

Queer Times/ Black Futures

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The Concept.

Queer Times, Black Futures further develops and elaborates the work on temporality that I began in my most recent book, The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense, putting it into conversation with current scholarship on queer temporality, queer futurity, and new media. To do so, I look at selected texts from recent queer cinema, theories about digital technologies and new media, and a set of the cultural productions that have been labeled Afrofuturist, with a particular interest in Afrofuturism's predilection for creative and complex musical expression. *Queer Times, Black Futures* is part of the growing body of vibrant and exciting interdisciplinary scholarship that seeks to build bridges between areas of intellectual inquiry previously held to be separate areas of investigation; it will contribute to African American and Postcolonial Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Queer Theory, and Media and Cultural Studies.

In The Witch's Flight, I provided a reading of Frantz Fanon's elaboration of the temporality of colonial reality in his oft-cited Black Skins, White Masks. According to my reading, colonial temporality continues to structure and (in)form our present reality, thereby rendering liberation from colonialism's regimes of representation and the logics of exploitation and domination they hold in place presently (im)possible. Because colonial temporality operates according to what Fanon describes as a "hellish cycle," in which "the Black" exists as "one who waits" in a situation wherein the terms of his waiting are pre-ordained, it forecloses foreseeable futures in which Black Liberation might be achieved as something other than "White." What remains, however, are futures that are unknowable and unforeseeable. These are futures that cannot be anticipated, but must be awaited, openly, without prescribing their content, yet with a desire for justice.

Certain Afrofuturist articulations provide insight into the “freedom dreams” (in Robin DG Kelley’s words) that historically have proven to be a generative force in the Black Radical Tradition and point towards the ways that African imaginings have sought to generate futures, even in the face of what has been referred to, however problematically, as “social death.” “Social death,” a concept generated from within African American thought and culture, resonates with Lee Edelman’s polemical call for queers to recognize the position to which they have been consigned in the Symbolic and embrace the ways queers figure “no future” through our relationship to Jacques Lacan’s notion of the death drive as Edelman reads it. Edelman’s polemic has become a prominent part of a broader conversation about queer time and queer temporality; yet, much of the discussion of his argument hinges on an either/ or relationship solicited by its polemical stance - either one embraces his argument on its terms or one rejects it. By putting Edelman and other theorists of queer temporality into conversation with Afrofuturist imaginings of impossible Black futures, *Queer Times, Black Futures* stages a different conversation, one that seeks to build bridges between the political (im)possibilities of queer times and those of black times.