

An Afrocentric Source Code for the Future of Black Liberation

A Literature Review for Freedom

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Prologue

AfroFuturism has continued to expand and be interpreted and expressed through a myriad of writers, artists, scientists, and other visionary creatives. Perhaps the most significant reexamination of the term coined by Mark Dery's use of the term was conducted in 2016, with the publication of *AfroFuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro Blackness*, edited by Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones. Fusing these futuristic contributions with the work of Afrocentric pioneers such as Molefi Kete Asante and Nah Dove inspired the creation of Afrocentric Futurism. As a self-defining liberation movement, Afrocentric Futurism manifests an independently driven future, through our understanding of contemporary connections to the traditions and deep structures of the ancient African past.

Afrocentric Futurism represents an effort to further anchor, connect, and reconnect contemporary consciousness and futuristic innovations with the immovable power of our African culture, past, and future potential. These connections serve as a methodological hedge of protection against futuristic cultural appropriation which often leads to whitewashing of African history. How can African Americans who have experienced the most thorough, long term, demonic erasure of history, find ways to utilize the lessons of the past, to maximize their potential in the present and prepare an optimal future? This is one of the primary tangible and theoretical challenges faced by those who advance the notions of Afrocentricity, Afrofuturism, Afrocentric Futurism and the speculative arts movement. This review of literature and related terms is designed to elucidate and interrogate this merging of science fiction, futurity, and

Afrocentric epistemologies. “But of course, one of the primary ways that artists project Black futures in writing is by adopting the tropes and narrative techniques of science fiction or by writing from an Afrodiasporic perspective from within the science fiction community” (Yaszek, 2006, para. 6). Before delving deeper into the nuance, and historical context of the guiding research question, it is imperative to establish a common understanding through the process of defining key terms which will appear throughout this review of related literature.

A World of Definitions

Afrocentricity is a methodological approach to phenomena advanced by Molefi Kete Asante which places African people, culture, and consciousness at the center of agency filled analysis and cultural expression. This outlook shifts African people onto their own historical and cultural center rather than residing on the periphery of European thought and culture. This is a paradigm which emphasizes African diasporic liberation through agency and victorious consciousness. “Afrocentricity is also viewed as a continuation of the long history of African intellectual thought. (Asante & Abbary, 1996; Berkerie, 1994; Giddings, 2003; Gray, 2001). Therefore, scholars developed an Afrocentric model” (Abarry, 1990, pp. 46-47) (Asante & Karenga, 2006, p. 93).

Afrofuturism is a speculative arts movement which interrogates music, literature art and culture through a futuristic lens. Themes of science fiction, advanced technology, and trans-humanism are often interwoven with elements of Black history and culture.

Afrofuturism navigates past, present, and future simultaneously. Afro-futurism is counterhegemonic and not concerned with centering on the monolithic literary cannon of

Western art. Afrofuturism advocates for the revision of accepted, long-standing views, theories, historical events, and movements. It retells history... (Anderson, 2016, p. 30)

The term Afrofuturism first uttered by Mark Dery, was originally a byproduct of a panel discussion in 1993 while on the topic of speculative fiction:

AfroFuturism implicitly recognizes that the status quo globally – not just in the United States or the West – is one of political, economic, social, and even technical inequality. As with much other speculative fiction, by creating a separation of time and space from current reality, a different kind of “objectivity” or ability to look at possibility arises. (Lewis, 2018, para. 3)

Afrocentric Futurism is a fusion of Afrocentricity and Afrofuturism. It is the study and implementation of the early ancient Kemetic technogenesis of pioneering, cutting edge, African cosmologies, creativity, and culture from an African/Diasporic centered perspective. This foundational historiography and worldview centers past, present, and future African expression, identity, evolution of thought, and civilization. Afrocentric Futurism analyzes phenomena through the foundational lens of philosophy, spirituality, related methodologies and Kemetic science. The connections between early scientific and how the stem fields are being further stimulated by Afrofuturism is a prime example of the past and present connections which bolster the potentially transformative powers of Afrocentric Futurism.

A Afrofuturism intersects imagination, technology, the future, and liberation — a way of imagining possible futures through a Black/Afrocentric cultural lens. Afrofuturist scholar Womack (2013) adds that it critiques not only the present-day dilemmas of people of color but also revises, interrogates, and re-examines the historical events of the past. It has a unique role to play in transforming Black urban educational spaces, particularly in

science and technology. Afrofuturism may improve the synergy between Black students' will toward justice and employing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) as a vehicle toward that end (McGee, 2021, p. 384)

Afrocentric Futurism is a theoretical paragon ed to extract the best of numerous existing theories and synthesize them in a manner which intensifies the resulting relevance and effectiveness concerning futurology from a Black communal center. “The future is a special case because it exists only in the vision that people have about it and in the plans they make for it. Yet those plans are made and actualized in the context of the present” (Keto, 1994, p. 22).

Afrocentric futurism is a means of further anchoring, connecting, and reconnecting contemporary consciousness with futuristic innovations and the immovable power of our African cultural past, and future potential. This methodological approach could create a hedge of protection against cultural appropriation which often leads to Whitewashing of African history. One of the most efficacious techniques of remedying historical, racialized falsehoods involves a process of traveling back to fetch that which came before you, also known as Sankofa.

Sankofa is a traditional African proverbial principle which emphasizes the importance of going back to fetch the relevant and beneficial elements of the past. It represents the study and implementation of the retrospective retrieval required for Afrocentric reclamation. The concept of Sankofa inspires a foundational historiography and worldview which centers past, present, and future African expression, identity, evolution of thought, and civilization. To know where you are headed, helps to be aware of whence you came. Some variation of this sentiment has been repeated numerous times by notable figures throughout history. This truism holds unique

resonance when applied to the African American experience within the context of the cultural assault and omissions which informs it.

The concept of Sankofa inspires a foundational historiography and worldview which centers past, present, and future African expression, identity, evolution of thought, and civilization. Thus, in the spirit and speech of the ancestors, I want to engage in the practice of Sankofa, a patient and persistent research and reasoning that enables a critical recovery and reconstruction of the past in order to enhance our insight into the motion and learning of African history as the ground of the present and unfolding of our future. (Telda, 1995; Keto, 1994, 1995; Asante 1998; Asante & Karenga, 2006, p. 166).

Framing an Afrocentric Futurism Approach

The Afrocentric idea provides a variety of perceptual opportunities that can potentially enlarge the Africology conversation beyond the confines of the English language with its inextricable connections to European culture and history.

Afrocentricity seeks to re-locate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes. For the past five hundred years Africans have been taken off of cultural, economic, religious, political, and social terms and have existed primarily on the periphery of Europe. Because of this existence we have often participated in an anti-African racism born of the same Western triumphalism that has entrapped our minds in the West (Asante, 2003, p. 3)

There are fifty-four countries on the continent of Africa with eighteen hundred or more total dialects which can be utilized to further define the discipline of Africology, the methodology of Afrocentricity, and the speculative artistic and literary visions of Afrofuturism. In his text titled,

The Afrocentric Idea, Asante articulates the definitions, assumptions, theories, methods, and pressing academic necessity for a revolutionary methodological approach such as Afrocentricity in our collective quest for the liberation of African minds, bodies, and spirits. These forms of freeing relate intimately to the required unhindered imagination which Afrofuturism had become synonymous with inspiring. To re-envision humanity, time, space, Blackness and the cycle of life calls for conceptualization free from the stifling burdens of the limiting matrix of traditional education. Afrocentricity as a recentering methodology, places African people within the center of their own experiences and understanding rather than relegating them to the margins of Eurocentric ideologies. Afrocentricity views/analyses/critiques/defines African people throughout the global Diaspora as subjects and not objects in history.

Afrocentric Futurism seeks to remedy critiques of elements of Afrofuturism which lack context:

Ytasha L. Womack's 2013 *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, the first comprehensive primer on the subject, treats a number of African artists, including the novelist Nnedi Okorafor and the filmmaker Wanuri Kahiu. These 21st-century artists are absorbed seamlessly into the flow of Afrofuturism as Womack presents it, without a discussion of how their relationship to the African continent, (...) this embrace of Black futurists without regard to their position on the planet aligns with Afrofuturism's emphasis on Blackness rather than nationhood and its orientation toward outer space... (Samatar, 2017, p. 176)

This powerful concept allows for the full humanity of African people to be recognized and engaged. When analyzed within the Afrocentric analytical superstructure, the African becomes an agency driven active participant in the molding of her/his destiny and not simply a footnote of European conquest and illusions of manifest destiny. Like Norman Connors praising

the feminine starship as he opens his heart and mind to the ascension of this divine connection, we must be drivers and definers of our own direction and destiny. Afrofuturism has this potential if the right questions are asked. As it relates to Afrofuturism, are we so busy looking forward that we are missing the tips, cheat codes, and guideposts which could be found through looking back? How can Afrocentricity combine with Afrofuturism to help transform the future of the world through the implementation of Afrocentric Futurism?

Afrocentricity can take us up into our brilliant liberated Afro future on our own terms, in our own time. Major proponents of Afrocentricity such as Molefi Kete Asante, Christel Temple, and Maulana Karenga implement the Afrocentric idea in their writings, lectures, and other academic analysis. Agency is a major tenant in Afrocentricity. It is theorized that certain levels of culturally rooted consciousness, humanity, and power are far more difficult to actualize without a critical deconstruction of the Eurocentric worldview as universal to all members of the human family. Critics of Afrocentricity claim that the theories and methodologies associated with this concept attempt to claim the inventions of Greece and other parts of Europe for Africa without merit or adequate historical basis. Numerous false accusations of this kind have been levied against the scholarship produced using the Afrocentric method by those who inaccurately assume that Afrocentricity is simply a means of increasing the confidence of African people by way of the exaggeration of their historical accomplishments. There would also be assertions that the legacy of European historical figures was being distorted, through misrepresentation and demonization when they were analyzed through an Afrocentric lens.

It has been said that people accustomed to privilege perceive equality as oppression. Similarly, when you're accustomed to academic falsehoods the truth can strike you as deceptive. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Afrocentricity is a means to

have a more open and honest, historically accurate future where Eurocentric illusions are exchanged for Afrocentric reality. A future driven reality is the preferred option for many who have previously been burdened by the crushing weight of the lies of American exceptionalism. Some popular examples of the undisputable pillars of Africological scholarship include: the fact that all human life began in Africa, African people were forced to take new names and ways of life, and they were robbed of their language, familial connections, and concepts of spirituality. There is a major difference between the ways traditional disciplines analyze these realities and their future significance in contrast to the Afrocentrist or Afrofuturist's observations and conclusions.

Ever since the first African was shackled and taken from their homeland there has been unceasing resistance to conquest and colonial subjugation. The African was forced into the position of visionary alchemist, a futurologist who would see a better tomorrow and figure out numerous ways to manifest these visions. This was implemented for their freedom, their safety or simply for their survival. From ancient Africa's interactions with the invading Hyksos there has been unceasing resistance to conquest, subjugation, oppression, and numerous other forms of negative Eurocentric incursions. When the present is filled with obstacles and extreme pressure, it can feel as though dreams of a better future are your only form of solace. For this reason, Africans throughout the world who have experienced various forms of racial assaults have seemingly managed to become expert transformative visionaries. This has manifested over time through kidnapped Africans dreams of returning home to the motherland to Harriet Tubman, Fredrick Douglas, and countless million other enslaved people's visions of freedom from bondage to Dr. King dreaming of America one day, finally being able to overcome its tragic

sickness of segregation. Africans have developed an advanced and sustained relationship with the power and liberatory potential of futuristic thought.

A part of the difficulty with implementing the strategy of Sankofa styled redemption in the process of molding a more desirable future involves the consistent assault on Black determination and accurate Black History. This resistance to Black realities inspires numerous questions concerning effective approaches to remedy these racist removals of historic and cultural guideposts. African culture and history have often been stolen, distorted, hidden, trivialized or disregarded and must be reclaimed, revealed, recalibrated, and celebrated in ways that establish a firm foundation for Afrofuturistic foresight. Although many Africans throughout the world are currently enduring physical and virtual valleys of life, through expansive conceptualizations like Afrofuturism we can ascend mental mountains of infinite illuminations even in our darkest hours. Lessons and ancient wisdom of the glorious African past must be brought to the forefront of our collective, victorious consciousness to properly locate and uplift a mighty yet often misguided and misrepresented race. The collective trauma (Maafa) which began with the colonial conquests, missionaries' spiritual afflictions, and the slave breaking processes on southern plantations enhanced the pain and effectiveness of Whitewashed history and anti-Black omission from the new records of civilized humanity.

As I see it, a great part of Black creative reflections and approaches to the future has also been the act of excavation, and translation, returning us as Black people back to ourselves, much like Haile Gerima's film *Sankofa*. The act of imagining a future is itself an abstraction of time travel in both directions, as we are asking each other and ourselves, in some instances, to relive and rethink the past. (Anderson & Fluker, 2019)

These words from Sheree Renee Thomas are found in a text titled, *The Black Speculative Arts Movement: Black Futurity, Art + Design* in the section labeled “Memory is Power. Memory is Resistance”: “Our ancestors understood something that we in our centuries-long desire to integrate, assimilate into this culture, to create within and survive this culture, sometimes forget.” (Anderson & Fluker, 2019, p. xii).

Sankofa Futurism

Just as I was celebrating the news that my first collaborative volume would be published by a university press; I encountered perspective changing information which I believe needed to be discussed in tandem with that text. The speculative arts movement has been growing by quantum leaps and bounds in recent years. Aspects of the phenomena have been the subject of inspiration, adoration, and critique from the Ivory Coast to the (Smithsonian/Carnegie) notes. Recently a name synonymous with Afrofuturistic knowledge and advancement was featured in the New York Times. The Afrocentric idea possesses the potential to encourage a more historically sound response to shifts in culture and a greater appreciation for improved health and African traditions. This all can be achieved through a greater desire for self-preservation and greater self-love which is a common byproduct of the application of Afrocentric theory. Prospects for Afrocentric Futuristic redefinition range from the literal to the more abstract and theoretical. In a fundamental sense, the recognition of the importance of language as it relates to the power to define your overall reality takes on a unique level of cultural and futuristic significance within the Afrocentric idea. When considering the tragic and lasting European disruption of the indigenous tongues of our ancestors as a means of oppression, appreciation for the importance of language grows stronger. Within this historical context, a multifaceted mission

of liberation is virtually embedded within Afrofuturistic thought and action. The imperative related to avoiding mistakes and deceptions of the past further informs the seriousness of Afrocentric approaches to shaping a more unrestricted future.

Questions arise related to the liberatory efficacy of utilizing the English language and other institutions and structures which have previously been used as a means to oppress African people. For those who are critical concerning the power of the enemy's tools in the hands of the oppressed to liberate those in bondage, Afrocentric Futuristic approaches offer innovative remedies. The speculative arts movement as it relates to sci-fi and other expressions of similar innovation provides a fertile conceptual breeding ground for new language, new methodologies, new ways of being human, and a new world yet unseen. To sharpen the potential for these new visions, we must be keenly aware of the abundance of progress, thought, and actualized African potential which preceded the current era. One of the areas of intellectual interrogation and innovative expression can be found in the Eurocentric historical study of science in contrast to the Afrocentric understandings of this field of study. Too often, complex science and modern technological advancements are juxtaposed, and any notion of ancient African existence and expression is typically deconstructed in historian circles of analysis. However, Western technological spaces are similarly plagued with these misconceptions. These perceptual impediments persist despite Africa being the home of the first civilizations and the first technologies. "In fact, everything indicates that the Egyptians had arrived at some remarkable results in certain areas of astronomy" (Sauneron, 1960, p. 152).

We must begin recalibrating our analytical, intellectual, and historical lens away from Eurocentric standards, and propaganda about Africa/Africans. Afrocentricity could be implemented to power a crippling blow to ahistorical concepts of European origins of science,

philosophy, medicine, spirituality, mathematics, and civilization. In the area of life imitating art as it relates to common humanity and future there are lessons in numerous artistic expressions from the literary to the cinematic. Here I will look at a few examples of cinematic potential for progress in addition to problematics presented with lights and cameras. One concerning narrative promoted on film is the Utopian end to all racial prejudice having an expiration date.

From the 1950s onwards, sf in the US magazine and paperback tradition postulated and presumed a color-blind future, generally depicting humankind “as one race, which has emerged from an unhappy past of racial misunderstandings and conflicts” (James 47; see also Kilgore) (...) Whatever their intentions, sf’s color-blind future was concocted by Whites and excluded people of color as full subjects; and because of the particularities of US history, the most obvious omission was that significant proportion of the population descended from the survivors of the West-African genocide, the Middle Passage, and slavery. (Bould, 2007, p. 177)

Other creatives (perhaps unintentionally) display our abilities to transcend the ills of social constructions such as racial stratification when it is mutually advantageous to do so. In movies like Independence Day there is often a quick acquiescence to the notion of a shared humanity immediately after there is an alien threat present. This artistic imitation of life displays our collective capacity to see beyond the artificial borders and barriers which negatively confine and define us. We have the power to do better and be more to ourselves and one another. Afrofuturism, like Afrocentricity offers a multiverse of windows into greater examples of the reach of our humanity. In the world of Afrofuturism galaxies are not so far away and like the ancient Goddess Nut in Kemet, all the stars are closer. The ideas of sharing space, however, are consistently contrasted by those individuals who seem determined to colonize everything in

which they could put a flag. Afrofuturist creators of all types have been engaged in a protracted battle of ideas, imagination, redefinition, affirmations of humanity, and of space. When Deji Bryce Olukotun authored his novel, *Nigerians in Space* in 2014 it struck me as a well composed effort to continue the battle of attempting to wrestle space and even the ability to imagine and reimagine space away from the few who appear dedicated to monopolizing the great unknown.

As Tesla CEO Elon Musk and former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos engage in a modern-day quest to explore and potentially commodify the newer, new world(s), it is in works of fiction where we often find the true universality of space time and geography. “The notion that the earth belongs to everyone represents the heart of Olukotun’s Afrofuturism. People learn to hate within educational systems that reinforce binary oppositions between ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ in regard to people” (Lavendar & Yaszek, 2020, p. 207). Recently, there has been increasing attention placed on the more accurate historical record regarding scientific contributions of peoples throughout Africa and the African Diaspora.

Authorities in anthropology and archaeology concede that Africans were the first to discover iron, the element most useful to man. They learned how to extract iron from the ore that abounds in the interior of Africa and to refine it in furnaces, and Blacksmiths throughout Africa worked the metal into useful tools. Other people learned to use iron only much later. In Africa, the Black was a discoverer and inventor in spite of his lack of contact with the so-called progressive parts of Asia and Europe. Scientists now give Africans credit for first discovering iron, developing stringed instruments, domesticating the sheep, goat, and cow, and learning about the planetary system. (Haber, 1970, p. viii)

Whitewashing, and even erasing historical truths, which have impacted the development of AfroFuturism as a field of study. Libraries have been destroyed as a consequence of conquest

since ancient times. The relationship between what master teacher John Henrik Clarke referred to as the colonization of information, and the need for greater Afrocentric grounding of AfroFuturist thought, could be recognized in comments from Reynaldo Anderson given in 2017, concerning the potential problematics of the Eurocentric perspective for African people, and others attempting to relate to and recognize the Afrocentric potential of AfroFuturism. Anderson expresses one of the weaknesses expressed by a Eurocentric perspective related to early formulations of AfroFuturism that have wondered if the history had been erased. And too many previous commentaries are little more than European studies of AfroFuturism (Anderson, 2017).

These are the cosmic philosophies of Sun Ra, connecting with the pro Black raps and Afrocentric attire of King Sun, analyzed through the lens of the Sun rays of Ra. These are the potentialities of speculative fiction, manifested through the Ka (i.e. “vital life force, spirit”) (Nehusi, 2016, p. 75), of the innovative imagination of Ytasha Womack, cutting through the stagnation of African forward progress, with the determination of Yaa Asantewaa in defense of the Golden Stool of Asante, and the sacred nature of her nation.

Afrocentric futurism is Octavia Butler meets Oshun. Octavia E. Butler, a speculative and science fiction writer, often considered the mother of Afrofuturism, is a prime example of taking the freedom of science fiction and examining the future of humans as they relate to the environment. (...) Octavia Butler is important to sustainability studies because she focused primarily on issues of race, gender, class, culture, and equity. Additionally, she addressed issues of global warming, the greenhouse effect, displacement, social vulnerability, and human’s ability to change, survive, and adapt. She focused on problems, but also proposed solutions and imagined the possibilities of humanity and the planet. (Pierre, 2020, p. 6)

It is important for artists and other Afrocentric futuristic creatives and human beings invested in African liberation world-wide to recognize their power. Own the future you are brave enough to define and design in your heart and mind. We must endeavor diligently to manifest ourselves in the physical world from the intense embers of our invisible genius. The inclusive nature of expansive Afrofuturistic worldviews (or better stated, beyond world views) can be drawn upon to solve real time issues of acceptance, alienation, and prejudice. The us versus them mentality which has played a major role in the problematic history of diverse human engagement can benefit from the intergalactic, transhumanistic beyond traditional borders thematic influences of Afrofuturisc visionaries. Few places in world history have ever been as largely and consistently defined by othering, segregation, and racial categorization as the United States:

In America, immigration-generated racism as it is directed to people of color is omnipresent to the extent that people of color who have been living in the United States for generations still receive inquiries about what countries they came from. By way of contrast, European-Americans (who rarely refer to themselves as hyphenated Americans) are never positioned as aliens. (Lavendar & Yaszek, 2020, p. 206)

These innovative conceptualizations serve to alter the stereotypical perspective of Black life and potential. The sordid history of brutal acts perpetuated throughout the colonial history of global European conquest continues to encourage futuristic thought from an African perspective as a weapon of liberation, clarity, and sanity. The time for African continental unity has come. The future manifestation of a United States of Africa is a prime example of the power and importance of Afrocentric Afrofuturistic thought and action. Before walking right up to the sun or riding a

Black version of the starship enterprise we may first consider securing our earthly launchpad for such voyages.

The intersection of imagination, technology, culture and innovation is pivotal. The synergy of the four creates an informed prism that can redefine lifestyles, worldviews and beliefs. Afrofuturism is often the umbrella for an amalgamation of narratives, but at the core, it values the power of creativity and imagination to reinvigorate culture and transcend social limitations. The resilience of the human spirit lies in our ability to imagine. (Womack, 2013, p. 24)

The main challenge facing Africans globally is to trust their own cultural compass to be powerfully guided into a self-aware and self-determined future. It is imperative for those interested in the liberation and empowerment of African people to be girded with their respect for African culture and history. We must seek and fervently pursue a future where we refuse to be reduced to peripheral figments of others' imaginations. These are the Afrocentric Futuristic elements required to illuminate a brilliant, agency-filled Black future. The time is now and forever!

This is where the Funkadelic Mothership meets the biblical wheel, within a wheel of Ezekial/Elijah, soaring through the solar system with Outkast inspired ATLiens, on a path to reunite the African Diaspora with the divinity of the Annunaki. From the wisdom teachings of Anansi the spider, to the depths of the dark web and Sheree Thomas' work about *Dark Matter*. This is a process of using Afrocentricity as our guide, and Sankofa as our cultural catapults into an Afrocentric future, through the practical and imaginative utilizations of ancient wisdom and traditional African technologies, cosmologies, and futuristic thought. (Smith, 2023)

Reviewing the various sources and methods related to this study further revealed the need to thoroughly anchor futuristic visions for African people within the context of African history and culture. The foundations for lift off into an Afrocentric futuristic galaxy were securely established eons ago. The roadmap into the stars has been mapped out for the mind, body and soul to take flight into new dimensions of thought, spiritual vibration, and physical ascension. Now is the time for us to return to our formerly elevated state of being, one with the stars and one with the Universe. The stardust that forms us and the melanin which blesses us have mirrored the glowing brilliance of the constellation in profound contrast to the endless deep dark expanse of the night sky.

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