

The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto

The undersigned, being alternately pissed off and bored, need a means of speculation and asserting a different set of values with which to re-imagine the future. In looking for a new framework for black diasporic artistic production, we are temporarily united in the following actions.



The Mundane Afrofuturists recognize that:

We did not originate in the cosmos.

The connection between Middle Passage and space travel is tenuous at best.

Out of five hundred thirty-four space travelers, fourteen have been black. An all-black crew is unlikely.

Magic interstellar travel and/or the wondrous communication grid can lead to an illusion of outer space and cyberspace as egalitarian.

This dream of utopia can encourage us to forget that outer space will not save us from injustice and that cyberspace was prefigured upon a "master/slave" relationship.

While we are often Othered, we are not aliens.

Though our ancestors were mutilated, we are not mutants.

Post-black is a misnomer.

Post-colonialism is too.

The most likely future is one in which we only have ourselves and this planet.



The Mundane Afrofuturists rejoice in:

Piling up unexamined and hackneyed tropes,
and setting them alight.

Gazing upon their bonfire of the
Stupidities, which includes, but is not
exclusively limited to:

- Jive-talking aliens;
- Jive-talking mutants;
- Magical negroes;
- Enormous self-control in light of
great suffering;
- Great suffering as our natural state
of existence;
- Inexplicable skill in the martial
arts;
- Reference to Wu Tang;
- Reference to Sun Ra;
- Reference to Parliament Funkadelic
and/or George Clinton;
- Reference to Janelle Monáe;
- Obvious, heavy-handed allusions to
double-consciousness;
- Desexualized protagonists;
- White slavery;
- Egyptian mythology and iconography;
- The inner city;
- Metallic colors;
- Sassiness;
- Platform shoes;
- Continue at will...



We also recognize:

The harmless fun that these and all the other Stupidities have brought to millions of people.

The harmless fun that burning the Stupidities will bring to millions of people.

The imaginative challenge that awaits any Mundane Afrofuturist author who accepts that this is it: Earth is all we have. What will we do with it?

The chastening but hopefully enlivening effect of imagining a world without fantasy bolt-holes: no portals to the Egyptian kingdoms, no deep dives to Drexciya, no flying Africans to whisk us off to the Promised Land.

The possibilities of a new focus on black humanity: our science, technology, culture, politics, religions, individuality, needs, dreams, hopes, and failings.

The surge of bedazzlement and wonder that awaits us as we contemplate our own cosmology of blackness and our possible futures.

The relief of recognizing our authority. We will root our narratives in a critique of normative, white validation. Since “fact” and “science” have been used throughout history to serve white supremacy, we will focus on an emotionally true, vernacular reality.

The understanding that our “twoness” is inherently contemporary, even futuristic. DuBois asks how it feels to be a problem. Ol’ Dirty Bastard says “If I got a problem, a problem’s got a problem ’til it’s gone.”

An awakening sense of the awesome power of the black imagination: to protect, to create, to destroy, to propel ourselves towards what poet Elizabeth Alexander describes as “a metaphysical space beyond the black public everyday toward power and wild imagination.”

The opportunity to make sense of the nonsense that regularly—and sometimes violently—accents black life.



The electric feeling that Mundane Afrofuturism is the ultimate laboratory for world-building outside of imperialist, capitalist, white patriarchy.

The sense that the rituals and inconsistencies of daily life are compelling, dynamic, and utterly strange.

Mundane Afrofuturism opens a number of themes and flavors to intertextuality, double entendre, politics, incongruity, polyphony, and collective first-person-techniques that we have used for years to make meaning.



The Mundane Afrofuturists promise:

To produce a collection of Mundane
Afrofuturist literature that follows
these rules:

1. No interstellar travel—travel is limited to within the solar system and is difficult, time consuming, and expensive.
2. No inexplicable end to racism—dismantling white supremacy would be complex, violent, and have global impact.
3. No aliens unless the connection is distant, difficult, tenuous, and expensive—and they have no interstellar travel either.
5. No internment camps for blacks, aliens, or black aliens.
6. No Martians, Venusians, etc.
7. No forgetting about political, racial, social, economic, and geographic struggles.
8. No alternative universes.
9. No revisionist history.
10. No magic or supernatural elements.
11. No Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, or Bucks.
12. No time travel or teleportation.
13. No Mammies, Jezebels, or Sapphires.
14. Not to let Mundane Afrofuturism cramp their style, as if it could.
15. To burn this manifesto as soon as it gets boring.

— Martine Syms & whomever will join me
in the future of black imagination.

*A version of this manifesto appeared on rhizome.org in December 2013

