

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The enduring existential and systemic threats to black life in America have often been compared to living through the end of the world. Out of this sense of black apocalypse, forms of black counter-speculation arise, such as afrofuturism and afropessimism. Speculative fiction and critical theory are used to both challenge and imagine alternatives to an anti-black world. When the truth goes fugitive, black existence seeks refuge in underground and otherworldly spaces. The alienated and estranged wretched of the earth use speculation to envision a world beyond suffering.

*Afrofuturism · Afropessimism · Black Counter-
Speculation · Speculative Fiction · Alienation*

CHAPTER 1. THE VIRUS IS THE ALIEN

Fiction and theory are tools of cognitive estrangement that deconstruct anti-blackness and push fantasies of repair and the romance of reunion to their limit. Rather than a binary between optimism and pessimism, we might think of black counter-speculation as playing the changes of the black radical will. Blackness is elusive of mapping and other technologies of representational capture. Instead, poetics can supply imaginative and sensory guides to navigating diasporic existence.

Romance · Cognitive Estrangement · Poetics · Diaspora

CHAPTER 2. THE CHANGING SAME

Afropessimism arose in the context of postmillennial spectacles of black suffering and death. The structural antagonism of anti-blackness challenged ideas of post-racialism, reintroducing the concept of social death. This discourse drew from, while substantially shifting, an earlier post-independence discourse on the African continent, leading to an “unclear word” in which blackness and Africanity are entangled. The circulation of this discourse on the internet is a significant factor in its globalization as well as its influence beyond the academy.

Social Death · Decolonization · Digital Culture · Cybernetics

CHAPTER 3. A REENCHANTED COSMOS?

From its early days, black artists have responded to the internet in ways that expose the complicity of technology with the afterlives of slavery. Near future dystopian fiction both represses and accelerates acknowledgment of how technocapitalism reinforces systems of control and surveillance rooted in slavery. With the digital era comes the possibility of hacking, with theory itself as a hack of the systems of knowledge-power that reproduce biopolitical control.

Commodification · Dystopia · Hacking · Rebellion

CONCLUSION

Speculative fiction and science can be used to challenge power and imagine alternative worlds. Imagination is not just a flight of fantasy but emerges out of collective study and struggle.

Black feminist speculative worldmaking offers resources to counter phallocentric domination over this world and others.

Exploration and wonder can be antidotes to empire.

Emergent Strategy • Glitch Feminism • Black Counter-Speculation • Decolonizing Astronomy

