts that may signal other origins but which nonetheless – and mysteriously – do not figure in the chronology.

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