

BOOK REVIEW

Kimberly Cleveland. *Africanfuturism: African Imaginings of Other Times, Spaces, and Worlds*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2024. xv + 200 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821411483.

Kimberly Cleveland's *Africanfuturism: African Imaginings of Other Times, Spaces, and Worlds* defines "Africanfuturism" as a distinct strand of science fiction, similar to but very distinct from Afrofuturism. The book's core argument is that much of the discourse surrounding Western Afrofuturism is centered on the Black diasporic experience and perspective. Thus, it is not appropriate to label all African speculative expressions as Afrofuturism as this would be treating Blackness and Africanness as universally uniform. Cleveland resists the notion that any speculative writing by a Black person can be called Afrofuturism and calls attention to the diversity of Black and African experiences worldwide. Calling everything Afrofuturism flattens voices and ignores writers on the continent. Africanfuturism, amongst other definitions, is an "advanced state of African decolonization" as it accounts for "African-centric" perspective in thinking about the future (33). The book also establishes that Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum and Nnedi Okorafor are pivotal contributors to the emergence and popularization of the term "Africanfuturism" (x).

In many ways, Cleveland's book extends conversations about the need to recognize and uplift Africanfuturism as an important strand of science fiction that originates from the continent; she also leaves plenty of room for others to develop and expand Africanfuturist ideas by strategically embedding sections in Chapters Four, Five, and Six titled "Connections Across and Beyond the Continent" and "Africanfuturist Revelations." These sections are invaluable because they provide succinct intra-continental and cross-continental connections amongst Africanfuturist thinkers. Additionally, Cleveland's deployment of Africanfuturist histories helps orient unfamiliar readers in the field. The suggested resources and discussion questions embedded at the end of most chapters provide relevant discussion-starters for instructors to adopt in their classes on Africanfuturism and other relevant topics. This book is an invaluable resource for teaching, entering, and understanding the Africanfuturist domain.

The nicely structured Foreword, by Ainehi Edo-Glines, ties histories neatly, while the Introduction unpacks the historical contexts of Afrofuturism and African futurism, showing how they connect and disconnect. Chapter One takes off from the iconic moment of *Black Panther* in 2018 and how the film made Afrofuturism more popular. It then goes on to link Africanfuturist ideologies to decolonization, thus separating it from Afro-futurism. Chapter Two analyzes Africanfuturism and its decolonial project; it also explores spaces and time to

center reactions on the experience of being “othered.” Chapter Three dives into alternate spaces, existences, and worlds, which are mostly dystopian (as opposed to utopian), using a novel, image, and city model for in-depth analysis. Overall, Cleveland demonstrates that space and time are key themes in Africanfuturist thinking.

Chapter Four likewise brings forward the idea of bridging the gap between the past, present, and future using indigenous elements, physical—as in the case of the *Docks Table*, and indigenous language—as in the case of “Egoli.” Tenda Huchu’s short story “Egoli” affirms the presence of technology even in unlikely places on the continent. Elias Sime’s *TIGHTROPE* panel is an example of how Africanfuturists are creating complex compositions and incorporating technology as a theme. In all, Cleveland demonstrates that Africa’s relationship with technology is more complex and diverse than the usual assumptions that are often built around cut-and-dried arguments of technological access or outright lack of access.

Chapters Five and Six explore the concept of remix and mythmaking. Amongst other things, Cleveland cleverly expands the relevance of the concept of remix to the African futurist context, which enables African creatives to take elements from preexisting materials and from different sources, and bring them together to create something new, what Cleveland tags a Sankofa remix—an Afrocentric generative combinatoriality (108). For instance, through the Sannkofamaan character, we see how Samto Ajuluchukwu demonstrates how Africans draw from trans-African indigenous history, beliefs, culture, plus technology in solving issues.

Centering the perspectives of Africanfuturist productions and critically setting them apart from Afrofuturism using a wide range of artistic mediums primarily sourced from the continent is the major strength of this book. Cleveland’s analysis of multimodal artistic Africanfuturist expressions is particularly expansive as it comments on the relevance of using Africanfuturist models in understanding (graphic) novels, short stories, images/pictures (photomontages), costumes, mixed media installations, painting, tapestry, cyborg designs, sculpture, film, comic books, textile design, architecture and more. As a literature scholar, I am intrigued by how much enriching literary analysis can be done in this field; Cleveland opens up an array of Africanfuturist concepts for further research. For example, the multimodal idea of a Sankofa remix, exploring space and time through an Afrocentric lens, and mythmaking are generative for literary analysis.

Lastly, by posing pertinent questions about the economics of Afrofuturism and who benefits from Afrofuturism, Cleveland puts pressure on both the idea and the term to tease out the problematics. This culminates in her succinct statement, “what most African Creatives desire is to be able to accept or reject labels as they see fit, particularly when the categories have originated and been applied in the West” (32). Situating the Africanfuturism project within the decolonization project is pertinent in Cleveland’s work, and this idea cuts through the whole work, which starts with using African-oriented terminology and conceptual framework to “analyze African speculative production” (34). To conclude, the fact that Africans champion traits and themes relevant to science

fiction but may not necessarily conform with Western or Afrofuturist conceptions is decolonial, a point Cleveland argues successfully.

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