Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department of American Culture and Literature

FROM THE SLAVE SHIP TO THE SPACESHIP: THE AFROFUTURISTIC IMAGINATION IN SUN RA, ISHMAEL REED AND OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Sinem TURGUT

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2022

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KABUL VE ONAY

Sinem Turgut tarafından hazırlanan "From the Slave Ship to the Spaceship: The Afrofuturistic Imagination in Sun Ra, Ishmael Reed and Octavia E. Butler" başlıklı bu çalışma, 24 Ağustos 2022 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Sinem TURGUT

To my mother,
the strongest woman I
have ever known

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ÖZET

Turgut, Sinem. Köle Gemisinden Uzay Gemisine: Sun Ra, Ishmael Reed ve Octavia E. Butler'da Afrofütüristik Düşlem. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Bu tez Afrofütürizm'in temelindeki felsefede Sun Ra'nın kurucu rolüne odaklanarak, Sun Ra'nın *Space is the Place* (1972) adlı albümünün film uyarlaması olan *Space is the Place*'i (1974), Afrofütürizmin edebiyattaki yansıması olan Ishmael Reed'in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) ve Octavia E. Butler'ın *Kindred* (1979) adlı romanları ile birlikte inceler. 1990'ların başında yazar ve kültür eleştirmeni Mark Dery tarafından tanıtılan Afrofütürizm'in başlangıcı esasında en az yarım yüzyıl öncesine kadar izlenebilir. Afrofütürizm, temelde Afrikalı Amerikalı sanatçıların Afrika kökenlerini, köle ticareti yollarını, Harlem Rönesansı ve Swing Caz akımı gibi tarihi unsurları, dışlandıkları Uzay Çağı teknolojisiyle birleştirerek Atom ve Uzay Çağı'na verdikleri bir tepkidir. Şiddetsiz protestolar döneminden radikalleşen söyleme kadar Sivil Haklar Hareketi'nin içinde bulunan Afrikalı Amerikalı sanatçılar, kendilerini değişimin kurucuları, yenilikçi müzik, sanat ve edebiyatın öncüleri olarak gördükleri bir gelecek tasarlar. Artık tarihin "görünmez" ve pasif kurbanları değil, aktif ve yaratıcı failleridirler. Sun Ra, Uzay Çağı'nın kavramsal olanaklarını benimseyen ilk Afrikalı Amerikalı sanatçılardan biridir. Uzay fikrini benimseyerek, bu kavramı tamamen farklı bir dünya düzeni iddiasında bulunmak için bir metafor olarak kullanır. Bu fikrin edebiyattaki yansıması olarak, Ishmael Reed, "Jes Grew" ile "sarsılan" daha iyi bir evren vizyonunu sunar. Octavia E. Butler ise dünyadaki varlığını güvence altına almak için zaman yolculuğuna zorlanan bir kadın kahramanla zamanın karmaşık yapısını keşfeder. Bu tez, Afrofütürist düşlemin bu eserlerdeki yansımalarını tanımlamayı ve incelemeyi amaçlar ve Afrofütürizm'in günümüz protesto hareketlerinin yanı sıra popüler kültürle de bağlantılı olduğunu öne sürer.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Afrikalı Amerikalılar, Sivil Haklar Hareketi, Uzay Çağı, Afrofütürizm, Sun Ra, Ishmael Reed, Octavia E. Butler

ABSTRACT

Turgut, Sinem. From the Slave Ship to the Spaceship: The Afrofuturistic Imagination in Sun Ra, Ishmael Reed and Octavia E. Butler. Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Centering on Sun Ra's foundational role in the philosophy behind Afrofuturism, this thesis analyzes Sun Ra's *Space Is the Place* (1974), the movie adaptation of his album *Space Is the Place* (1973), together with Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979), as literary examples of Afrofuturism. Introduced in the early 1990s by the cultural critic Mark Dery, Afrofuturism can be traced back to at least half a century earlier. It is African American artists' response to the Atomic Age and the Space Age, incorporating historical elements, such as African roots, slave trade routes, Harlem Renaissance and Swing, with the Space Age technology that they were excluded from. Driven also by the civil rights struggles, from its nonviolent phase to its radicalization, African American artists projected themselves to the future as initiators of change, innovators of musical, artistic and literary modes. They were no longer "invisible" and passive victims, but active and creative agents in history. Sun Ra was among the first African American artists to adopt the conceptual possibilities of the Space Age. He embraced the idea of space and used it as a metaphor with which to claim a totally different world order. On the literary side, Ishmael Reed offered his vision of a better world "swinging" with "Jes Grew," and Octavia E. Butler explored the complex structure of time with a female protagonist who was coerced into time travel to secure her presence in the present. This thesis aims at identifying and analyzing the Afrofuturistic imagination as seen in these texts, and suggests that Afrofuturism is in tune with contemporary popular culture as well as protest movements.

Keywords

African Americans, Civil Rights Era, Space Age, Afrofuturism, Sun Ra, Ishmael Reed, Octavia E. Butler

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Space has never been so black and so inviting before.

INTRODUCTION

in some far-off place
many light years in space
I wait for you
Where human feet have never trod
Where human eyes have never seen
I'll build a World of abstract dreams
and wait for you
in tomorrow's realm
we'll take the helm
of a new ship
like the lash of a whip
we'll start on the way
and safely journey
to a new shore

-Sun Ra (*tomorrow's realm*)

The intersection between the Cold War (1947-1991) and the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) represented a crucial turning point in black history. The former had a broader white political agenda operating on an international level, whereas the latter addressed the domestic struggle of African Americans within the US. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the Civil Rights Movement broke out within the Cold War period. Since these two periods are intertwined, African Americans were also witnessing the ongoing geopolitical and ideological tension between the US and the USSR and situating this experience into their own civil struggle.

The Cold War became more evident and belligerent during the Space Age of the late 50s and it mostly turned into a technological war. During this period, however, white dominancy in all fields, particularly in politics and education, caused African Americans to be excluded from the space technology. They were not allowed to take part in scientific and technological progress conducted by the US government. This demonstrates that segregation continued even in space and leads to a new artistic response for black people to challenge racist, social, political, economic and even scientific structures. Even though their existence was contested, African Americans used the power of scientific and technological developments of the Space Age. The anti-militarist, astral and techno-space approach developed during this era was combined with the artistic and philosophical approach of the Civil Rights Movement, specifically

in the Black Arts Movement. Under the leadership of Sun Ra, African Americans fictionalized an alternative realm that led to the birth of Afrofuturistic imagination in music, art and literature.

Even though Afrofuturism chronologically and historically dates back to the 1990s with Mark Dery's famous essay "Black to the Future," ideologically the concept can be traced back to the Space Age. The term Afrofuturism was first defined by Mark Dery in 1994 as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture[1]—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic, and historical philosophy that brings together the elements of science fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, fantasy and occult. In this sense, Afrofuturism is a paradox itself; the future Afrofuturism needs is hidden in the past. It is the myth. The ideology behind the term not only addresses the themes and concerns of the African diaspora, but also to review, question and re-examine the historical events of the past.

Afrofuturism can be seen as a reaction to white domination, a reaction to European expression, and the use of science and technology to justify racism. Art is used not only to imagine counter-futures free from Western and European domination, but also as a tool to indirectly criticize the status quo. Rather than basing the imagination of the dissenters on Eurocentric philosophical and political arguments, Afrocentrism draws on a variety of inspirations, such as technology (including Black cyberculture), myth forms, indigenous ethical and social ideas, and a historical reconstruction of the African past. This artistic and philosophical movement originally began with Sun Ra and his experimental style. Ra was among the first Afrofuturists who saw the benefits of the Space Age and its compassing scope to reach the space. He embraced the idea of space and used it as a metaphor to claim a totally different world order. With his music, writing, and other works, Sun Ra has been a pioneer of the Afrofuturist movement during the 1950s.

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[1]Especially, space technology led to the birth of a modern/contemporary, technology-based culture during the Space Age. Lavender mentions technoculture as "machines, electricity, circuits, hacking, and so on" (17). He further describes the language of technoculture that is "useful to this afrofuturistic study because this language represents the metaphoric discourse currently operating within science fiction, itself the signature literature of our moment" (17).

The 1950s in the US was sharply contoured by political and social turbulence, marked by two great conflicts which were national and international. On the one side, there was the Cold War between the US and USSR. On the other side, there was the Civil Rights Movement through which African Americans sought economic equality and social justice in the US. Even though the government was trying to catch up with the new scientific and technological improvements to push its rival out of the space race, it was also dealing with the democratic demands of the Civil Rights Movements spreading across the country. The US got stuck between the clashing ideologies of this historical coincidence, and the government had two choices: They would either at least nominally provide political rights to African Americans or lose their international prestige against the Soviet side. At this point, it is important to underline the question Skrentny poses in his essay: "Does the White House operate at the world level or the nation level" or how could these dichotomies be combined? (241).

After the Second World War, another phase of war, called the Cold War, started. The founding actors of this order were the US and the USSR. Both states entered into a fierce struggle to make their own political, economic, military and even technological orders dominate the world. It was obvious that the US and the USSR were thrown not only into a long-running political debate, but also a technological one. Beyond the propagandistic dispute between communism and capitalism was one more question which led the superpowers into conflict: Who will control space? As a country which came out of World War II as the world's leading military-industrial-complex, the US enjoyed a prosperous economy that manifested itself in scientific and technological growth.

During the Cold War years, the US and the Soviet Union were competing in different fields. The two important events of the Cold War symbolized the general atmosphere of the era. The race for nuclear weapons between these two superpowers led to the Atomic Age and the space race initiated the Space Age. After the US used the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War 2, many countries in the world—especially the US and the USSR—entered the nuclear arms race. In addition to nuclear weapons, the Cold War witnessed a great competition in terms of conventional weapons and in this period, states allocated a large share in their budgets for armament due to the predominance of security concerns.

Both states competed with each other in sending satellites into space. The Soviet Union, which started a new era in history, sent the first artificial satellite called Sputnik 1 on 4 October 1957. A month later, on 3 November 1957, the Sputnik 2 was sent into orbit and became the first satellite launched into the orbit of the Earth. As Bradley Shreve echoes, "the heightened alarms again sounded after the successful launch of Sputnik 2 locked into the Cold War mindset and brushing aside the USSR's persistent claims that its satellites were of a purely scientific nature, the Eisenhower administration could only hope that the twin Sputnik shots would frame the Soviets as in Dulles' [the US Secretary of State] words 'the chief war makers in the world'" (69).

Sputnik was humanity's first step towards the exploration of space. This mission, which represents an important step in humanity's work on space, ignited the debate about the use of animals as test subjects for scientific progress. Right after the Soviet artificial satellites were sent into space in 1957, the US Department of Defense started a new satellite project. This space travel satellite also led to the establishment of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA, on July 29,1958 as the agency responsible for the space work of the United States. In 1958, the US officially entered the Space Age with President Eisenhower's voice being broadcasted from outer space to the earth. Beyond his simple and seemingly unifying message to the American people and to "all mankind," Eisenhower made one thing clear: the US was ready to use all the "scientific and technological advance" of the twentieth century to defeat its Cold War rival.

In the same year, the US Congress initiated the National Defense Education Act, which aimed to educate young students in the fields of mathematics and science and to provide loans for their education. The passage of the bill was strongly recommended through these words: "It is no exaggeration to say that America's progress in many fields of endeavor in the years ahead—in fact, the very survival of our free country—may depend in large part upon the education we provide for our young people now."[2] For the first time in the US, this act pushed the borders of the space race by enabling American students to learn science and calculus which were the genesis of rocket science. When creating acts and laws to win the space race, the US perceived space as a

[2] The original document is available online at https://history.house.gov/HouseRecord

universal concept in which they could envision a future. As Shrew articulates, "political and military leaders in the US saw outer space as a new arena for superpower sparring, while its exploration was simply viewed as Cold War strategic positioning" (68). Therefore, the idea of reaching space was not performed on an individual level, but it entered the collective imagination as a part of American ideals.

Apart from these high technological breakthroughs that expanded the academic standards, the US also showed its existence in the Space Age with a much more decisive attempt by creating ARPA and NASA in 1958 to explore the depths of space and to extend scientific and technological advancements into a military level. Eisenhower first "created a separate agency within the Pentagon called ARPA, which controlled all space politics" (Shreve 69). Shortly after the creation of the ARPA, "NASA was born by an act of Congress on October 1, 1958. The atmosphere was one of crisis. It was reaction, not deliberate, long-range planning that gave rise to NASA" (Lambright 152). The missions of these space programs of the Cold War period were well-fitted to the United States' purpose. ARPA, fully known as Advanced Research Projects Agency, for example, successfully launched SCORE (the Signal Communications by Orbiting Relay Equipment) into orbit, which enabled President Eisenhower to speak to the nation from outer space. The USSR answered these developments with a crucial step by sending Yuri Gagarin to the Earth orbit in 1961 and "the Eisenhower administration had already inaugurated three programs devoted to the goal of manned spaceflight: Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo, involving one, two, and three astronauts, respectively. Kennedy's contribution was the deadline: A walk on the moon by the end of the sixties" (Younquist 147).

When investigating this ideological and technological war between the US and the USSR, many studies tend to ignore African Americans' demands for quality education and inclusion in scientific advancements in their struggle against racist structures. Indeed, America's scientific and technological developments needed white man's perfected knowledge and intelligence in order to meticulously conduct space exploration and to leave the rival, the Soviet Union, out of the space race. At this point, the real question is how African Americans serendipitously altered their own destiny by taking advantage of the Space Age.

Since the US politics operated on a wide scale during the mid-1950s, the crucial line between the moral values and political ethics could not be denied. The ideological war in the international arena was amplified by a greater domestic struggle which directly impacted race politics in the US. The Space race between the two superpowers raised a number of moral and political questions. As the world is shivering with a growing concern on political rights and human rights during the Cold War, the US side was handling with the black and white dichotomy, which ended up with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement. Before achieving phenomenal success in its international and diplomatic relations, the US firstly had to maintain a constructive approach on its domestic politics concerning racial issues. As Aldon Morris points out:

> The politics of the Cold War was an additional factor making Black protest a viable option. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked in an intense battle to win over newly independent Third World countries, especially those in Africa. The issue of American racism was an impediment to an American foreign policy bent on persuading African nations to align themselves with America. Racism and democracy were opposing ideologies, and Black leaders were aware that America's treatment of Blacks could be a stumbling block in America's quest to become the major superpower. (516)

In Morris' words, the Cold War was a tremendous opportunity for African Americans to be recognized internationally in their struggle for racial equality. This conflict "between the United States and the Soviet Union for influence over emerging Third World nations strengthened the political position of American blacks in the United State" (Skrentny 238). The Cold War provided the suitable context in which to showcase American hypocrisy about democracy as practiced within the country.

Until the 1950s, the US South was segregated under Jim Crow laws, which stood for "a system that went to great lengths to impress on Blacks that they were a subordinate population by forcing them to live in a separate inferior society" (Morris 518). They were confined to a life in which they were denied the right to benefit from public places, services and facilities. The notion of "separate but equal" legitimized the white supremacist structure and systematically excluded African Americans from society thus justifying their long struggle for equality. In addition to the large-scale boycotts, the first victory of African Americans came into the court through the efforts

of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[3] In 1954, with the case *Brown v Board of Education,* the US Court, led by the Chief Justice Earl Warren, declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. This decision, unexpected when compared to the previous verdicts in the US legal history, overruled the previous "separate but equal" doctrine ruled by the US Supreme Court with the decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson.*[4] The Supreme Court's school desegregation decision functioned as evidence against the claims of the USSR about racist practices in the US. In this sense, Dudziak argues that "Brown was an international story" (35), and further explains:

> American international prestige served two important interests. First, it gave civil rights activists important leverage. The argument that social change aided U.S. foreign relations could be used to further the NAACP's social change agenda. Second, showing that NAACP efforts enhanced American international prestige helped the NAACP argue that its work promoted, rather than undermined, the nation's Cold War interest. (36)

Despite the international condemnation of the racist practices in the US, segregation and disenfranchisement continued until a striking instance of which was the case of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American boy, who was lynched in 1955. The murderers were acquitted of the crime not long after. His mother, Mamie Till's decision for an open casket funeral for her son launched a new era in African American history and sparked the notions of civil rights activism and prepared the grounds for nationalism of the coming decade. Ongiri comments, "post-1950s Black nationalism becomes an essential, yet largely unacknowledged, model for later liberation movements…" (281). Through these protests, which mainly covered the late 1950s and the 1960s, African Americans strongly demanded social justice and equal treatment.

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[3] The NAACP, founded in 1909, was the earliest African American civil rights organization. The founders including W.E.B. DuBois "agreed to use every available means to publicize the neglected issues of civil and political equality for African Americans" (Watson 454) and "the party NAACP continued to develop its humanitarian and constitutional (egalitarian) philosophy by seeking the support of the federal courts to challenge the legality of segregation laws" (Watson 455).

[4] In 1896, the US Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public facilities was constitutional. The sanction of *Plessy*'s "separate but equal" doctrine violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution, which granted legal citizenship rights to African Americans in the US, and led to an explosion in the number of segregated facilities until *Brown*.

As the civil rights activists' broader political protests succeeded on a legislative level, African American artists got the upper hand in cultural protests to define black consciousness and identity through music and literature. As an African American poet and oral historian, Tom Dent posits in his essay:

> The early Sixties was also the time when the Civil Rights Movement in the South was the major national news. (The Movement hadn't reached the North in any organized form.) We, as black artists, related to the Movement in one form or another and shared many friends who had gone south to work. The world of the black man's struggle for not just existence but identity, the world of rapidly growing disenchantment with America and the so-called American Dream, the world of new-found interest in Africa—this was our world, the intense and rapidly changing world we lived in. (106)

The intersection between the Cold War period and the Civil Rights Movement revealed that African American intellectuals and artists had to embrace a new form of artistic expression. Even though the Civil Rights Movement provided a basis for African Americans to demand their constitutional, social and educational rights in nonviolent terms, the late 1960s was characterized by more radical forms of resistance because the communities felt that nonviolent strategies were exhausted and no longer efficient. Musicians, authors and intellectuals sought a much more innovative idea in which they could combine the scientific and technological improvements of the Cold War and the struggle for social and political justice of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, Afrofuturism entered the African American canon in the late 1950s and 1960s for the first time with Sun Ra's experimental and astral jazz, even though it was not accepted as a separate literary genre until the 1970s. As an umbrella term, Afrofuturism is a way of envisioning a black future through philosophy and art. Encompassing science, technology, magic and myth, Afrofuturism tackles the present-day oppressions and marginalization, and in the final analysis, offers imaginative ways of resisting them. Additionally, it focuses on African diaspora to address a number of speculative themes ranging from the revival of ancient African myths to survival of the lost generations.

The Umbra poets "served as predecessors to the Black Arts Movement" (Fortune 20). As Fortune further points out the general characteristics of Umbra Poets;

> Uniquely situated in time between the naturalistic protest poetry and the Black Arts Movement, the Umbra Poets were a community of readers and

> writers who gathered around to share their writing and offer and receive critical affirmation and valuable criticism. Their ultimate goal was to cultivate life-long writers who wrote with purpose and passion. Umbra Poets wrote with a heightened sense of urgency. Some of poets became influential writers for Black nationalism. (20)

The close link between Umbra movement and black nationalism served as a basis for the Black Arts Movement (BAM). The New York experience of young African American artists highlighted their aim to develop a purely African identity and culture. Most of the Umbra poets reflected the political and cultural upheavals of the early 1960s, which paved a way to reinterpreting Black aesthetic within African diaspora. Headed by Imamu Amiri Baraka, formerly known as LeRoi Jones, and a group of black artists, poets, writers and musicians, BAM replaced the concept of New Negro with genuinely Black.

By the late 1960s, there was a growing tendency among African American writers, dramatists and poets to embrace Black Power and they "saw their efforts to change black consciousness and culture as an alternative form of politics to be contrasted with both the tactics and integrationist goals espoused by the civil rights movement" (Kreiss 68). They particularly sought to embed their radical and political ideologies in their works of art in order to create a peculiar black identity. In other words, "the leaders of the Black Arts Movement hoped to celebrate a kind of proletarian and vaguely 'African' culture" (Thomas 237). In *The Black Arts Movement and the Black Panther Party in American Visual Culture*, Morgan exemplifies the visual expression of Black Power through Black aesthetic. She argues that Malcolm X was "the key understanding to Black Arts Movement" (xvii). Morgan articulates that the political and cultural ideology of Malcolm X helped Baraka open Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BART/S) which was at the center of Black Arts Movement. Even though BARTS was not a long-lived organization, it encompassed music, theater and poetry by maintaining the notion of Black superiority. Morgan describes how BART/S was opened:

> That February of Malcolm's death, poet and playwright LeRoi Jones (the future Amiri Baraka) along with like-minded writers, musicians, and artists from the New York City enclaves of Greenwich Village and the Lower East Side turned their attention uptown. A brownstone was rented on West 130th Street near Lennox Avenue in Harlem so that classes could

> be conducted in history, politics, and drama. They called it the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BART/S). (39)

The pedagogical transmission of spiritual and aesthetic values in the form of art added a new dimension to Black struggle during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Larry Neal, one of the leading critics and scholars of Black Arts Movement, favors the concept of Black aesthetic, and notes Black Arts as the "spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" in his 1968 essay "Black Arts Movement,"

> When we speak of a "Black aesthetic" several things are meant. First, we assume that there is already in existence the basis for such an aesthetic. Essentially, it consists of an African-American cultural tradition. But this aesthetic is finally, by implication, broader than that tradition. It encompasses most of the usable elements of Third World culture. The motive behind the Black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the World. (29)

The BAM offers a re-evaluation and re-conceptualization of "western aesthetic, the traditional role of the writer, and the social function of art" (Neal 29). When reformulating the Western cultural aesthetic, the BAM "proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology from that of the West" (Neal 29). The "iconology" that Neal mentions is acquired from a certain set of imagery embedded in a more performative and unique context. To Neal, acquiring a black aesthetic merging with Western literature should be reflected through a unique Afro-American culture in style and content (Rowell 21).

Neal's understanding of black aesthetic is based on a dramatic departure from the Western philosophy and aesthetics. Morgan explains that in rejecting Western forms, black aesthetic claims the Afrocentric: "Having cultivated an aesthetic divorced from Eurocentric notions, the next move was to broaden the cultural lens. That meant bypassing Europe altogether to trace an umbilical link back to Africa" (44). This "umbilical link" Morgan mentions shares the same ideological lineage of Pan Africanism. By straying from the mainstream, Anglo-European art, African American artists could form their genealogy archive, including the historical records in Africa.

Going back to the mythological roots is the starting philosophy of Black Arts Movement, which makes it different from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, whose activists "hoped to prove the cultural worthiness of African Americans by

demonstrating their aptitude for cultivation, development, and progress in terms understood by white American society" (Thomas 237). As Neal noted:

> The Black Arts Movement represents the flowering of a cultural nationalism that has been suppressed since the 1920's. I mean the "Harlem Renaissance"-which was essentially a failure. It did not address itself to the mythology and the life-styles of the Black community. It failed to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit. (39)

As Neal and other leading names of the movement suggested, when investigating the "Black aesthetic," the existence of true African mythology cannot be denied, and this is quite probably what the Harlem Renaissance lacks. Once mythology is combined with "the life-styles of the Black community" (Neal 39), the premises of "cosmic Blackness" can be reached.

In 1968, Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal published the literary magazine, *Cricket*, which was considered as a BAM milestone (Funkhouser 237). Cristopher Funkhouser credits Neal and Baraka as the initiators of *Cricket,* which had been "the magazine functioned to promote music as a cultural nucleus" (237), and he points at the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the project:

> The pair identified directly with musicians, shared beliefs and concerns with them. Jones and Neal sought to share resources, space, and the page with peers they viewed as "the priests of pure wisdom, in essence the voice of a people" (Cricket 1: a). Closely aligned with radical jazz music and musicians, they knew the political and cultural significance of Black music as a rejection of an oppressive European colonialist mind set. (238)

Neal and Baraka's belief in black music for black liberation manifested itself in the first issues of *Cricket,* which particularly encapsulated the avantgarde jazz musicians of the era such as Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane. It is noteworthy that *Cricket* was an important step for bringing music and poetry together to complement the development of black nationalism. Chicago in the 1950s and New York in the 1960s became the two key spots for musical experimentation and black nationalism. However, nationalism was not a monolithic concept as it was tentative and contained disagreements. According to Pinson, "the intense political action associated with black nationalism caused some musicians to differ in their interpretation of the black aesthetic. Sun Ra is one of those avant-garde jazz composers who strengthened

the ties between the avant-garde and the ideologies of Black Nationalism" (151). The emerging experimental groups and individual performers in the 1960s provide the prolific jazz years of the US. As Pinson articulates,

> From 1965 to 1975 a number of new collectives appeared on the scene … including the Black Artists Group (BAG), the Aboriginal Music Society, the Revolutionary Ensemble, the Human Arts Association, the Jazz and People's Movement, Collective Black Artists, and the Jazz Composers Orchestra Association (JCOA). Some groups, like the AACM, BAG, the Jazz and People's Movement, Collective Black Artists, and the Human Arts Association, cultivated ties with other black cultural nationalist groups and artists as well as with black communities. These affiliations often reflected developments in black ideology. (150)

By the 1960s, black music entered a new era in which the composers "encompassed self-empowerment, celebration, and self-love. It paved the way for improved self-esteem and community esteem, challenged societal social norms, and, most important, created an avenue for self-definition" (Morant 74). This shift in black music was inextricably bounded by the growing nationalist spirit during the BAM. Jazz was not a mere entertainment tool anymore. It had a philosophy and a function. It was the music of "spontaneity, creative nowness, ecstasy, quotidian use, or identity of life and art" (Ostendorf 46). The performative, spontaneous, tentative discourse of Black Arts Movement was inspired by the avantgarde jazz. This experimentalism was also an exercise in "musical independence and musical adulthood" (Ostendorf 48). In his essay on the relationship between the Black Arts Movement and the experimental avantgarde jazz, Robinson says,

> Throughout this period, the attitudes, values, and goals of black artists were anything but monolithic. Instead, the interrelated worlds of black literature and musical experimentalism created a dialogic space that encouraged interrogation, innovation and articulation of new artistic ideas. Within this environment, "black music" took on heterotopic meanings; rather than a rigid, collectivized notion of "black identity" in music, the Black Arts Movement and the jazz avant-garde were marked by multiple, sometimes competing, conceptions of artistic identity. (20)

When describing the politics of the BAM, Neal underlines the "apocalyptic vision" of the movement (Rowell 26). He thinks African Americans need an apocalypse, a catastrophic break from the ongoing oppressive system to initiate "a world where Black people are free" (14). By appropriating the Western art, the leaders

of the BAM advocated a peculiar African imagery and iconography. Especially in the creation of an art work, they relied on the power of "the weird" as Neal points at. More precisely, while depicting the background of the movement, Neal articulates they were fully devoted to "to African ideas and to African liberation and to Afro-American liberation and to African culture and to African perception" (Rowell 13). Having demarcated African mythology and culture from that which is essentially Western, black authors and intellectuals within the BAM aimed at getting the true feeling embedded in the "weird." In his interview with Rowell, Neal further says "we were looking for a big feeling; we were really trying to connect. I was aware of a whole kind of cosmology of love that I had never dealt with before, and I was aware of it. I was trying to sing to all of that, you know" (13). This "weird" experience, Neal proclaims, signaled the emergence of a dynamic, out-of-this-world concept, namely Afrofuturism.

From the modernist expressionism of the 1920s to the philosophy and experimentalism of the 1960s, jazz music always initiated or accompanied cultural innovation and change. The technological progress of the Space Age which meld into the political turbulence of Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s determined the "African American figures, cultural institutions, and ideological contexts of the movement" (Jarrett 1244).

Afrofuturism remained unidentified until Mark Dery, a *New Yorker* journalist, author and critic, introduced it for the first time in his well-known essay "Black to the Future" in the early 1990s. In his essay, Dery poses the question of why very few African American novelists write in the genre of science fiction whereas it enables them to imagine themselves in "an enhanced future" (180). Instead of saying "an enhanced future," Dery offers an alternative term, which he later calls Afrofuturism. In order to define Afrofuturism, he asks this notable question: "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?" (180). Afrofuturism is thus understood primarily in terms of its relation to time, history, diaspora and African American experience. The examples of fiction "imagine possible futures" by re-envisioning African American history from the lens of technology, and project a futuristic vision that also resonates with the present.

After Dery coined the term, Afrofuturism continued to be reinterpreted by black intellectuals and authors such as Alondra Nelson, Yatasha Womack, Reynaldo Anderson, and Isiah Lavender. To Lavender, "this definition led the first generation of afrofuturist scholars to treat afrofuturism as a black Atlantic art form that appeared in the wake of World War II and that is, as such, uniquely suited to thinking about issues of social justice in a global and technology-intensive world" (3). Especially, the Black Arts Movement paved a way for the development of Afrofuturism. In her book *Afrofuturism* (2002), Alondra Nelson claims Afrofuturism is rooted in technology, and the relationship between music, art, literature, and African Diaspora culture is reflected well through this movement. In so doing, Afrofuturism opens a path to use imagination in a free sense, and this situation creates "free thinkers." In the late 1990s, many African American authors began to study it in a more philosophical and aesthetic context, and many of them realized that they have already produced numerous works with an Afrofuturistic discourse. As Yatasha Womack argues in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*:

> I was an Afrofuturist before the term existed. And any sci-fi fan, comic book geek, fantasy reader, Trekker, or science fair winner who ever wondered why black people are minimized in pop culture depictions of the future, conspicuously absent from the history of science, or marginalized in the roster of past inventors and then actually set out to do something about it could arguably qualify as an Afrofuturist as well. (8)

Womack plainly describes Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (9). These four keywords enable Afrofuturists to imagine themselves in a liberated future through the power of technology. To Womack, Afrofuturism can be created "through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing," as long as it "redefines culture and notions of blackness for today and the future" (9). The collaboration between the present and the future that Womack describes is not merely the concern of a musician or an author; any African American artist is entitled to produce an Afrofuturistic expression image. In this regard, not only black authors but filmmakers, critics, painters, dancers began to be a part of this tradition. In this way, both underground and mainstream culture shaped the concept of Afrofuturism, which symbolizes techno-space future for African Americans. The race-free approach Womack uses to define Afrofuturism led the movement to grow "as a great tool for wielding the imagination for personal change and societal growth" (191). To Womack,

Afrofuturism will also create “free thinkers and innovators” by empowering them to see themselves in possible futures and in “a new, balanced world” (67). However, she points out that only the imagination will reveal Afrofuturism’s central function which is to see “race as a technology” (191).

Isiah Lavender also examines the connection between science, politics and race with a growing interest in technology. To him, an Afrofuturistic lens might be quite helpful for understanding black experience in the US during the Space Age. Both textually and non-textually, Afrofuturism enables African Americans to reflect on the period antebellum slavery from a current and creative perspective. Lavender articulates that Afrofuturism “functions as a scientific and political meditation on race and freedom as well as a fantastic fugitive adventure that complicates our understanding of antebellum America” (76).

Seeing race as a product of technology is the reflection of the intersection of the Cold War period and the Civil Rights Movement. Scientific and technological developments of the Space Age in the US led many Americans to seek a promising future in space. Having found a utopia on another planet, De Witt Douglas Kilgore argues that space provided yet another area for the American white-male upper-class ideology to pursue the expansionist American dream. Kilgore defines this trend as “Astrofuturism.” As a result, science fiction and science writing became increasingly popular through technoscientific advancements during the space race. This vision helped African Americans them to reinterpret and recreate an imaginary and a prospective future. The blackness of space added another dimension to Astrofuturism as a symbolic referent to African Americans. As Kilgore indicates how blackness of space became a “racial signifier” that pertained to diaspora:

> In the decades following the Second World War, the predominantly white and male ranks of astrofuturists confronted a great crisis for which race became the most potent signifier. In response to criticisms inspired by the civil rights movement and the new left, their space frontiers promised to extend the reach of the human species and to heal its historic wound. (8-9)

The space race, however, was no longer a “battle for the stars” between the two big powers. African Americans entered the race to make the outer space black. Reynaldo Anderson’s book *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* furthers to

Dery's term, and establishes Afrofuturism as a creative tool for blacks to reinterpret their troubled past and to reclaim an imaginative future. With the usage, "Afrofuturism 2.0," Anderson argues that the movement has entered a second phase in the twenty-first century. Different from the traditional understanding of Afrofuturism, which primarily favors technology, this new concept, *2.0* carries Afrofuturism over to the fields of "metaphysics; aesthetics; theoretical and applied science; social sciences; and programmatic spaces" (Anderson x). Whereas the traditional notion of Afrofuturism serves as a tool for digitalized African American art and technoculture throughout the West, Afrofuturism 2.0 represents the genuine pan-African esoteric identity. As Anderson lists the basic terminology of this new concept:

> [T]he early twenty-first century technogenesis of Black identity reflecting counter histories, hacking and or appropriating the influence of network software, database logic, cultural analytics, deep remixability, neurosciences, enhancement and augmentation, gender fluidity, posthuman possibility, the speculative sphere, with transdisciplinary applications and has grown into an important Diasporic techno-cultural Pan African movement. (x)

Afrofuturism can be related with pan-African philosophy, "which posits the belief that black people all over the world share an origin and a heritage, that the welfare of black people everywhere is inexorably linked, and that the cultural products of blacks everywhere should express their belief" (Floyd 100). Historically, the radical ideology of Pan-African movement of the nineteenth century stemmed from "Africological" philosophy that "is the trans-generational and transcontinental study of African phenomenon" (Rollins 129). As Rollins acknowledges that Afrofuturism is also "an Africological system of metaphysics, aesthetics, and social thought, used to analyze and interpret Africanity and Africanist art, literature, music, science, technology, and society from a perspective which informs the trans-generational study of the past, present, and future of African peoples" (Rollins 128). Considered as a form of art consisting of beyond-the-world elements, Afrofuturism combines the mythological past with the astral future. This astro-mythologic dimension of Afrofuturism has ultimately altered the ongoing discourse of black exploitation and slavery. In this alternative realm, Afrofuturists could reimagine and reconceptualize the systematic harassment and discrimination.

Afrofuturistic perspective is rooted in Astro blackness, which is a synthesis of Afrocentrism and ancient Egyptian myths. Afrofuturists believe in the need for an "emergence of a black identity framework within emerging global technocultural assemblages, migration, human reproduction, algorithms, digital networks, software platforms, bio-technical augmentation" (Anderson vii-viii). Through Afrodiasporic post-modernity, Afrofuturism creates a neo-African narrative by synthesizing science, fiction and magic. As Szwed articulates, "Astro-Black mythology was a way of expressing the unity of Egypt and outer space, of bringing a black reading of the Bible together with elements of ancient history and science to update the black sacred cosmos" (256). It enables African Americans to cross a critical threshold and put them in a "post" labeled category. Marlo David, in his article "Afrofuturism and Post-Soul Possibility," relates Afrofuturism, and black popular music, and points out that "post-black" or "post-soul" aesthetic "rejects blackness as a unitary subject position" (695). David argues that black liberation expands the boundaries of black cultural aesthetics (696). The "post" labeled notions, namely post-human, post-soul, post-colonial and post-black, constitute an "alien-nation" by leaving the mainstream behind and by focusing on "electronic music and experimental jazz" (David 698). At this point, post-blackness can be defined as a new tool in radical Black aesthetics. Crawford explains the dichotomy between black and post-black; and encompasses these notions to understand contemporary black aesthetics in the twenty-first century. She implies that black aesthetic values are concentrated upon respectively "being black, being beyond black, or post-black, and eventually becoming black" (Crawford 3). "The most radical black aesthetic movements," Crawford writes, "are always anticipating the next step 'beyond blackness' and actually shaping whatever blackness is around the impulse to imagine the unimaginable" (3).

For Afrofuturists, post-human is the most crucial category to interpret their future. Strict racial codes and practices pushed African Americans into a sub, or even, non-human position in the US. Afrofuturists, however, replaced this racial indicator by post-human. This understanding of Afrofuturism as a post-black discipline, however, does not mean "to deny the tradition of countermemory" (Eshun 289); instead, it reconsiders tradition within the boundaries of cross-cultures. As "an ethical commitment to history, the dead, and the forgotten, the manufacture of conceptual

tools," the countermemory Eshun reiterated here is something which has to be "assembled" and "contested" through "the colonial archive" (Eshun 288). Under the significant role of countermemories, situating the collective trauma memory into a modern healing narrative addressed the way transatlantic slavery is rehistoricized through imaginative and speculative responses of Afrofuturism. To Eshun, tradition is now "proleptic as much as the retrospective" (289), and he further describes the unusual narrative of Afrofuturism as "the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future condition." (293). Assembling cultural and historical archives virtually, predictively, proleptically or retrospectively, Afrofuturists build up counterfutures "to forecast and fix African dystopia" (Eshun 29). They never reject the role of the past while imagining themselves in a remote technological space. They rewrite the past in order to conceptualize an alternative future. In both scenarios, however, "either imagining alternate futures or rewriting the past," African Americans aim only to "change the present" for an "authentic" Black future (Veen 80).

Afrofuturism manifests itself firstly in Sun Ra's experimental space music and his abstract poetry, then in the speculative science fiction of Afrofuturist authors, shaped the understanding of a new, genuine Black aesthetic of the late twentieth century. They all focused primarily on the notion of post-blackness by revealing the unconventional motifs of African diaspora, and they used teleportative, scientific metaphors such as space and time travels, or spiritual and magical tools such as reviving ancient myths and legends. Their desire for producing "race as a technology and as racial identity futures interaction" in a black cosmos led African American authors including Baraka to embrace an Afrofuturist discourse by championing Sun Ra's ideology of fictionalizing an alternative galactic sphere (Brooks 154). African-American cultural imaginary that emphasized Space Age technology for an "enhanced future" "to take on the white technologies that have, like aliens, enslaved and transported African people from one world to another one to erase their past and remake their future" (Brooks 156). From the perspective of Afrofuturism, using race as a technology became a form of science fiction and in the 1970s of the US, Black Sci-fi broadened its horizons and blossomed into a deep-rooted literary movement: Black Speculative Genre.

This thesis will firstly provide an overview of the emergence of the Afrofuturist imagination in Sun Ra's music and poetry, and how it is reflected in the movie

adaptation *Space is the Place* (1974). Then, it will analyze two important authors, Ishmael Reed and Octavia Butler; and how their novels, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and *Kindred* (1979) reinterpret, revisit and reconceptualize African American history, mythology and philosophy in the frame of Afrofuturism. Whereas Reed uses humor and satire to rewrite history in his satirical narrative *Mumbo Jumbo*, Butler presents an Afrofuturistic sense of time in her feminist dystopia, or neo-slave narrative in *Kindred*. Though different in temperament and technique, both offer a concept of African diasporic culture in which they reinterpret and mythologize race, gender and sexuality through an allegorical perspective. Ra, Butler and Reed had one thing in common. When fictionalizing an alternative realm, they insisted that the future "is black, or will be" (Younquist 334).

CHAPTER 1 SUN RA: ASTRAL JAZZ FUELED HIS SPACESHIP

> "If art is the harbinger of future possibilities, what does the future of Black America portend?"
>
> -Larry Neal

The Cold War, the launch of Sputnik, the space race, and the growing tension during the civil rights directly impacted Sun Ra. Ra added space imagery and electric sounds of the mystical Space Age to his poetry and music. However, he went all the way back to ancient Egypt. Although Sun Ra was completely unique back then, he was heavily influenced by Egypt, African American folklore and culture, American society, and the scientific developments during the space race. He did his own research and incorporated and formulated his original thinking to create a metaphorical utopia of black consciousness, facilitated by science and technology and grounded in the cultural values of ancient Egypt and the re-enactment of space. Sun Ra's interest in energy objects and metaphors, space and advanced technologies represents a black cultural understanding and a rethinking of cold war science through deep-rooted African American social narratives of freedom and empowerment. Thus, Sun Ra's bizarre and experimentalist music and philosophy particularly contributed to Cold War's space race and attempted to emphasize the dominance of Egyptian folklore, myth and culture as a means of elevating the position of African Americans in the US.

1.1. SUN RA AND HIS SOLAR ARKESTRA

Sun Ra, or with his original name Herman Poole "Sonny" Blount, was born in Birmingham in 1914. Ra, however, never claimed that he belonged to the Planet Earth; rather, claimed that he was coming from a deep cosmic realm. He was from another world, "a mystical World from outer space" (Ra 14). As Paul Younquist playfully presents his subject, in his notable biography, *A Pure Solar World: Sun Ra and the Birth of Afrofuturism* (2016) "He came from Saturn. Arrival date: May 22, 1914. Place: the Magic City, Birmingham, Alabama. Terrestrial identity: Herman Poole Blount, the apparent son of Cary and Ida, who had moved to Birmingham from Demopolis, a one-time French utopian community" (7).

Sonny was one of the jazz musicians that Birmingham raised. It was Birmingham where he started writing his poetry and composed the background of his songs. Especially during the 1930s, the number of musicians increased in Birmingham streets and country-clubs. As Szwed particularly summarized the leading role of Birmingham in producing the notable musicians of the era, "Most of the bands which developed in Birmingham in the 1930s, such as The Black & Tan Syncopators, The Fred Averett Band, and The Magic City Serenaders-were made up of Whatley students, many of whom by then were teachers of music themselves in other Birmingham schools…" (22). Ra's withdrawal into himself to survive in a creative sense began during his Birmingham years. "If Birmingham was racially demonized," Szwed argues, "it was also extraordinarily tolerant of individuality of eccentricity and personal excess" (3). In other words, his Birmingham years forced Ra to adopt a mystical identity. Indeed, the segregation was widespread throughout Alabama, and until the Civil Rights Movement, Blacks were exposed to endure white supremacism and their segregationist policies of both the government and terrorist groups such as KKK. As Szwed depicts Birmingham as a major site of the brutal white treatment,

> It was Birmingham, Alabama, in 1940, the most segregated city in the United States. A city so racially possessed that black businesses were legally enclosed within a downtown grid, and local custom set aside a day for blacks to shop outside of it-a day on which, whites complained to each other, they'd be shoved off the sidewalk if they dared to venture out. This was the city where the Robert E. Lee Klavern boasted the largest KKK membership in America, and was so bold that they murdered a Catholic priest on the steps of his own rectory. A city where violence seemed so imminent that President Harding (who some said was a Negro himself) had once given a speech timorously pleading for an easing of segregation. (3)

By the 1940s, Birmingham had already become a target of the KKK. The terrorist groups organized heavy dynamite explosions against African Americans. The African American population of the city was terrorized with so many bombings that it was once called "Bombingham." Their basic motive is to prevent African Americans to occupy white neighborhoods. It is also important to bear in mind that Birmingham was central to the Civil Rights Movement. During the same period, World War II also changed the balance of the city. When he was drafted into the army in 1942, Sony refused to enroll in the army, despite religious objections to war and death, although many of his

relatives excluded him from the family. He was caught and arrested after he continued to oppose the judge in the court where he was taken. The judge says to him, “I’ve never seen a nigger like you before,” to which Sonny replies, “No, and you never will again.” After leaving prison and completing public service, he left Alabama in 1945 and settled in Chicago. Indeed, in the beginning of World War II, many African American musicians invaded Chicago’s Jazz scene by refusing to serve in the US army. As Cataliotti argues, “the Chicago area experienced a massive influx of African American musical, particularly jazz, talent due to the U.S. Navy’s establishment of a special camp for training black recruits at the Great Lakes base” (428).

Ra was born as Herman Poole Blount. For Ra, being born with an inherited identity does not mean that one cannot acquire another one. Denying his past, including his birthplace, his name and his family, Ra believes that he found his true self embedded in his ideals. In his belief, creating a self should not be restricted in certain dominant categories; and human beings have the capacity to discover the truth hidden in themselves. Ra’s radical decision to reject his given identity and to adopt a universal-self ended up with a metaphorical rebirth as a spiritual being in a mystical place from outer space. Ra says “I have many names. Names of mystery. Names of splendor. Names of shame. I have many names. Some call me Mr. Ra. Some call me Mr. Re. You can call me Mr. Mystery” (qtd. in Redd 239). Ra’s name has a reference to ancient Egyptian God, which represents “solar energy, testifies to the possibility of the transcendence of human form and transfiguration of identity” (Redd 238). To Redd, “sacred names incorporated the essence of a being, and possession of such names provided both knowledge of and access to divine forces. Sun Ra extends this science of sound alchemy throughout his works” (239).

As a self-proclaimed alien, he argued that he was prompted with a mission: To transport African Americans away from the humiliating racist practices of Planet Earth. During this astral travel, Sonny Blount became Sun Ra. His music became his spaceship and his friends became his Arkestra. The real motivation behind Ra’s abstract-futuristic identity was music. During his childhood, Ra began to write and compose his own music by outfitting himself. He distanced himself not only from his family and birthplace but also from Planet Earth. As Younquist points out:

> Sonny Blount (as he was known in his early years) lived at a distance from others and the common concerns that ruled their lives—getting and spending, winning and losing, courting and marrying, even living and dying. He would reject his family. He would leave Birmingham. He felt he was not human. He liked to say he belonged to another race altogether, the angel race, which graced him with an awareness of worlds far superior to planet Earth. (8)

Sonny was "one of the strangest artists that America has ever produced", says Szwed, (xvii); however, the atmosphere of Birmingham forced Ra to adopt a mystical identity. As Frank Adam remembers, "No one said Sonny Blount was crazy: he was different, they said, and no had approached his degree of difference. Birmingham could tolerate a lot of strangeness. And even in slavery there were some blacks who defied all kinds of rules. And no one dared burn a cross to control them. And Sonny was no threat to anyone-especially other musicians-he never threatened to become 'successful'" (Szwed 36).

Ra was more than a simple musician. He was a poet, composer, arranger, pianist and an avant-garde jazz musician. The tune of his music "was the weapon he directed against that World" (Younquist 154), and it helped him find another living chance for his people in another planet which is far from the painful realities of this world. His songs were a reaction against the traumatic African American experience in the US. He believed no place on Planet Earth was safe for African descent people. Ra's life coincided with civil rights struggles and several interconnected movements that addressed the question of cultural identity and ancestral roots but he did not become an ardent advocate in any of them. Neither the strong Christian tradition among African Americans in the South, nor the Nation of Islam and the Islamic tradition that was widespread among the more radical groups in the urban North was convincing for Sun Ra to become a member. Ra believed that this galactic experience could be achieved metaphorically, intellectually and poetically through astral travel, and he used space and time travel as tropes to signify the politics "of exclusion and of reterritorialization, of claiming the 'outside' as one's own, of tying a revised and corrected past to a claimed future" (Szwed 140). Sun Ra's way of dealing with this exclusion, both the long-term and the particular case of the Space Age, is to change the equations by using outer space as the base in which the underprivileged subjectivities are empowered. Szwed puts it this way: "Space was also a metaphor which transvalues the dominant terms so that they

become aberrant, a minority position, while the terms of the outside, the beyond, the margins, become the standard" (140). Sonny sees the planet as a spaceship, and this "beyond" imagination becomes his medium in his poetry and music.

By the end of the 1940s, Ra came to Chicago where he "channeled the urban spirit of American black vernacular art" (Younquist 20). During the 1940s and early 1950s, Chicago had become the new Harlem of black music. "Chicago," Younquist relates, "was a mecca of improvised music, an urban space peculiarly conducive to the sly alchemy of tradition and innovation, sustained by an avid audience of dancers, drinkers, hipsters, and hangerson" (Younquist 20). Ra's arrival in Chicago changed the nature of black music on the South side during The Black Chicago Renaissance. His 5414 South Prairie Apartment where "he slept and ate, read his books, wrote his poetry, and played his piano, often in the company of other musicians" became a turning point in Ra's life, too (Younquist 26). Playing piano and writing poetry in his small flat blossomed Ra's aspirations into a new level. His improvisational jazz style and urban life experience in Chicago opened a new path for the avant-garde of the 1960s in New York. Among Chicago's clubs was Club DeLisa,[5] located in Bronzeville,[6] where Ra worked with the pianist and composer, Fletcher Henderson, whom he admired much.

A leading figure in the scene of swing jazz, Henderson hired Ra as a copyist and pianist. Even after Henderson's contract was done with the club, Ra continued to appear on the stage with the band until he assembled his Solar Arkestra and released his own albums under the management of Alton Abraham. "Ra created an Arkestra which became the most continually advanced and experimental group in the history of jazz and popular music. And by locating himself in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia, the major centers of jazz, he affected all of the music of his time" (Szwed xvii). The jazz tuba player, Bob Stewart recalls the period as such: "During the mid-1950s, he launched his own label, Saturn and brought together a band dressed in purple blazers, white

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[5] Szwed remarks that "The club was opened in 1933 by the DeLisa Brothers, who ran it as a nightclub and gambling operation until it burned down in 1941; and a few months later they opened the new DeLisa at 55th and State Street, a couple of doors up from the old place. The new club was spectacular: faced with glazed white bricks on the outside, it was lit inside with red fluorescent bulbs, and had a dance floor which was hydraulically raised up to the bandstand when the floor show began" (53).

[6] "Blacks didn't call this part of the city the Black Belt," Younquist says, "those were white words, used to mark a difference also deemed a deficiency. They called it Bronzeville and had done so since 1934, when James J. Gentry, a writer for the Chicago Defender, inaugurated with the newspaper's blessing an annual 'Mayor of Bronzeville' election" (18).

gloves and propeller beanies before making a transition to their signature ancient Egyptian garb" (xiv). Ra called his unusual tribe-like big band, Arkestra. Their repertoire featured Ra's own experimental compositions and hailed the conventional jazz forms as well. His concept of "Arkestra" has a phonetic implication. To Corbett, "homophony is why he called his group the Arkestra—on one hand, he slipped in a Biblical reference to the Ark, but on the other hand, Ra always explained that where he came from, in Alabama, that's how you said the word Orchestra" (5). Ra and his Arkestra had interesting business cards showing the date and place of their performance during the 1950s. (See Fig.1., Fig.2., Fig.3.)

It demonstrates that Ra and his Myth-Science Arkestra had a ticket for everyone to join them in their cosmic voyage with a spaceship fueled by their experimental jazz.

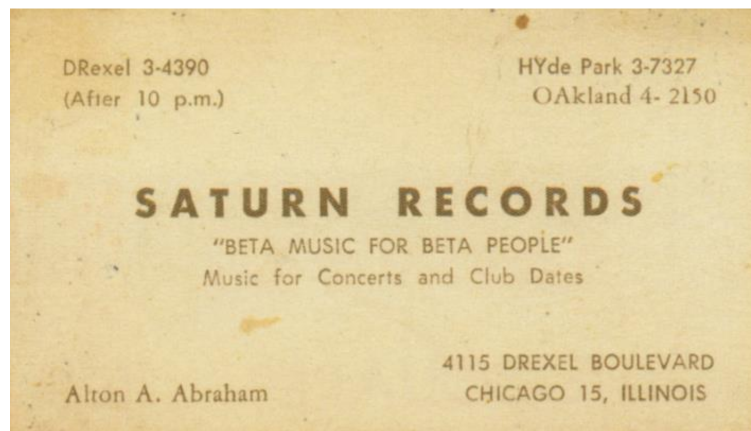

Fig.1. Sun Ra's Business Cards from the 1950s (Saturn Records)

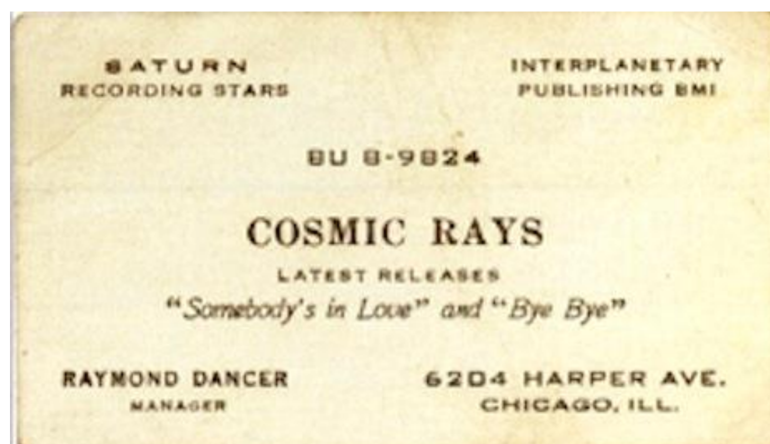

Fig.2. Sun Ra's Business Card from the 1950s (Cosmic Rays)

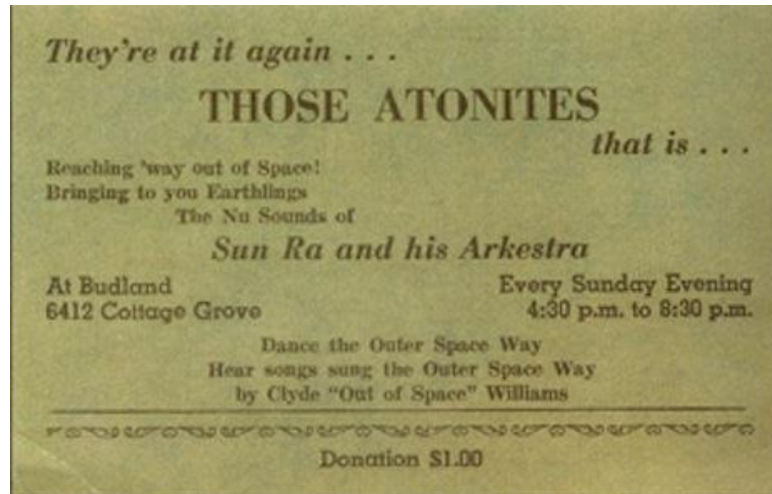

Fig.3. Sun Ra's Business Card from the 1950s

As well as an avant-garde jazz musician, his poetic output is indispensable when analyzing Ra's understanding of Afrofuturism. In Szwed's view, Ra's poems "were heavily Neoplatonic in content, the music of the spheres playing in the background, poetry as music as divine order; he toys with number symbolism, focuses on creativity and incarnation" (320). With Neoplatonic, a philosophical and spiritual doctrine, Szwed refers to the mystical, mostly esoteric, dimension of Ra's poetry. A scholar in philosophy, Tuomo Lankila analyzes Neoplatonic manifestations and conceptions as "a form of mystagogy," which means the interpretation of mystic doctrines, and argues that "historical conditions later forced Neoplatonism to act as a substitute for persecuted polytheism" (149). Therefore, in its tendency to revive the mystic, the spiritual, the obscure and the occult, Sun Ra's philosophical poetry followed a Neoplatonic line. It is important, however, to keep in mind that this Neoplatonic thought was counterbalanced by Sun Ra's response to the social, political, historical, and economic circumstances of the twentieth-century US.

The philosophical and artistic elements of Sun Ra's musical and literary work can be identified and analyzed. The product, especially his music and the poetry, which are the manifestations of those elements, might not always be subject to clear analysis and identification. Many scholars note the raucous, untidy, unclear, and ambiguous nature of Ra's work. Perhaps the central question in studying Sun Ra's output is not about themes and arguments, but about the points of this deliberate disorder, the

undisciplined structure, the nature of inspiration, and the wilderness of thought itself. The best display of such issues is perhaps the life that Sun Ra led. As Zamalin posits:

> Ra's poetic message—much like his musical compositions—was less philosophically clear and more improvisational and shrouded in mystery than his utopian predecessors. But it was much more fully embodied in his life. Ra tried to live out the utopian aesthetic that was only outlined in literature. In fact, he tried to make his life literary…his thoughts probed questions about the ethics and necessity of what was central to the twentieth century: capitalist inequality, ongoing war, white supremacy, *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation, and black ghettoization. (108)

Ra's formation of his big band is more than a simple experiment of blending different musicians and their instruments. Ra wrote the science-fiction poetry of his music and the Arkestra played it by reforming "sounds that exceeded the size and shape of more conventional jazz forms: swing, with its ensemble harmonies, bebop, with its jagged melodies and rhythmic tricks" (Younquist 72). For Ra, the "manner" of the music was more valuable than the instruments. As he expresses in an interview: "Well, I use ordinary instruments, but actually I'm using them in a manner … I'm using the fellows who are playing the instruments as the instrument … It's just a matter of transforming certain ideas over into a language which the world can understand …" (qtd. in Szwed 247). They combined the mythic, scientific, electronic and esoteric elements, "then they put on weird clothes, space helmets, robes, flowing capes. They did rituals, played in rituals, evoked lost civilizations, used strangeness to teach us open feeling as intelligence" (Baraka, vii).

In addition to the extraordinary stage personae of the Arkestra as a whole, cosmical and science-fictional terminology became an important part of the Arkestra's music, titles of songs and albums. Even the "utopic-apocalyptic" album covers triggered the alienness of Ra's music. Ra and his Cosmic Arkestra did not produce rhythmic and experimental sounds only; they produced "ideas, longings and visions that had visited him for years" and they were the fundamental mediators of abstract-futuristic sounds (Younquist 72). Ra and his Arkestra's "music was more than music," Younquist claims, "it stirred a philosophy in his bones, a deep wisdom…" (72).

In his formative years in the 1950s, Ra developed an esoteric vision that incorporated several elements of ancient Egyptian mythology. One of the prominent

mythological figures of inspiration for Sun Ra was Thmei, the prophetic Goddess of Justice and Truth. Not only for Ra, but also for the African Americans, Egypt and its mythical resources were gaining importance. He founded a secret society, a study group, named Thmei Research, and produced broadsides. For them, a reading of Thmei and Egyptology resonated "with a message of spiritual awakening, aesthetic transcendence, and social transformation designed specifically for blacks" (Younquist 37). Combining the ancient Egyptian inventory of his vision with technology, Ra laid the foundations of, what he later called, "myth-science," and claimed the Space Age technology to create an unprecedented world, as Kreiss explains:

> Sun Ra believed that African Americans were going to be left behind as the technology changed around them unless they developed the technical agency to both use and reinvent the tools of white society. For Sun Ra, this agency could be established through the creation of a mythic consciousness for black people that was centered on the metaphor of a "black knowledge society" informed by the cultural imagining of Egypt and outer space. (61)

In Ra's understanding the color black is loaded with meaning, referring both to the skin color, and something spiritual beyond that. It is both African, with its sounds, sense of self, and transcontinental history, and also, the vast unknown space. At its deepest level, the sign black signifies a knowledge of the complex African history and diaspora, and a way of being and performing, which resonates with what Kreiss calls, "black knowledge society," in the above quotation. As Redd clarifies, Ra's concept of blackness is not about "race and racial hierarchy. It is a divine, cosmic principle of the universe, a living spirit that transmits its vitalism" (232). The vitalism Redd brings up can be linked to "the technical agency" Kreiss explains above. Redd believes that Ra did not classify blackness within a social category. To him, blackness might be depicted as a "multi-dimensional symbol simultaneously encoding information about the formation of the cosmos, human life, and the human psyche and linking these domains through analogy" (232-233).

When re-establishing a modern version of Egyptian blackness, Ra favors "sacred science … to explore realms of experience (the uncharted dimensions) forbidden and repressed by empirical sciences …" (Redd 237). "The sacred science" Redd mentions here is not identified with the objective truth and knowledge of the external world;

instead, it “effects an augmentation of the self of the practitioner, creating Sun Ra’s many-multiself” (Redd 237). Accordingly, the initiation of outer-darkness concept, which is common to Ra’s understanding of space jazz, can be directly linked to his belief in celebrating the idea of blackness. In his poem, “the outer darkness,” black is space/the outer darkness/the void direction to the heavens/each spaceport is a heaven/in that it is a haven/the music of the outer darkness is/the music of the void/but the opening is synonym to the beginning (52)

After completing his Chicago years, Ra stepped in New York and he found himself at the center of heated debates. Arkestra had a different mission in the Northern part of the country. Rather than simply performing their space jazz as they used to do in Chicago, they evolved with the highly politicized climate of New York City. Ra and his Solar Arkestra, however, did not physically take part in black protests during the 1960s. They primarily focused on what the political protests and uprisings of the 1960s lacked. As “a mainstream jazzman” and “a central figure in the era’s African American embrace of science and technology” (Kreiss 197), Ra helped in changing the social and political climate of the era and in reinterpreting “the racial aesthetic themes that characterized the Black Arts Movement” (Kreiss 201). To him, there was nothing wrong with the cultural agenda of the BAM—except that the Black Arts poetry needed a marginal sound that incorporated science.

Ra calls the role of science in human life as “equations,” and he believes every human being should come up with an equation “for a better world.” In his poem entitled “science has changed,” Ra writes,

> there must be different kinds of philosophies
> different kind of music
> different kind of approach to religion
> different kind of approach to politics
> different kind of approach to an education
> different kind of approach in every way
> that is the only way
> everything is based upon equations. (60)

Ra loved equations and wanted to vitalize the energy which, he believed, the words possessed, by using them in different combinations and permutations to create a certain phenomenon. These equations highlight how important Sun Ra is to anyone

interested in theory, philosophy and the nature of (artistic) creation. For Ra, music, religion, politics and education are all based on equations. In Ra's ideology, myth equals science, and that "science has changed." (Ra 60). As he understands it, science is no longer a methodical and systematic knowledge with certainty qualities. It is more than a simple "equation." Rather, science is his experimental music which is facilitated by advanced technology; it is a mediator. Ra's conception of science is shaped by cultural and historical understandings. It reflects a rethinking of Cold War science in relation to the deeply-rooted African American narratives of freedom and empowerment. "Inspired by scientific theories and mathematical equations," Gaskins notes, "artists explore the connection between cultural heritage artifacts and contemporary ideas about the structure of time, space, and the universe. Sun Ra experimented with electronic instruments to create soundscapes from the future" (Gaskins 41). When marshaling the role of science embedded in equations for a better world, Ra's poetry acts "as a technology of preparation for immortality" (Redd 237).

With his relocation to New York, Ra's free jazz style in his Chicago years turned to avant-garde and this relocation opened a path for other avant-garde jazz musicians to express themselves. It changed the very nature of Black Arts Movement, as well. Amiri Baraka, formerly known as LeRoi Jones, indicates, Ra was the real founder and the "philosopher musician" of Black Arts Movement (253). The cultural revolution in music of the 1960s initiated by Ra aimed to reveal the suppressed black consciousness and his music laid a base for the literary works and plays of the period. Once he moved to New York, Ra performed his songs at BARTS. Ra's first musical contribution in BARTS was to Baraka's famous play, *A Black Mass* (1966), "which uses the Nation of Islam's myth of the origin of the white species as a story line, represents an eclectic array of techniques served up to African-American viewers as propaganda for cultural nationalism" (Shannon 357).

The integration of Ra's experimental music into Baraka's experimental theatre summarizes the point why Baraka called Ra as "our resident philosopher" of the Black Arts Movement:

> Sun Ra's Afrofuturism found an unsettled home on the jazz mobile of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre. Sun Ra was drawn to the BAM's future-oriented engagement with the present, and his resonant query—"Suppose

> we came not from Africa but to Africa"—reflects what "Africa" symbolized in the BAM. The idealization of "Africa" was rooted in Afrofuturism—an anticipation of a new understanding of heritage as not where one is from but to where one must travel. (31-32)

It is apparent that Sun Ra's poetry and music are mainly based upon the notion of black nationalism which had originally been pioneered by Henry Sylvester Williams "who began the intellectual and civil societal agitations against slavery, colonialism, and racism towards African peoples," and this "resulted in the formation of the world's first Pan African Association (PAA) in 1897" (qtd. in Edozie 273). This idea was later advocated by the pioneering black nationalists such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, WEB DuBois; and they truly believed that uniting all people stemming from the African descent was the most crucial step for "racial identity and the concept of global African World" (Edozie 273).

The pioneers of African diaspora movement offered "Back-to-Africa" for the ones who brutally experienced slavery and racism, because "returning to Africa had been one of the major thrusts of the nationalist movements" (Harris 409). However, by the 1960s, the classical approach of black nationalism was replaced by a contemporary one. Unlike classical camp, contemporary nationalists "sought to change black consciousness as a means toward psychological, social, and economic liberation, although they did not explicitly embrace the reconception of technologies to restore black technical agency and build utopias" (Kreiss 62). Sun Ra argued African Americans would have a prospective future by liberating their minds from a hundred-years of oppression and believing in "the magic light of tomorrow" that he expressed in his song "Enlightenment." However, whereas Garvey's solution seemed concrete, Sun Ra embraced a mystic one and "invited" the black race to space where "the song of Enlightenment" comes from. As Amiri Baraka says in his essay dedicated to Sun Ra, "the future is always here in the past" (xi). Ra always stood at the "door of the cosmos" and waited for the people from his own ancestry to accompany them "to the outer worlds of otherness" (Ra 103).

1.2. AFROFUTURISM: ALTER DESTINY IN THE ASTRAL PLANE

At night I sleep my sleep
and dream my dreams
reach into the darkness
and touch the stars
place them in new places
where I would have them
pattern them into another design
of another tomorrow's destiny

-Sun Ra *(touch the stars)*

Ra was the first Afrofuturist who "reached into the darkness" and "touched the stars" as it is quoted in the epigraph. Africanizing outer space had been the first and the foremost step of Ra's intergalactic discourse. His faith in "darkness of space" rooted in his childhood interest in science-fiction. As Szwed argues, "he followed the rise of science fiction as a child, reading early comic books and seeing the movie serials of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon; learning its language, incorporating its themes and motifs into his performances" (131). Science fiction became Ra's safest shelter to escape from Planet Earth and to seek a better world. This subtle idea triggered the impact on reassessing the concept of post-blackness in a futuristic realm. Crawford argues that "Sun Ra's Afrofuturism epitomizes the black post-blackness that shaped the most nuanced parts of the BAM" (62). His involvement in black cultural nationalism completed both the magical and radical dimension of black abstraction "that bridges the gap between black and post-black, being and becoming, the past and the future" (Crawford 64).

As a techno-scientific motif, space entered the music. Space and time metaphors create an anchor for the "weird" and the "other" for African Americans. Sun Ra launched his own space program with his new equations on which he composed his music, originated the manner in which the musical instruments were played and rearranged the syntax of his language so that he could think in unprecented terms. Szwed records Sun Ra reflecting that "… musical instruments, … would someday soon

be electrical, and be capable of producing sound" (49). According to Baraka, "Ra was a Pioneer in using … electronic instruments" (254) and in Afro American jazz. In his works, Baraka claims, "The Weirdness, Outness, Way Outness, Otherness was immediate. Some space metaphysical philosophical surrealistic bop funk… He used music as language, and image" (253), and this "otherness" was best reflected by Sun Ra's efforts to create an "alien-nation," and he intentionally preferred the Space age to illustrate African American "outness" and "otherness." There is no doubt that the earliest representation of Afrofuturism in music was Sun Ra, who released cosmos-centered albums with his Solar Arkestra such as *Super-Sonic Jazz* (1956), *Interstellar Low Ways* (1966), *Sound of Joy* (1968), *Space is the Place* (1973) and *Cosmos* (1976). Ra's electronic tunes in his songs describing interstellar travels and cosmic voyages universalized black struggle. For Dery, Afrofuturism has its roots in "the deepest, darkest wellsprings in the intergalactic big band jazz" of Ra (182). Womack depicts Ra as:

> Sun Ra was a total original. He was a founding father of Afrofuturism, a pioneer of electronic music, playing multiple electronic keyboards long before anyone in jazz or otherwise adopted the instrument. Moreover, he was a forerunner of today's space-music genre, new-age or ambient electronica designed for contemplation. (55)

This creative path Sun Ra pioneered was also followed by many famous jazz musicians of that period and it is not a coincidence that the Space Age gave birth to funk music, as well. To Rambsy, music, especially newly emerging funk, jazz, rap, hip-hop, became the most important tool for African Americans to reflect their creativity and identity (209). In the late 1960s, funk (Parliament/Funkadelic) became another significant Afrofuturist genre in music in the US which is a "bass-heavy music form designed to create states of ecstasy akin to the trance consciousness that morphs from tribal drumming, but using a mid-tempo bass guitar as the match" (Womack 57). Funk is a very distinctive style of music that reached its height in popularity from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. It is a mix of soul, jazz, and R&B that has influenced and incorporated many popular music artists into their music.

Black music offers a new interpretation of African American experience. P/Funk, Morant says, functioned as "as a social protest discourse…after the euphoria of the civil rights movement faded" (72). It gives African Americans a social dynamism

and power of expression. Considered as the forerunner of Funk, George Clinton was on that experimental jazz stage “in white ermine and feathers in his own version of the Mothership[7]” (Szwed 264). Clinton with his space suit and electronic music “took Sun Ra’s concepts and made them a part of pop culture” (Womack 56). While creating his energetic “postdisco” beats, Clinton was particularly inspired by Ra’s intergalactic discourse and he also revealed his belief in cosmic blackness as the basic motif of his music. Both Ra and Clinton, as the pioneers of musical expression of Afrofuturism “exist in the Future/ Past as we all do. It is a syncretic nexus that has an extremely rich communicative potential regarding creativity… to unify through radical cultural productions that recontextualize the perceptions of black people in order to restore their subjectivity” (Jennings et al. 59).

The 1960s’ musical transformation from a traditional to an alternate one was not only limited to Ra and Clinton’s bizarre music. The Afrofuturist concept in jazz saw its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix, John and Alice Coltrane, Gary Bartz, Eddie Henderson Miles Davis and Lee Perry. In the late 1960s, Lee Perry became the pioneer of reggae and dub sound “by layering the same sounds on top of one another, initially playing the same sound on two tape players and recording it” (Womack 63). His initiation of modern reggae through the usage of space tunes and techno-rhythms in their Afrofuturistic albums, Sun Ra, George Clinton, and Lee Scratch Perry have invaded the innovative jazz scene of the late 1950s and 1960s and they “have inspired not just musical genres, but critical music writing that explores their technological approach to sound” (Womack 66).

Apart from the astral music legacy of the 1960s initiated by Sun Ra, another subgenre developed which allowed novelists to imagine a counter future: Black Science Fiction or Black Speculative Genre. As Eshun depicts, “science fiction is now a research and development department within a futures industry that dreams of the prediction and control of tomorrow” (291) Brandon Jones epitomizes SF on a historical and philosophical basis and he claims that SF is built upon “a certain historical period” and it cannot be considered as “distinct from realist fiction.” (291). Rather “it stimulates possible futures, thereby creating the present as an ongoing project that influences the

[7] Clinton’s Mothership concept symbolizes a sacred space ship which “came from star Sirius, harking back to the Dogon’s theory of origin” (Womack 56).

future" (238). SF also helps to create new engagements with "techno-scientific modernity and future imaginaries." In this different historical legacy, "Afro-Americans produced their own science and technology" (Jones 237). In that sense, it can be argued that Black science fiction was developed as a distinct and speculative genre. Especially, during the 1950s and its afterwards, science fiction in the US entered a color-based phase and "presumed a color-blind future" (Bould 177). For many black authors, Black Sci-Fi shaped along with the concept of Afrofuturism means "a cultural departure, because it allows for a series of worst-case future…which are woven into every kind of everyday present reality" (Bould 180).

Black Sci-Fi authors believed in the power of myth. More precisely, mythologizing African history initiated by Sun Ra enables African Americans to cross a critical threshold and place themselves in a "post" labeled category. To David, "Post-black" or "post-soul" aesthetics "rejects blackness as a unitary subject position" (695). David argues that black liberation expands the boundaries of black cultural aesthetics (696). All of these "post" labeled notions such as post-human, post-soul, and post-black shaped an "alien- nation." The difference between black and "post-black," soul and post-soul, human and post- human reflects the same difference between past and future.

As Younquist explains, "when Sun Ra, the great theorist and master mage of astro-black mythology, says, *Space is the Place*, he means that it's the place of blackness: black space. What, then, is the relationship between space and race? A question for science fiction, that vernacular idiom of cultural imagination and critique" (333). African Americans were no longer the "invisible members" of the US. They found a simple yet creative solution in order to dream a world beyond its limitations. In "Beyond Keeping It Real: Outkast, the Funk Connection and Afrofuturism," Howard Rambsy makes it clear that "keeping it real" is generally associated with concealing the true selves and feelings. This is what African Americans have been doing for centuries against the oppressive authority. They no longer preferred to "keep it real," rather, they adopted an identity in which they could reflect their "outer-space personas" (209).

Ra and his Arkestra's initiation of astral jazz fueled with experimental music drew a new path for many jazz composers and musicians of the 1960s. Re-establishing a world beyond its limitations was the first step of his abstract poetry and music. To him,

finding another place and living in this intergalactic realm can only be achieved through the collaboration of technology and music. For Ra; this place is outer space and the music is outer space music. Imagining the past as it has never existed becomes the genesis of Ra's ideals of living in a reclaimed future in outer space. As Ra further states in one of his poems; "the past is a dream, something that came and seemed to have been; if it is not a dream, where is it now?" (Ra 68). This acceptance of the past as "a fictitious thing" and "a one-dimensional fantasy" (68) ends up with reframing the heritage of a long African American tradition in a universal diaspora by building a cosmic consciousness. Sun Ra's reaffirmation of a deeply rooted tradition African Americans have inherited and the reformation of a cosmic consciousness not only set the basic tenets of Afrofuturism but broaden the scope of African American art, as well. Expanding Blackness from Planet Earth to outer space was key to his understanding of Afrofuturism. Different from other avant-garde jazz composers and musicians of the period, Ra's Afrofuturist vision, however, is vividly illustrated and supported with visual arts.

1.3. A TICKET FOR EVERYONE: *SPACE IS THE PLACE*

Music. It is the myth. It is the universal language. It is the principal apparatus in Ra's imaginative world. For Sun Ra, it is the "science too long ignored" (Ra 93). He further locates sound forms and rhythm at the center of the universe, the great cosmic flux: "The earth cannot move without music. The earth moves in a certain rhythm, a certain sound, a certain note. When the music stops the earth will stop and everything upon it will die" (qtd in Szwed 329).

By the early 1970s, Sun Ra was settled in the West coast, California, had already established himself as an eccentric artist and musician, and produced many albums. *Space is the Place*, the 1972 album contains five tracks: "Space is the Place," a 20-minute-long sonic meditation or a ritualistic song with the mantra in the title, "Images (In a Mirror)" and "Discipline 33," in more recognizable jazz conventions and big band orchestrations, "Sea of Sounds," a deliberately raucous and improvisatory piece, and "Rocket Number Nine," a playful song with winded instruments in the foreground, and electronized human voices punctuated with the synthesizer in the background to evoke the interior of a spaceship. This album dated 1972 is not to be

confused with the album of the same name, which was produced solely for the film (*Space is the Place: Music for the Film*), containing sixteen tracks, most of them originally composed, and which was not released until 1993.

Ra's transition from a promising pianist in the Chicago music scene of the 1950s into an extraordinary ambassador of "space" jazz is best depicted in the movie adaptation of his album *Space is the Place* (1972). Produced by Jim Newman, directed by John Coney and filmed in Oakland, the project began as a short documentary on Sun Ra. *Space is the Place* documents Ra's arrival to Planet Earth to alter the destiny of black race and to achieve blackness on a cosmic level by setting up a black-centered colony in space "for black people 'under different stars' where the music and vibrations are different, and there are no white people" (Reed 123). Fawaz claims,

> In Sun Ra's post-national Utopian vision of a musically harmonic planet upon which the Black race can resettle away from Earth, we see a fully realized world-making project that inaugurates a new era of Afrofuturist thought in the 1970s. For Sun Ra, the Earth must embrace an "altered destiny" that not only demands permanent institutional change, but that might require the complete abandonment of Earth as the only viable solution to the racial ills that beset the human race. (1105)

Space is the Place is one of the first examples of Afrofuturist cinema incorporating the elements of "transformative music and outer- space clothing, futuristic technologies and various mysticisms, utopian community, extraterrestriality, and a belief in the possibility of immortality" (Corbett 160). It is a low budget movie with a mostly unknown cast except Ra himself and Raymond Johnson (The Overseer). Szwed accounts how the film producer Jim Newman's plans of making a short documentary about Sun Ra and his Myth-Science Arkestra turned to a full-length film:

> Sun Ra had been approached by film producer Jim Newman with an idea of making a half-hour documentary of the Arkestra for PBS. Newman thought they might shoot with a true "cosmic light show" at the planetarium in San Francisco, the band seated in the audience. And though that particular plan never materialized, with John Coney as director, a new kind of film was conceived: *Space Is the Place*, part documentary, part science fiction, part blaxploitation, part revisionist biblical epic. Strange enough in its own time, as the years passed it assumed an even stranger aura of 1970s ideas and affectations and what appears to be the genuinely timeless in Sun Ra's dress and manner. (331)

Iconic as it is, the movie is not a total and accurate rendition of Ra's ideas. Ra personally took part in some of the scenes by giving opinions, or he became the part of a decision-making process such as the regalia and some parts of the script but he never recognized the movie as an autobiographical sketch. Reed describes *Space is the Place* as a "quasi-vehicle for Sun Ra" (121) and he supports Szwed's argument on the role of Sun Ra in the film. He further states "Ra did not exercise total control over his presentation that this film offers an especially rich occasion to consider not only the ambiguities of Ra's own politics, but the larger questions of the utopian imagination…" (121). When accepting Newman's offer, it is true that Ra had the objective of reaching a mass audience to make them believe in his black diaspora where music presided over the problematic race relations. In this sense, the film has a metacinematic effect.

To dive deeper into Ra's understanding of Afrofuturism reglossed by the visual exhibition of his existing album, it is crucial to decipher his surrealist examination of race relations in the US. In David C. Wall's words, *Space is the Place* is "the cinematic realization of Ra's cosmic harmonic consciousness linked to a searing indictment of the political and social realities of the African American urban experience" (164). The film was "strange" yet modern enough for the 1970s when people were even mostly unaware of African American cinema.

Space is the Place becomes a movie in which Ra not only explicitly introduces his music as the basic constituent of his "spaceship" but also his individual struggle to raise consciousness especially among young African Americans. In the film, to succeed his mission, Ra finds an Outer Space Employment Agency which is "eternally open" to register people in his African Space Program. The name of the agency comes from his well-known song *Outer Spaceways, Incorporated* saying "If you find the Earth boring / Just the same old same thing / Come on, sign up/ To Outer Spaceways, Incorporated." The employment agency's motto also explains the mundane and shallow lifestyle of people and invites all to try a position in the space program and it says "If your job puts you to sleep, try one of ours."

Ra conducts interviews applicants, among whom is a white NASA engineer who complains that his salary is not enough to look after his family. This scene is a satire of the American Dream, and how it is incongruent with the actual stakes of

scientific exploration. Fawaz identifies “the very performance of the American Dream” as “marriage, children, a government job, patriotic anticommunism” (1107). Not surprisingly, Ra’s agency offers no money but instead the reward is the knowledge of “multiplicity adjustment, readjustment synthesis, isotope teleportation, transmolecularization, frequency polarization, intergalactic realm of eternal darkness, intergalactic realm of eternal black darkness, white darkness, infinity incorporated” (36.17- 36.30). Fawaz comments that such technological knowledge and skill about the outer space job resonate with cultural and political activism:

> The methods Ra lists are a repurposing of scientific terminology to describe cultural work: the work of multiplying meaning; adjusting and readjusting sounds, ideas, and histories; synthesizing varied cultural forms; and perhaps even discovering new “isotopes” that would exist in a world where the Black race lived apart from “white darkness” by embracing the “intergalactic realm of black darkness” that is outerspace. (1107)

In real life, Ra himself tried to get a position at NASA in the margins of occupying an artistic merit in space. The applications were completed on a piece of paper and the image below symbolizes Ra’s own application to this space art program. (See Fig.4.) Ra outlined his ideas about space on the sheet, as seen below, as such: “without the proper type of music your program will be more difficult than need be. You know it is said ‘music soothes the savage beast,’ and what is called man is anarchy-minded at present.”

Fig.4. Sun Ra’s NASA Application

Probably remembering his real-life application to NASA in the background of his mind, in the movie, Ra seeks for the meaning of transmolecularization and its role in transferring the black soul and body into another planet. In other words, through the use of transmolecularization and isotope teleportation which is only possible with music, Ra tries to find how to teleport people to an extraterrestrial place. The applicants do not like the idea of leaving Planet Earth for “nothing.” Veen acknowledges that “Ra attempts to save Earth’s inhabitants by offering them offworld employment with Outer Spaceways Incorporated, but seeing that the position provides no pay and requires giving up Earthly pleasures and vices, only a handful take him up on the offer” (66). Ra’s employment agency offers a better future for the ones who dreamed of getting away from the Planet Earth.

Serpell calls Ra an “intergalactic Marcus Garvey” who arrives Earth, specifically Oakland, “to set up a colony for black people … bring them here through trans-molecularization … or teleport the whole planet here … through music” (431). The movie allegorizes the obstacles in Sun Ra’s grand project, the opponents who are both from the white establisnemnt and those from his own community. Throughout the movie, Ra is seen in conflict with the overseer, the FBI, the NASA personnel and even other African American characters, which strikes as a reference to the COINTELPRO operations, the practice of using African American infiltrators. These villains try to prevent Ra from achieving his plan to recruit African Americans in his space colony. Two NASA men, who sexually and physically exploit black women in a brothel by calling them “nigger,” and the FBI agents who kidnap Ra in his big world concert day and torture him with national Dixie anthem, imply the ongoing pressure over African Americans applied by white supremacists. In the movie, the FBI and NASA struggle to prevent Sun Ra from performing his big world concert and black people from uniting. The reason behind all these operations is to preserve racist social structures portrayed in the movie, and by way allegory, experienced in real life. This interpretation is strenthened in the movie, when Sun Ra’s spaceship lands in Oakland, California, and Jimmy Fey, the black reporter together with a supporter of the Overseer claims that Ra and his Myth Science Solar Arkestra pose a big threat to the most powerful nation of the world, and that they are on the FBI’s red list.

In *Space is the Place*, the racist practices directed against African Americans are mostly shown in terms of dominant state apparatuses such as violent policing, arresting and surveillance. In addition to its demonstration of racism, the movie reveals the unstable power relations in terms of class, race and gender. It is within this context that "Ra's self-presentation as a black savior who journeyed to a distant land to find truth only to be subverted by the interests of established corrupt modes of power" (Zamalin 104). However, Ra did not privilege "power" which "did not guarantee liberation" over "weakness" (Zamalin 104). In Ra's creative solution "by leaving behind planet Earth, a place defined by deadly violence, false prophets, outsized gangsters, and probing FBI agents" (Wald 673), African Americans could have a chance to live in an uncorrupted planet where no one will be judged by his/her color and race. As Steinkog argues, "whereas the movie is realistic in its depiction of race relations, it moves to science fiction for its solution (or one of its solutions): going to outer space and finding a planet for blacks to create a new civilization" (114). This is to say that on the one hand, there is a utopian alien world, yet on the other, there is the Planet Earth where African Americans seem unable to have a future.

The realism of the race relations and recognizable references to the social order are interrupted with the surrealistic card game scenes, which parodies the chess game scenes between the knight-hero and the personification of Death in *The Seventh Seal*. In several episodes, Ra is seen playing a card game called "The End of the World" with the Overseer, "the devil-like card player who contends with Sun Ra for dominion over the Earth" (Szwed 331). The Overseer, the pimp-like extravagant black character, is mostly depicted with his Earthly delights and as a Satanic figure who represented the evil side of white people. He seems to work in a mutual cooperation with white forces keeping African Americans at the bottom of the society such as racist violence, sexual exploitation, money laundering and drug abuse. The way the Overseer humiliates and degrades his own people reveals the complex dynamics of African American figures selling-out to the American system. As David C. Wall articulates the Overseer's intriguing role on the plot:

> Within *Space is the Place*, blacks are victims not only of white racist power structures (as embodied in two government agents and their employment of surveillance, coercion, and violence), but also of black-on-black exploitation as embodied in the Overseer, a kind of cosmic über-

> pimp who drives the Oakland streets in a bright red Cadillac supplying drugs, prostitutes and—most crucially—false consciousness. (165)

Fig. 4. Stephens, Chuck. SUN RA: SPACE IS THE PLACE (2013), 16.

Indeed, the Overseer's primary function in the movie is to sabotage Ra's plans with an intention of preserving his own authority over blacks. As a super-villain foil to the character of Ra, he benefits from the white supremacist status quo which sustains the economic and political circumstances of his privilege. Early in the movie, Ra meets the Overseer at a black night club in Chicago in 1943 and he wants Ra to stop the music claiming it "sounds like shit," and to "get him out of there, start the show." Ra, however, continues to play his keyboard ignoring the excessive protest toward him. This attempt of the Overseer to leave Ra out of his own claimed territory has a metaphorical implication on this chaotically-ended scene and it foreshadows the upcoming conflicts between them.

Through a teleportative back and forth time travel between the 1940s and the 1970s, Ra and the Overseer find themselves in a symbolic card game presiding over the movie to decide the fate of African people. As soon as Ra picks a card called "Judgment" [sic] on which there is the bizarre image of his space ship, the camera moves toward the scene in which the spaceship[8] is traveling through spaceways on the

[8] In the scene, the ship fueled by Ra and his Arkestra's music was depicted with two flaming eyes which is also resembling a blooming Lotus Flower. In Buddhist belief, Lotus symbolizes "the essence of enlightenment of those who have meditated…" (Ward 135). As Ward further predicates the origin of

way to Planet Earth. More precisely, the Judgement here as an indispensable value that stimulates Ra's basic ideal in his spiritual quest for a different order of existence. Ra personally believed he was sent to the Planet Earth from Saturn for judgement and he sought to convince people that judgement was urgent. In an interview Ra says (1991):

> I am looking for people to make judgment day a reality, and to realize that neither God or anybody else is going to judge humanity. *They* have to do the judging as to what is proper for them to survive. Now they can judge whether I'm really telling a lie or whether I'm telling the truth. If I'm telling a lie, they have to judge whether the "lie" is more profitable to them than the "truths" that they know. So therefore, I am paving the way for humanity to recognize the myth and become part of my mythocracy instead of their theocracies and their democracies and any other 'ocracies they got. They can become part of the magic myth, the magic touch, of the mythocracy. Because everything that's unknown is part of the myth. And I'm sure that the myth can do for more humanity than anything that they ever dreamed was possible. (2:05-3:34)

Ra urges his people to believe in the power of judgement and encourages them to judge anything to maintain their survival. The more people "do the judging," the easier they "recognize myth." Instead of religious and political dogma, Ra prefers "mythocracy" which has a base in the "unknown" to all other "ocracies." To Zamalin, Ra's myth is "a normative value to denigrate Blackness" (99). Mixing magic, art and technology, *Space is the Place* is very much in tune with the rich imagery and symbolism of Egyptian myth and Afro-centrism. Ra's mythology embedded in Egyptology seeks a way of re-envisioning the past and incorporating it into the future. Ra's fascination with Ancient Egypt comes from the history of blackness. For him, the first thing that has to be done to understand Egypt is to understand African American history. In an interview with Burke, Ra explains why he goes back to Ancient Egypt to find a solution for all Africans:

> The message is that you must study and at least you should try and understand about the ancient Egyptians. We hear that the Negroes are in need of help and they aren't getting any and the Negroes are getting riled up and everybody is saying they're poor, and that they don't have anything, but the ancient Egyptians are never mentioned in the press or

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blossomed Lotus, "this symbol has its origin in ancient Egypt. Here it was the symbol of the sun and of life, of immortality and of resurrection" (135). At this point, it is important to remember Ra's different mystical studies on different fields including religion in his Chicago years. Buddhism is one of those ancient wisdoms tracing back to Egypt "typically funneled through an African or diasporic viewpoint" (Womack 58).

> anywhere else. They've come to America from the Middle East... (qtd. in Szwed 247)

In *Space is the Place*, the usage of Egyptian elements is first seen in the very opening of the film. (See Fig. 5). Before landing on Planet Earth, Ra appears with a golden, otherworldly Egyptian outfit on a distant planet which is "suitable to serve as a colony for his people under different stars where the music and vibrations are different, and there are no white people" (Reed 123). The scene is set in a wilderness with Ra, accompanied by a number of strange figures[9]. In his first philosophical monologue before the camera turns its lenses to the 40's Chicago, Ra singles out the healing acoustic of this place, or namely vibrations, which is different from Planet Earth. As he says when the movie starts:

> The music is different here. The vibrations are different. Not like planet Earth. Planet Earth sound of guns, anger, frustration. There was no one to talk to on planet Earth who would understand. We set up a colony for black people here. See what they can do on a planet all their own without any white people there. They could drink in the beauty of this planet. Perfect their vibrations - for the better, of course. (01:54- 02:25)

Fig. 5. Stephens, Chuck. "SUN RA: SPACE IS THE PLACE" (2013), 16.

[9] One of these figures is depicted with a full-body-length black fabric "whose face is obscured by a mirrored screen, similar to the figure in Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's *Meshes of the Afternoon*" (Reed 123). Reed also reminds the reader that the year *The Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) was released is the year when Ra first appeared in Chicago.

The vibrations Ra feels occur as a part of his Afrofuturism combining aesthetics and cosmology. To Steinkog, the sound or vibrations of Ra's music on this deserted planet is a metaphysical means of "transportation" and it is basically considered "as being part of a continuum where cosmological thinking and speculation, science, and myth meet" (115). When combining black and post-black or past and future, the vibration of the outer space becomes the most powerful tool. As Reed indicates, "the outer space—the area within which sound necessarily vibrates— becomes an inner (cognized) space, and vice versa, through the affective qualities of music" (136).

One of the most historically outstanding scene in the movie is the one in which Sun Ra visits a congregation meeting and talks to youth there. Especially in those years, most of the black students enrolled in black activist groups were highly marginal in their political views. The room in which the wall is furnished by the posters of the historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and Huey Newton all of whom were brutally assassinated. This scene in the youth center becomes symbolic while interpreting Ra's "black post-blackness [which] enchanted the BAM as a whole" (Crawford 63). As Crawford argues, the relationship between African American teenagers and Ra shows "the power of the film's depiction of black cultural nationalism emerges with such force…" (63).

In the middle of the meeting, Sun Ra greets the "black youth of planet Earth," who at the first glance suspects "whether he is real or not." When the youth saw Ra with his usual-unusual outfit with the crystal stone in his hand, they make fun of him. Ra talks to them not in a condescending tone but in a wise, interrogative tone with for the purposes of deep self-criticism:

> How do you know I'm real? I'm not real; I'm just like you. You don't exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn't be seeking equal rights. You're not real. If you were, you'd have some status among the nations of the world. So we're both myths. I do not come to you as reality. I come to you as the myth because that's what's black people are. (24.32-25.00)

Judging that their energies are wasted and misdirected, Ra begins preaching them about their history, cultural resources, and recommends that they read Amiri Baraka's book, *Black Music*. He attracts the attention of his audience and tells that white people carry out regular visits to the Moon. Obviously, no black is invited to

these journeys. Sun Ra asks them: “How do you believe you can exist in the future—the year 2000 is just around the corner”. This year not only exemplifies Sun Ra’s philosophy and use of the concept of myth, it also expresses Sun Ra’s concern that African Americans will be left behind as technology advances in the world around them.

This iconic scene of the movie symbolizes that in addition to his keyboard, Ra needed people, especially the black youth, as the biggest instruments and sounding organs in his struggle to resettle in future. He said in his poem, “rays strike the earth,”

> I needed people
> not to really listen
> but to believe what I’m saying
> but as instruments
> to be part of the cosmo
> cosmic orchestra
> of the universe
> so then in my future plans
> the people are the instrument. (51)

In *Space is the Place*, Ra’s personal battle also encompasses to convince African Americans to be a part of his big cosmic orchestra. The movie makes the point that while the Overseer is supported by the likes of the FBI, NASA, and the media, Ra relies on the grassroots, especially the younger generations. Even though the Overseer attempts to provoke the youth by suggesting Ra is a schizophrenic, an opportunist who is after self-promotion, the young people eventually believe in Ra’s utopia and protect him from being assassinated by the FBI on the day of his concert.

In this case it is important to view Ra almost a father figure to black teenagers. He tries to convince young African Americans before leaving earth with him for the new planet. His paternal and friendly approach to youth can be crystalized with his poem Redd added to his essay (241):

> Never say you are unloved I love you
> In all the simplicity of the word
> Never say you have no friend
> How dare you feel that way! (240)

To Redd, Ra here implies the youth to the cracks caused by "an entire historical legacy of economic exploitation, state violence, and unredressed ancestral enslavement" (Redd 241).

Coming to his people as a myth, a living dream or a fantasy from "a mystical world," Ra opens a way to inhabit an alien planet in the space with his own people. Ra exists in a fantasy realm where nobody has dared before. To get at that, he uses myth which is the only way to reverse or even to alter the destiny of African Americans. Younquist explains myth as "the abstract nothing that yet is and produces living effects" (210). It is the only way to make the impossible imaginable. Indeed, Younquist attracts attention to the title of the movie which is almost impossible to imagine space and place together. To him, through the power of myth, "space and place might come to coincide" (210). Through transmolecularization and isotope teleportation Ra conducts in his space agency, he offers everyone to become black in his outer darkness. Blackness is no longer a racial category, instead it becomes a metaphorical and cultural tool to inhabit a different planet and *Space Is the Place* gives that harmonization of Ra's bizarre music, exotic costumes iconic cinematography with an astral traveling in space and time.

CHAPTER 2 ON THE SHIP WITH THE "LOA"S IN ISHMAEL REED'S *MUMBO JUMBO*

"We will make our own future Text"

-Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*

2.1. ISHMAEL REED

Ishmael Reed, or with his full name Ishmael Scott Reed, born in 1938 in Tennessee, USA, is an important figure in African American history and literature. Reed spent most of his life in Buffalo, New York where he started his college education. He left college, however, to pursue a writing career outside academic confines. As it is quoted in Gates, "this was the best thing that could have happened to me at the time because I was able to continue experimenting along the lines I wanted, influenced by [Nathanael West] and others" (798).

Following his decision to continue his career as a writer, Reed moved to New York in the 1960s. Also prolific as a poet, Reed met and joined the young members of the Umbra, a group of poets resided in Manhattan in 1962. As he indicated to Shamoon Zamir why Umbra was an important experience in his life,

> The importance of Umbra for me was that I came in contact with other black poets, which wasn't the case in Buffalo, New York. There I was in a very provincial town and I was in a situation where you had very little contact with other black poets. When I went to New York, Umbra brought me into contact with other black poets. That's the significance of Umbra for me. (1138)

Reed further argues that some of the Umbra poets played a crucial role in merging the ideology of black aesthetic into black power. Even the free-jazz groups of the 1960s in New York were influenced by the artistic and political agenda of Umbra. Reed asserted that "one of the traditional programs of Black Power has been self-sufficiency and self-help, so I think that's probably how they're [free-jazz organizations] related to Black Power. Also, some of the Umbra Workshop people were instrumental in setting up the philosophy of Black Power" (Zamir 1140).

Reed also joined a number of authors such as, Walter Bowart, Allen Katzman, Dan Rattiner, and Sherry Needham, to establish *The East Village Other* (EVO), an underground/radical newspaper psychedelically documented political, racial and sexual

events. The name of the newspaper was coined by Reed himself. As Ishmael Reed records the naming process and how he met the other members in an interview,

> I met Walter Bowart down there. He and I started The East Village Other-I named it. And I introduced the late Allan Katzman to Walter Bowart, who became a publisher. Though Tom Wolfe, a man who makes a living at ridiculing blacks, what I would call a "black pathology careerist," claims he invented "New Journalism," the form was originated in the *East Village Other*. He is also associated with the phrase "radical chic" when this expression was invented by Seymour Krim. So, I knew people from different backgrounds down there as well as the people from Umbra. (Zamir 1135)

The *EVO* was an innovative step to introduce Afrocentric discourse and "the staff to the *East Village Other* strove to present an artistic, innovative newspaper. Brilliant cartoonists were particularly drawn to the *East Village Other*, including Art Spiegelman and Robert Crumb" (157). However, it did not intend to appeal to literature, instead it was an outrageous press to mock the conventional political and religious norms. From 1965 to 1972, the *EVO* continued to circulate among the underground poets and comic artists. To him, the 1960s' "nationalism is sort of a mystical idea among Afro-American people" (Zamir 1140). Different than Marcus Garvey's interpretation, Black nationalism has a dual identity now: mystical and technological.

Mostly occupying the mystical side, Reed Especially, the 1960s when Ra's professional jazz performance was sweeping across New York City affected Reed's prose and poetry. Ra's experimental and bizarre style in music manifested itself in Reed's literary style in which he revisits the slave past. In his interview with Zamir, Reed indicates that music is one of the basic tools in his life. As a child, he was interested in playing instruments. He says, "I used to play when I was a kid in Buffalo, about eighteen or nineteen. I was also a violinist and played in a string quartet" (Zamir 1131). In New York, he was influenced by the avant-garde jazz musicians of the era such as Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor and Bill Dixon, and met them personally: "I knew them well. We were all in the same community on the Lower East Side. I socialized with Cecil and Sun Ra. And Albert Ayler was a guest in my house. I mentioned him in a piece I did for Arts Magazine, I think that was 1967" (Zamir 1132). He marks that it was Sun Ra who left a deeper impression because of "the interest in myth and science fiction, as well as tradition" (Zamir 1132).

Even though Reed does not prefer being classified within a single literary genre throughout his career, he is known for Black Speculative Fiction. As Smith points out Reed's style, "Ishmael Reed's battle with the new black aesthetic critics began early in his career. From the very start, he has disliked being categorized and seems to find it impossible to play the literary game by the rules of others" (36). He determines his own writing rules. His literary style was spontaneous, immediate and tentative. Early in his career, he challenged the conventional Western forms of literature and he contributed to black writing with his genuinely black diasporic and post-colonial discourse through what he calls, his Neo-HooDoo narratives.

Introduced by Reed in the manifesto, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto/The Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic," Reed argues that the suppressed African religions were "lost" in the New World but fused into the American Church. He calls this African spirituality, syncretized and reincarnated in the New World, as the "lost American Church" (417). It first appeared in New Orleans' Place Congo, where "the power of HooDoo challenged the stability of civil authority … and was driven underground where to this day it flourishes in the black ghettos throughout the country" (417). Although the Neo-HooDoo "comes in all styles and moods" (419), its defining aesthetic lies in the virility, spiritual possession, innovation and improvisation (418). As an amalgam of Western and Afrocentric understandings of the aesthetic, the Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic is a concept introduced by Reed himself during the 1970s. It symbolizes the spiritual and mystical black aesthetic in contemporary literature. Indeed, Nathaniel Mackey, in his article, "Ishmael Reed and the Black Aesthetic" reveals that the main aspiration of African Americans is for "more freedom, and not slavery—including freedom of artistic expression" (355). Mackey calls Reed's approach to the black aesthetic as "adversarial" (355).

To Reed, there is a parallelism between his Neo-HooDoo/Voodoo Aesthetic and the black aesthetic. Like his counterparts in the Black Arts Movement, Reed also thought that African American arts had always been shadowed by the dominant Eurocentric norms and values. To Reed, the most important similarity between his Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic and black aesthetic is "their renunciation of Western civilization, their sense of being witnesses to its decline" (Mackey 357). Here it is important to recall Neal's argument in the manifesto of the Black Arts Movement which is the black

aesthetic could only be achieved through the negation of Western iconography. Reed also believes in "the existence and the dignity of a distinct and coherent Africa-based culture among black people in this country, a culture with which the white cultural Establishment is out of sympathy as well as out of touch" (Mackey 357). The convergence of African and neo-African identity enabled Reed to delve deeper into the artistic practices of history and the recover the lost spirituality. He recontextualizes race, gender, slavery and colonization. In this sense, Reed attracts attention to the universal characteristic of art. It is crucial to highlight that his style is eclectic in which he harmonized different backgrounds.

Reed explores blackness through the convergence of race, myth and technology. In his works, Reed uses media as a tool Reed is not simply writing against racial and social practices throughout the US; rather, he creates his own protest literature through parody and satire. Mellis asserts that "the political and cultural impulses inspiring the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed many authors delving into African, Caribbean and Afrocentric philosophical and cultural motifs. Ishmael Reed is one of those writers who led this resurgence" (11). Even though Reed did not strictly take part in Black Arts Movement, he engaged with the movement to convey the idea of black nationalism. His Neo-HooDooist understanding based on ancient Egyptian mysticism enabled Reed to employ a radical and controversial black aesthetic and to radically comment on politics and religion.

To Reed, writing is multicultural and open to a multitude of influences. In his own essay, "Writin' is Fightin," Reed depicts writing as "armed with only a pencil and a piece of paper one can, among other things, insist that a discussion of race in this country not be monopolized by those who wish to impede the progress of multicultural people" (305). As a first-hand witness to the liberation struggles of people of many different ethnic origins, Reed links Afro-American rites and traditions to those of other groups. He was basically writing for his own people, but it does not mean that he excluded other marginalized groups such as Natives, Asians or Irish from his writing. In an interview with Nazareth, Reed talks about his multicultural literary style,

> The Afro-American material I use is part of an international aesthetic that blends in with other cultures very easily. It's absorptive. You cannot discuss these ideas in the United States without a lot of unclear thinking because of the racial paranoia and traditions of racism in this country, which may exist in other parts of the world but in a different way. In this

> hemisphere there are whites who are members of syncretic religions, Afro-American, Native American, Euro-American religions in Brazil and other places. You have pictures of whites running temples or whites who have become possessed by black loas. African mythological systems get along very well with Euro-American ideas and Native American ideas…Indians, black gods, the saints. So what I'm dealing with is a multi-cultural aesthetic of which the Afro-American part may be the strongest part because that is my strongest heritage. (123)

Reed's interest in "African mythological systems" both encompasses and absorbs different beliefs, values, religions and languages which eventually makes its way to the "international aesthetic." Incorporating esoteric and magical elements of different societies into his modern multi-cultural writing, Reed opened a new era in Afrofuturist tradition. Larry Neal comments that Reed has "a nice sense of what to do with Pan-African folk materials and Pan-African mythological materials" in his works (Rowell 33). Reed's close contact with black nationalism allowed him to reimagine the slave past of African Americans. As Monas claims in his essay, "In America, the influential role of Afro American culture has been denied its proper historical place; it has, instead, been trivialized and marginalized… and Reed 'rehistorifies' black fiction and black culture by firmly emphasizing the capacity of the text to record a revised history" (98). His multi-cultural, contemporary hoodoo spiritualist, Afrofuturist writing is reflected in his well-known novel, *Mumbo Jumbo.*

2.2. *MUMBO JUMBO:* JAZZ, JOY and JES GREW

"Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around."

-Ishmael Reed (*Mumbo Jumbo*)

Mumbo Jumbo, published in 1972, is a tour-de-force of postmodern and Afrofuturistic text, combining the several literary conventions such as the detective story, noir fiction, mystery text, and fantasy literature. It weaves fact, fiction, and conspiracy in such a way that African American history becomes a moral tale, as far as Reed is concerned. It revives African religious and spiritual practices, such as the HooDoo and Vodou, first transmitted to Haiti, and then to the US through the slave trade routes. By revisiting the Harlem Renaissance during the Black Power era, Reed implies that the black aesthetic of the 1950s and 1960s is the resurfacing of the Afrocentric creative outburst that emerged a few decades earlier.

In the prologue, Reed provides the dictionary definition of *Mumbo Jumbo* which is "*ma-ma-gyo-mbo*, magician who makes the troubled spirits of ancestors go away" (Reed 7) and he believes that his magical Neo-HooDoo tradition can recover the lost spirit of Africans. With its full, plural meaning, *mumbo jumbo* contains a paradox. It refers to a complex, confusing, nonsensical language and a superstitious fear at the same time. The ritual or language can be meaningful only in the eyes and minds of a certain group of initiated. The secret language or rite is jibberish, "mumbo jumbo," nonsense, only for those who do not have the esoteric knowledge, the necessary *gnosis*. As an extension to its tie with the ritual, mumbo jumbo also stands for a fetish, a sacred idol. Indeed, the novel depends on a certain level of familiarity with ancient African, Egyptian, Judeo-Christian and even Greco-Roman myths, African American vernacular to be understood. For the reader who is interested only in the plot, the novel ironically becomes a mumbo jumbo in the derogatory sense.

Reed makes extensive use of the African spirituality as adopted in the New World. Haiti, the first black republic to gain its independence from the French colonial rule at the end of the 18th century, is known to be a country where it was possible for the enslaved population to preserve their religious tradition. Because the enslaved population was huge, they were able to maintain a sense of community, being able communicate among themselves, keeping their knowledge of cultural and religious practices (Vodoun or Vodun) relatively intact. Haiti plays an important role as the source from which the Voodoo religion and beliefs spread to the American continent, particularly Louisiana. The Legba legend, the African god of the crossroads, is worshipped in Haiti, and migrated to Louisiana where the god is known as Papa Labas, the namesake character in the novel, Papa LaBas, the Vodou Priest and the Houngan. As Pfeifer gives a thorough depiction of Haitian Vodou:

> Haitian Vodou is based on a belief in a unique supreme being as creator of the universe. Contrary to the Christian god, the supreme being is believed to be a distant god. This god is supposed to have transferred some of its power to a pantheon of deities, called loa. A serviteur always serves the loa, not the supreme being. Therefore, Haitian Vodou is a religion with a monotheistic head and a polytheistic body. Leaders of a Vodou community, which often make up the core of a social community, are either called houngan, describing a male priest and healer, or mambo…" (139)

Papa Legba belongs to the Rada nation or spirit that “is representing African loa” (Pfeifer 139). To Fandrich, “on the Rada side, we find, for instance, an old mighty *lwa* named Papa Legba. He is the gatekeeper of all spiritual forces and needs to be invoked at the beginning of every ceremony. Papa Legba usually appears as an old man who moves slowly in a very distinct manner” (783). Legba has multiple selves and areas of proficiency. One of most important is that he is a guardian of the crossroads. He occupies the liminal spaces, the thresholds and the boundaries, and is associated with the rites of passage. In this sense, the spiritual education which transforms the uninitiated into the initiated, is under his domain. Legba, as the grantor of permissions for communication and education at the crossroads, is believed to master all the languages, and is competent in the lore of different worlds. He is the intermediary between the dead and the living; the world of the “loa”s, “lwa”s or the African spirits, himself being one, and the world of humanity. It is only with his permission that a human being can contact with a loa for guidance[10], help or protection. However, he is not the most reliable of spirits in granting communication, education, guidance or protection. As the divine trickster, Legba can intervene in the businesses of deities and human beings, opening and closing the gateway to the world of the gods at his capricious will. He can do mischief, and mislead people. He is loved and feared, and every ceremony begins and ends with a sacrifice to him. The loas, in addition are the spirits, deities or gods. They have to be tended. They also have the habit of possessing human beings. The state of being possessed is reminiscent of the moments when musicians, poets, actors, singers, and artists are improvising at their highest capacity of creation.

The literature of the Harlem Renaissance is also another source to be familiar with. As Reed quotes from James Weldon Johnson who is cited frequently in the book; “…we appropriated about the last one of the ‘jes grew’ songs. It was a song which had been sung for years all through the South. The words were unprintable, but the tune was irresistible, and belonged to nobody” (11). The story follows the new phenomenon of “Jes Grew,” which stands for ragtime and swing jazz. The music, and the kind of dance

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[10]As Pfeifer argues, “Loa, ghosts in Haitian Vodou, coalesce African and Creole gods, with the imagery of Catholic saints, all rooted in Haiti’s colonial history as a Spanish and later French colony with slaves of different ethnicities from the West Coast of Africa. Although the Vodou belief system rests upon a firm belief in a supreme being, vodou serviteurs pray to, serve and ask for guidance from their loa. In order to understand loa and possession by a loa, the concept of the soul in Vodou will be observed” (137).

it inspires, is treated as an epidemic by the "Atonists," the promoters of monotheism, orthodox Christianity, reason, totalitarianism, institutionalism, and white supremacy. For them, Jes Grew is the ultimate threat to the order of the world they wish to keep. Atonists are the present-day representatives of the medieval Knights of Templar, and its military apparatus, Wallflower Order, who made an oath to keep Jes Gew under control, and to keep the Text of Jes Grew, the Book of Thoth, out of African Americans' reach. On the opposite side of this "mystery war," as it is so termed in the novel, are the artists, poets, musicians, and the spiritual descendants of the Osiris-Dionysus spirit which cherishes ecstasy, trance and magic, and hence, take joy in the Jes Grew phenomena. Though they do not know its origin story, they see it as a life-giving essence. Organized under the Mumbo Jumbo Kathedral, The "houngan," the Voodoo priest and detective, PaPa LaBas, and his companion, an occultist and doctor, Black Herman are the protectors of the Osiris-Dionysian spirit, keepers of the African "loa"s (spirits), and the disseminators of the Jes Grew practice, which is also called, "the Work." They are looking for the lost Text, the Book of Thoth, which contains the secret knowledge of the African origins, and which happens to be in the hands of the Wallflower Order members.

On another line of action, Barbelang and his gang, the Mu'tefikah, have taken on the mission to liberate all the aboriginal artifacts from the possession of Western museums, which they call the "Centers of Art Detention." They are loosely connected to Papa LaBas. Later on, Papa LaBas and Black Herman join forces with Benoît Battraville, the actual Haitian nationalist who resisted the American occupation of Haiti. As Michael Niblett argues, "during the U.S. occupation of the island, the struggle of the peasantry to retain control over its land coalesced around the Cacos rebellion from 1918 to 1920, led by Charlemagne Péralte and Benoît Batraville" (30). In the novel, the Haitian Revolution is in the background, and Batraville functions as the wise mouthpiece of all enslaved diasporic Africans. He also controls the ship called, *The Black Plume*.

The ship offers a place for initiation, a learning of the secret knowledge about African origins of Judeo-Christian myths, and it is also the vessel to repatriate the cultural artifacts that were rescued by the Mu'tefikah. Unfortunately, Mu'tefikah dissolves as a result of successive assassinations caused by an infiltrator. Eventually,

Papa LaBas and Black Herman reveal the hoax of the Knights Templar and the Wallflower Order. However, the Text is destroyed, ironically, by another African American nationalist acquaintance of LaBas, Abdul Sufi Hamid, for the reason that he found it too liberating. The novel ends with Papa LaBas lecturing the secret knowledge to a slightly skeptic audience of college students in the 1970s. The finale captures a cinematic scene, the Manhattan skyline, fast forward and backward at once. Papa LaBas remembers Arna Bontemps notion of time moving as a pendulum in the manner of "what goes around comes around," as his locomobile rear moving towards Manhattan (218).

The United States' occupation of Haiti, white attempts to suppress jazz, Reed's and the widespread belief that president Warren Harding has a black ancestry are all entangled in a plot where the novel's protagonist, PaPa LaBas, searches for a mysterious book that disappeared along with jazz music. Finding a suitable body or context for the virus to be eradicated is the recurring motif in the novel and it is frequently reminded by LaBas himself. He says, "It's up to its Text. For some, it's a disease, a plague, but in fact it is an anti-plague…Being an anti-plague I figure that it's yearning for The Work of its Word or else it will peter out as in the 1890s, when it wasn't ready and had no idea where to search. It must find its Speaking or strangle upon its own ineloquence" (33- 34).

Given that the protagonists of the novel are Voodoo practitioners, the novel itself contains a lot of Voodoo terminology. In the novel, Voodoo is an influential art: PaPa LaBas practices from the Mumbo Jumbo Cathedral, and at one point his assistant is possessed by a loa he neglects to feed. Voodoo itself goes back to sharing a common ancestry with Judeo-Christianity in ancient Egypt, and Osiris was the first recipient of Jes Grew, whose influence and powers were interchangeable with those of Voodoo. Moses steals the Petro aspect of Voodoo secrets from Isis. Other classical mythological figures include Dionysus, who is portrayed as a follower of Osiris, and Faust, who receives his magic not through a pact with the devil but through his connections with black Voodoo practitioners.

Mumbo Jumbo is a parody of the Western culture and when the virus began to spread out, "ancient secret societies prepare for battle, each one representing not simply opposing races and cultures but histories as well" (Chaney 273). The novel chronicles

this growing racial struggle between two groups. As Michael Chaney articulates, *Mumbo Jumbo* has two sides. One is dealing with Europeans and the other side is exemplifying the African origins. Whereas the European side (Teutonic Knights, the Wallflower Order, Atonists) is made up of Masons, nobles, devout Christians and Catholic medieval groups headed by Hinckle Von Vampton, the black team (the Voodoo priest-houngan PaPa LaBas/Legba, The Black Herman and Abdul Sufi Hamid) represents the black religious and nationalist leaders trying to find the sacred Text and to spread the virus. This black and white battle is reminded by Black Herman through another myth, the example of the conflict of Set and Osiris which ended up with shaping two different ideologies: Osirian worldview and Set worldview.

Harris describes Set as "the killjoy 'Atonist' (sun worshipper), is the prototype of a certain type western man: as a progenitor of the military-industrial complex, reason must forever re- main separate from feeling," whereas Osiris is depicted as "the working sensualist who combines reason and feeling" (43). Reed tells,

> Osiris was regarded by his brother Set as dilletante, a recipient of a far-out education, an done who would not know how to deal with the firmly enemies of the Egyptian people. That was Set, that stick crook and flail man…. Set hated agriculture and nature which he saw as soiled dirty grimy etc. He was arrogant jealous egoistical and when Osiris issued a ban on men eating men.… He was also jealous that Osiris was to marry their sister Isis…. People hated Set. He went down as 1st man to shut nature out of himself. He called it discipline. He is also the deity of the modern clerk, always tabulating, and perhaps invented taxes. (162)

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, Thoth as a follower of Osiris is given a chance for having built a "text" (the "LaBas" way) for the spiritual and mystical continuation of which characterizes the Osirian worldview. Reed exhibits this interconnectivity between these polarized groups and later their world views to show how they reflect and challenge each other both in the past and present. Through an Afrofuturist lens, Reed puts blacks and whites in a race as it was given in ancient myths and stories before. In other words, Reed's novel encompasses authentically African and African-American history, black and white conflicts, literary folklore and myth. Sun Ra's dedication to reveal futuristic myths to survive both in past and present is manifested in *Mumbo Jumbo*, too. This is why as the Atonist path was trying to eradicate the virus, the black side was getting more eager to create their own "text."

Reed's choice of ancient sacred and secret societies show how he reflects white and Afro-American folk culture through a contemporary interpretation and this is quite probably why he presents the narrative through his understanding of Neo-HooDoo Aesthetics. It is the parody/criticism of ancient history and he rewrites the past. As a political and cultural means, Reed uses Neo-HooDoo and creates his own literary folklore that "confronts changing conditions" (Harris 48). As the basic component to reflect the past/present/future dichotomy of the novel, there is the ideology of the sacred "Text" behind the novel. The text which "the ancient Osirian guide to the powers and functions of the spiritual in nature for which everyone is searching" (Jessee 12), indeed, has a traditional connotation that keeps the Jes Grew under the control; otherwise, it creates the chaotic and reviving energy for the virus, as well. Ironically, the Text is hidden in black artists, poets, musicians and authors; it is embedded in black culture. As Benoît Batraville explains where to find the Text of Jes Grew: "don't ask me... Ask Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, your poets, your painters, your musicians... Ask those people who be shaking their tambourines impervious of the ridicule they receive from Black and White Atonists, Europe the ghost rattling its chains down the deserted halls of their brains" (152). This answer implies that as a twentieth century "disease," Jes Grew, should be engraved from its own cultural and literary roots.

In the novel, Jes Grew is depicted with its different, plural connotations. As the name of the book underlines the complexity of the given situation, the virus transmits blackness, black culture and black ideals that frighten Atonists. "Without uniformity, causality, or observable pattern," Chaney says, "Jes Grew recodes people of all races to behave according to a mysterious programming associated with ancient primitivism, Africanicity, jazz music, bacchanalia, and Voodoo possession" (273) In the opening pages of the book, Reed depicts how the Wallflower Order describes the virus;

> …people were doing "stupid sensual things," were in a state of uncontrollable frenzy," were wriggling like fish, doing something called the "Eagel Rock" and the "Sassy Bump"; were cutting a mean "Mooche," and lusting after relevance. We decoded this coon mumbo jumbo drive it out; but it started to play hide and seek with us.... Don't you understand, if this Jes Grew becomes pandemic it will mean the end of Civilization As We Know It? ...This is a psychic epidemic not a lesser germ like typhoid yellow fever or syphilis. We can handle those. This belongs under some ancient Demonic Theory of Disease. (2-3)

The Wallflower order hires Hinckle Von Vampton, an elderly white man formerly known as a member of the Knights Templar, to prevent Jes Grew and revive European civilizations and Westernized Judeo-Christian culture. Against Jes Grew, Von Vampton's first plan was to collect and destroy the "text" whereas the second plan was to create another entity called *Talking Android* "who will work within the Nego, who seems to be its classical host; to drive it out, categorize it, analyze it, expel it, slay it, blot Jes Grew. A speaking scull they can use any way they want… In other words, this Talking Android will be engaged to cut-it-up, break down this Germ, keep it from behind the counter" (Reed 69) and he chooses Jefferson for the position of Talking Android who is known for his antipathy toward African Americans:

> Here we will feature the Talking Android who will tell the J.G.C.s [Jes Grew Carriers] that Jes Grew is not ready and owes a large debt to Irish Theatre. This Talking Android will Wipe That Grin Off Its Face. He will tell it that it is derivative. He will accuse it of verbal gymnastics, of pandering to White readers. He will even suggest it abandon the typewriter completely and create a Black Tammany Hall. He will describe it as a massive hemorrhage of malaprops; illiterate and given to rhetoric. (69-70)

Establishing a black Talking Android in the form a cyborg, Reed encodes "African-American relationships to a technology traditionally raced as a tool of white power follow the same politics of assimilationism and exclusion that surrounds minstrelsy" (Chaney 278). Indeed, Jes Grew is the blackness itself which is seen as a growing threat for the Western side and this virus can be found in all what black aesthetic requires such as music, dance and singing. The "Jes Grew" epidemic sweeping across the country "infects all it touches" (Reed 13). At first, the Wallflower Order underestimated the seriousness of Jes Grew epidemic and it becomes a growing alarm first in New Orleans, then throughout the country. The authoritative force of the Wallflower Order including Atonists, especially the Teutonics, the sun worshippers in ancient mythology, initially tried to cope with Jes Grew in the 1890s, but they were not successful in preventing it from spreading. Now, they have another plan by introducing an anti Jes-Grew President, Warren Harding. Reed ironically uses a white character with a black ancestry, as the president, who secretly admires and enjoys black culture and jazz.

The novel traces Jes Grew back to the cult of Osiris, ancient Egyptian god of life, resurrection and fertility, and Isis, the Egyptian goddess of magic and life, to draw a connection between Judeo-Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Began in New

Orleans, continued in Chicago and ended up reaching New York, Jes Grew is a growing spirit that can be found in jazz, Hoo-Doo practices, polytheism, literature and dance. Sharon Jessee points out that “the dances of the Roaring Twenties, like the dances for Osiris and Isis in ancient Egypt, are free, vibrant, and, most significantly, not serious” (128). The novel offers an alternative to the linear sense of time and a progressive sense of history. Instead of the conventional understanding of history punctuated by wars and massacres it centralizes historical processes around dance, joy and laughter.

Reed believes that just like jazz, dance is multicultural and eclectic. Especially, during the 1920s in New York, a new form of dance called Swing emerged when the jazz age was experienced in the US and lived its most popular period until the 1950s. It was the simplification of the figures of Lindy Hop, “a dance of African American origin vigor and a new driving rhythm articulating four beats to the measure” (Spring 184). Swing emerged with the influence of jazz musicians on the street in New York who determined the rhythm and movements of swing dance. Reed also uses swing as a basic metaphor of *Mumbo Jumbo* and as the basic infectious symptom of the Jes Grew. People were spontaneously dancing in the streets; they were unconsciously “swinging.” To Reed,

> Dance is the universal art, the common joy of expression. Those who cannot dance are imprisoned in their own ego and cannot live well with other people and the world. They have lost the tune of life. They only live in cold thinking. Their feelings are deeply repressed while they attach themselves forlornly to the earth. (60)

Here in this quotation Reed criticizes especially the whites who cannot dance, or in metaphorical terms, they cannot “swing.” This is why he depicts them as the ones who “imprisoned in their own ego and cannot live well with other people and the world.” (60). Epitomizing on the role of African Americans dominated the dance and music scene of the 1920’s US, Reed establishes Jes Grew with its political, social and artistic connotations. As Lewis argues,

> Osiris and his modern manifestation as Jes Grew are therefore highly successful as well as beneficial social viruses of free expression; the people hear the songs, dance the steps, and make them their own—they don’t need a leader or priest or rules keeper. Instead, everyone can make their art— do their thang be it a dance, a song, a poem, a novel—and be free. (86)

Jes Grew is a "social virus" as Lewis discusses and each individual can apply it to his own art. This is why Reed frequently reminds that it was an anti-plague. It does not resemble the other plagues. Unlike other epidemics, Jes Grew rejuvenates the one it touches. As Reed describes Jes Grew's life-giving potential,

> Actually Jes Grew was an anti-plague. Some plagues caused the body to waste away; Jes Grew enlivened the host… Jes Grew victims said that the iar was as clear as they had ever seen it and there was aroma of roses and perfumes which had never before enticed their nostrils. Some plagues arise from decomposing animals, but Jes Grew is electric as life is characterized by ebullience and ecstasy. (6)

The virus, as Reed asserts, has a reviving power. Reed's metaphor "for this fluid energy in *Mumbo Jumbo*, lives within his recasting of thousands of years of black cultural history, from Egyptology to the Jazz Age, into a protean form of personal energy that authorizes self and identity" (Jessee 127). This fluid energy also affects the quick transition from past to present, and Reed easily uses an invisible time travel method which is rehistorifying both the facts and myths.

For Reed, the setting of the Harlem Renaissance was not an accidental choice. It chronicles "African Americans who inhabit an equally synchronic temporality melding ancient Egypt with 1920's America while reflecting the 1970's Black Arts movement" (Chaney 272). As a novel taking place in 1920s, reflecting the times of Ancient Egypt yet written in the 1970s' Civil Rights Movement, Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* harmonizes mythological past with the contemporary day US politics that eventually led to the creation of modern interpretation of African American history. The political scene of the 1920s was generally framed by white conservatives. The presidents of the era, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover were the members of the Republican wing. Reed's choice for Harding as an anti Jes-Grew president also symbolizes Harding's administration which was marked by corruption. On the other side, there was substantial economic growth, consumerism and prosperity that eventually led to the Great Depression of 1929. The cultural atmosphere was also colorful. Art, music, literature and visuality flourished during the 1920s. Especially jazz changed the traditional music taste and it opened an era in black history known as the Harlem Renaissance. To Reed, there are too many resemblances between the 1920s and the 1970s in terms of political corruption; social upheavals and cultural developments.

Mumbo Jumbo melds Ancient Egyptology within the Harlem Renaissance and carries it to the Post-Civil Rights Movement. In her article, "*Mumbo Jumbo* and *Paradise:* Language and Meaning," Keren Omry says *Mumbo Jumbo* is a "jazz-based" novel to reconcile "the violent past with the new demands of the present, ultimately envisioning a future that re-writes racial and ethnic ideologies" (Omry 130). To Omry, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a great example of a transition from slavery to a much more productive, creative future. What helps most this transform to be carried out is the "developments in jazz music that, by the early 1960s, began to be identified as the new music or free jazz" (127). This is to say that historically the flowering of avant-garde jazz championed by Sun Ra allowed Reed to produce a "jazz-based" Afrofuturist novel in which he reinterpreted African American and Pan African diasporic experience. As Harris argues the dichotomy between Osirian worldview and Set by locating it within the racial and musical context of the 1920s,

> In *Mumbo Jumbo* these assertions find reality. The Harlem of the twenties is a hotbed for practitioners of the Osirian worldview. It is a place that the Atonist finds intolerable- too much movement and passion for Set's task. Reed's necromancy places the Jazz Age squarely in the context of an ancient and epic struggle. Presumably, the reader, having been made aware of the context of this epic struggle, ought to better understand the contemporary racial situation. (44)

To be more precise in terms of its Afrofuturist characteristics, *Mumbo Jumbo* occupies a crucial place within the Afrofuturist tradition in terms of reflecting an Afro-centric viewpoint. Reed treats African folk tradition which is not dominated by Western imagery and language as magico-religious practices of Africans. Here it is important to underline Reed's own interpretation of HooDoo, Voodoo and conjure his recurring metaphors in *Mumbo Jumbo.* Whereas Vodou is a Haitian religious practice created by genuinely black people of Haiti, Hoodoo is more of a spiritual-magical tradition of enslaved people in the US. Both of these practices reflect African diasporic culture. To Kohoutek, "language and imagery from these magical systems provide continuity with the African past, and a way to talk about power and agency in the world" (149). Reed uses these rituals which have a curative power over the lost spirits, behaviors and values. Indeed, Papa LaBas and Black Herman symbolizes Reed's Neo-HooDoo struggle to spread Jes Grew by locating the sacred HooDoo Text (ancient Egyptian) in the Book of Thoth. This concept of Text appears as a recurring motif in the book. Reed

reminds his readers the epidemic urgently needs its text embedded in the Sacred book of Thoth:

> Jes Grew is seeking its words. Its text. For what good is a liturgy without a text? In the 1890s, the text was not available and Jes Grew is out there all alone. Perhaps the 1920s will also be a false alarm and Jes Grew will evaporate as quickly as it appeared again broken-hearted and double crossed. There is another group called who is saving the stolen artefacts and sending them back to their origin country. (6)

Here it is crucial to analyze Reed's insistence upon specific periods in black history. Jes Grew initially was a product of slavery. It originally comes from Haiti where the Voodoo tradition began. Going back to African roots from slave trade routes, Reed highlights the necessity of reaching the genuine African folklore and myth.

> Jes Grew carriers came to America because of cotton. Why cotton? American Indians often supplied all of their needs from one animal: the buffalo. ...Eskimos, the whale... but Americans wanted to grow cotton. They could have raised soybeans, cattle, hogs, or the feed for these animals. There was no excuse. Cotton. Was it some unusual thrill at seeing the black hands come in contact with the white crop? (17)

Reed does not only limit himself with an Afrofuturistic context in *Mumbo Jumbo*, but he uses an experimental writing style, as well. By upsetting conventional formats and typographies, he explores a sort of free-jazz expression in literature. He generally removes commas or gives the dialogues without quotation marks to accelerate the pace of reading. He also uses non-verbal signs such as drawings, photographs, capitalized announcements and historical documents. As Rhodes depicts, "*Mumbo Jumbo*, his best book to date, is a montage of historical fact and fiction, episodic structure, newspaper clippings, nineteenth century photos, and language that "'shucks and jive'" with the best. His unorthodox and rambling style suits the novel's premise of a "'Jes Grew'" epidemic leap-frogging its way across the United States (11). With the expressive modes that the techniques of bricolage make possible, Reed produces an Afrofuturistic text by stretching language, in the Derridean sense, to charge the signifiers with multiple meanings, and by rehistorifying black experience.

Reed's novel can be regarded as a preach to the readers and it becomes more apparent at the end of the novel when Papa LaBas, who is a hundred years old now, is speaking to students about Jes Grew. The virus is reincarnated in the 1970s and it is clearly understood that to Reed history is a recurring motif which repeats itself. *Mumbo*

Jumbo, all in all, changes the traditional notion of black culture, history and identity by destroying the Anglo-European understanding and "quite distinctly becomes a carrier of the information (virus) that destabilizes the linearity of Western Judeo-Christian epistemology" (Chaney 274).

In Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed implicitly reveals a key political and historical concept. The plot generally chronicles a sudden explosion of "Jes Grew," a confusing harmonization of cultural elements—ragtime, jazz, Swing, Bop, Funk and other vital energies that The Wallflower Order tried to suppress throughout the novel. The ruling order is not interested in using free minds, so they have to "knock it dock it co-opt it swing it or bop it."

CHAPTER 3 FROM ALIENATION TO ALIEN-NATION

3.1 OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

After Butler lost her father in a very young age, she had to maintain her life with her mother under the harsh mechanisms of slavery and poverty. Butler was raised by the women of her family or namely her mother and grandmother. Without a father figure, she came to a conclusion that life made them vulnerable yet quite strong at the same time. Butler had always known that life could be challenging to survive in the South if one is poor and black. As a little girl racially oppressed, she had to face how embarrassing being a black was in a white society. To Butler, which is more embarrassing than being a black is being a black woman. When she was taken to her cleaning work by her mother, she saw how they were treated inhumanely by the masters. As she indicates in an interview with a scholar:

> I wanted to deal with my own feelings. My mother was a maid and sometimes she took me to work with her when I was very small and she had no one to stay with me. I used to see her going in back doors, being talked about while she was standing right there and basically being treated like a non-person; something beneath notice, and what was worse, I saw all this. And I could see her later as I grew up. I could see her absorbing more of what she was hearing from the whites than I think even she would have wanted to absorb. (Beal 15)

As a true witness of Antebellum slavery, Butler constructs her novels around a re-interpretation of racial stigmatization toward African Americans. In so doing, she eventually demonstrates a parallelism between her immediate family and the protagonists in her novels. As Crossley indicated, "what she saw as a child she later confronted and reshaped as a novelist" (xiii). Butler's traumatic growing-up experience with her mother not only left a mark over her life but also had a great impact on her works.

Butler's interest in science fiction was first revealed when she was a little girl. She spent most of her childhood reading science fiction and watching science fiction movies. In an interview with Rowell, she basically mentioned how she was influenced by the movie *Devil Girl from Mars* (1954) to become a science fiction writer which was a UK based black and white science fiction movie. This influence, however, is not a positive one at all. Butler admitted that even though she watched it as a kid, the movie

seemed too “silly” because of the sexist approach toward Mars. With a sudden decision, she writes science-fiction to produce something better than what she watched on TV (Rowell 54). Butler summarizes that moment by saying, “I didn't decide to become a science fiction writer. It just happened.” (Beal 15) However, she never denies the impact of science fiction on her career as a science fiction author. It further triggers her inclination in astronomy, namely outer space. As Butler indicates how her involvement in astronomy and geology started:

> But, quite often, they gave me something to think about, taught me something that I didn't know about before. I got my first notions of from those little films. I guess I was interested enough in astronomy to learn more because the second book I ever bought new was a book about the stars; I bought it to learn more. I knew that what I was writing was completely imaginary because I didn't know anything about Mars or anyplace else out there in space. I wanted to know more, so that's when I went and bought the book about the stars. (Rowell 54)

Her specific interest in science fiction continued in her adolescence and ended up with creating science-fiction novels revolving around speculative themes in the 1970s. Robert Crossley says “when she enrolled in a summer workshop for novice science fiction writers in 1970 at the age of twenty-three, Octavia Estelle Butler took a decisive step toward satisfying an ambition she had cherished since she was twelve” (xii).

Although Butler does not put herself in a specific literary category, she claims she mostly deals with science-fiction and fantasy in her novels. Furthermore, Butler would not like to be remembered with a single literary genre; instead, she prefers writing through intuitions. In an interview Butler says “most of what I do is science fiction. Some of the things I do are fantasy. I don't like the labels, they're marketing tools, and I certainly don't worry about them when I'm writing” (Kenan 493). Refusing “the labels” by calling them “marketing tools” lays the foundation of Butler’s aim at being heard and read by the masses. As Streeby provides a support to Butler’s explanation about her style, “Butler rejected narrow genre categories and was ambivalent about the term *science fiction* as a descriptor for her writing, often expressing frustration with marketing categories and wondering if they stood in the way of reaching a wider audience” (512). This is why it is hard to limit Butler with a single literary genre, and this is why it is “speculative” for describing the contributions to

"feminist theories of knowledge production, political leadership, and imagining the future" (Streeby 512).

Octavia Butler emerged as a successful female black science fiction author when women even did not actively take part in this literary field and she became "the only prominent, popular, female African American and decidedly feminist voice in an historically white male domain called science fiction and fantasy or SF/F" (qtd. in Smith 385). Indeed, science-fiction was a color-based genre back then. At the center of the traditional domain of science-fiction, there were generally white male writers who targeted a male-dominated audience. They basically created a masculinist world with their white male protagonists depicted as superheroes with a number of superpowers. In a period when blacks were even excluded from this genre, it is not easy for a black woman to be accepted as a sci-fi author. Crossley says "In the 1940s and 1950s no black writers and almost no women were publishing science fiction. Not surprisingly, few black readers—and, we can assume, very few black girls—found much to interest them in the science fiction of the period, geared as it was toward white adolescent boys" (xvi). With a fear of judgment, black women receded themselves from producing works within science fiction.

In the early 1960s and 1970s, Butler highlighted the absence of strong women's voice in black science fiction and she changed the nature of science fiction which had been regarded as a white heterosexual literary category for quite a long time. She reconceptualizes the notions of race, class and gender through her feminist science fiction and fantasy novels. As Smith epitomizes the subgenre of feminist science fiction, it "deals with issues of particular concern to feminism(s), engaging questions about gender and queer studies, family and social structures, individual autonomy, and the individual's ability to control her body and sexuality" (386). As a black woman herself who endured societal obstacles during her life, Butler's narrative generally chronicles strong female protagonists and their struggle against racism, classism and sexism. Butler constructs historical, political leaderships, moral authorities or social privileges and as Parham argues she "has shown us, science fiction, so often misunderstood as the province of white men and their green aliens, is useful to the task of thematizing some of the more haunting aspects of black experience in the Americas" (1317). At this point,

it is important to underscore that Butler uses science fiction not only against white supremacy, but against the ongoing patriarchy, as well.

As a black author whose writings are highly recognized within the Afrofuturistic territory, Butler became a part of the Black Arts Movement. Her most prolific years came during the post CRM and her transition from a novice to a professional sci-fi author became apparent in the late 1970s. To Butler, at a time when race and gender were determining norms, it was not easy to be noticed as a female black author. Butler's portrayal of science fiction changes the very understanding of that period in which white heteronormative patriarchy got the upper-hand. As Allen points out:

> It is hardly surprising that the 1960s of political upheavals and NASA moon shots would usher into this almost all-white male genre writers who were neither white nor male, like Samuel Delany and later Butler, Butler insistently incorporates a readily identifiable African American history in her writings even in those texts that are set in the future or on other planets, using the creative possibilities of science fiction to portray African American history in new and highly original ways. (1354)

Not only white patriarchy but mostly the black-men structure of the BAM makes Butler's recognizability difficult. Resurfacing slavery in a literary and feminist context alters the scope of patriarchally dominated Black Arts Movement which is the cultural site of Black Power Movement. To Miletic, "the discourse surrounding black femininity in Black Arts print culture and Black Power rhetoric restricted women to being submissive to support the Black Power construction of a dominant masculinity" (270). Rather than denying the important role of the BAM within the Black Power discourse, Butler redefines race and gender by choosing her characters from socially, racially and politically oppressed groups, especially black women and she replaced the male-dominated atmosphere of the BAM by destructing the gender barriers. It is clear to see in most of her narratives the echoes of what Butler herself went through as both a little black girl and an adult black woman who had to endure the stereotypical gender roles and ethnic relations. Indeed, by evoking her own African American experience, Butler did not intend to change the existing philosophy of the BAM; rather she added a different dimension to the ongoing patriarchal discourse of the movement. In brief, empowering black women's voice through Afrofuturism was the foundation of Butler's understanding of radical black feminism.

Owing to the embracing philosophy of feminism, black female activists became the voice of the alienated no matter which race, gender or religion one belongs to. However, they gave utmost importance to empowering black women both in the domestic and public sphere. Butler and a group of feminist authors within black activism interrogated the dominant ideology of feminism in general and they primarily drew attention to the recurring themes of restricted black female body and soul. Especially, in a period when even a white woman was legally and morally restricted in many circumstances, a black woman was completely invisible. Butler created an alternative future for her female heroines who can endure the obstacles no matter how difficult the situation is. Barber poses a few questions to attract attention to Butler's integration of the black feminism into her futurist narrative:

> What about black female subjectivity requires a futurist context? What are the generative possibilities for black female bodies historically represented as quintessentially other, abject, and alien? What is at stake in privileging a project that ultimately produces dismembered black female bodies? (7)

Barber relates all these questions to the concept of "textual healing" coined by Griffin (qtd. in Barber 7). Indeed, such healing is necessary to reconstruct a black female body after a mental or physical trauma. This is why The Black Arts Movement coincided with the second wave of feminism became an opportunity to position the black female bodies "as powerful and worthy—dignified and tactful on one side, radical and dangerous on the other" (Barber 10). To Barber, the Black Arts Movement within the scope of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement established racial blackness "—racial, corporeal, and aesthetic—as the very foundation of identity" (10). At this point, Afrofuturism enables Butler to conduct "a textual healing" as a part of the neo-slave narrative in her feminist science fiction and to re-envision an "other, abject and alien" African diaspora far from the Planet Earth with Sun Ra's definition. Butler rebuilds the concept of black abstraction in favor of black women.

3.2. A BLACK RADICAL UTOPIAN IMPULSE

> "Entropy, the idea that the natural flow of heat is from something hot to something cool -not the other way - so that the universe itself is cooling down, running down, dissipating its energy."
>
> -Octavia E. Butler

Mark Dery defines Afrofuturism "in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). In other words, Afrofuturism encompasses science fiction and fantasy elements to create alternate realms through racial politics. Through a mixture of sci-fi and fantasy, Butler creates her own Afrofuturist vision in which "race becomes 'denatured' from its historical roots and becomes a tool for creative expression" (Gaskins 29). As a writer of the African diaspora, Butler aimed at augmenting "fragments from their past of historical emigration (forced relocation), violence, and marginalization" (Gaskins 29). When re-contextualizing both colonial and contemporary African American history and politics, Butler uses science and technology in a broader cultural and aesthetic agenda. Her reinterpretation of black future within the feminist context alters the traditional notion of black utopias. As Morris epitomizes, "Afrofuturist feminism of the text illuminates epistemologies that do not suggest Utopian panaceas but instead underscore the importance of transgressive manifestations of family and intimacy, epistemologies that ultimately present possibilities for our own decidedly unenchanted world" (147). Butler's alternate realm for African Americans, more precisely for black women, basically relies on a radical utopian rhetoric of Afrofuturism.

Butler's Afrofuturism echoes Gipson's definition which is "Afrofuturist narratives and artwork often depict black people building communities, innovating new technologies, rewriting dominant narratives, and escaping oppression" (91). In her fictional world, Butler builds far-away communities both in the real world and uses space or time travel as a tool encapsulating the concepts of past and present. However, Butler's understanding of Afrofuturism is not an optimistic one. To Butler, Afrofuturism is not only about finding a perfect place for the salvation of black race or escaping oppression but for establishing dystopias mostly characterized by chaotic and catalysmic elements in order to survive. Her Afrofuturist themes are mostly framed by a

number of dystopian ones such as miscegenation, mutation and they represented the war for survival during a catastrophe. Her narrative is mostly based on the idea that something more prosperous and more energizing always comes after a calamity. Here it is crucial to deconstruct Butler's idea on the entropic force of the universe. Manifested itself in a thermodynamic process in physics, entropy is generally defined as something which is revealed after a constant decay or disorder. Butler transcends the concept of this statistical disorder into her writings as a vital tool for both survival and salvation. As a futurist, a dystopian, a dreamer, Butler's Afrofuturist narrative is entropic.

Especially, in the second half of her writing career, Butler basically concentrated upon the anti-utopian dimension of black science fiction. Through the *Parable* series of the early 2000s, Butler's chaotic and dystopian fiction rather than an ideal one became more visible. Apart from black- white relations, her Afrofuturist vision challenged the existing problems which threaten modern societies ranging from poverty to sexism. At this point, it is important to recall Erik's definition of Afrofuturism that "is not only dealing with traumatic historical memory and a troublesome present, but it also contains the possibilities that the future will not be very bright" (143). According to her Afrofuturist vision, a "traumatic" past and present might eventually lead to a traumatic future, as well.

In the realm of speculative literature, near-future is not always depicted with its promising connotations. Butler mostly uses post-blackness to reveal its catastrophic realities. She altered the very meaning of utopia by rejecting neoliberal utopianism and "dramatized its ethical and moral values" which has not seen since Sun Ra (Zamalin 126). To Butler, freedom, especially economic, brings about more violence rather than a growth in a society. Such entrepreneurial activities, more free markets, and an increasing number of industries lead communities to a global disaster. As having the same spirit with Ra, Butler used black space and time travel "as black liberation through escape from US white supremacy, racism, mass incarceration, poverty, neoliberal capitalism, instrumentalism, and patriarchy" (Zamalin 136). In this transition from "black" to "post-black," she defamiliarizes historical and social realities. Butler's Afrofuturist vision produces "alternative modes of ethics and justice that have been denied women, minorities, and the poor in historical and contemporary reality" (Gipson 187).

Although Mark Dery coined the actual term “Afrofuturism” during the 1990s, Butler wrote most of her Afrofuturist novels during the 1970s and 1980s such as the Patternist series, *Mind of My Mind*, *Kindred, Bloodchild* and the Xenogenesis trilogy. She is considered as the mother of Afrofuturism. Her visionary fiction encompasses the alternative communities embedded in genuinely African race and extraterrestrial elements which enable her to create African dystopias Within the territory of science-fiction, Butler reshaped the experience of time travel through her extraterritorial characters as aliens, vampires or superhumans with different skills. Butler’s time travel is not all about embracing the haunting past of African Americans. Instead, she wants her characters to meet the grim realities of their past by going all the way back to their ancestors and she reinterprets the past with a viable alternative. As Allen points out:

> By using science fiction conventions such as time or interplanetary travel, encounters with alien beings, characters with psionic powers, and futuristic settings, Octavia Butler is able to imagine both fictional futures in which she deals with the many wounds of the past for African Americans and other marginalized groups, and alternative pasts wherein her contemporary characters learn about their ancestors by confronting them face to face. (1354)

This is to say that in her fictional societies, Butler basically stands with the marginalized by embracing diversity and she experiments with social, racial and political structure of the slave societies by adopting the power of technology to prevent the “dehumanization of the vulnerable” (Allen 1356).

Distorting the real identity to find the “other” and outer” was the basic motif of Butler’s Afrofuturism. To Butler, “there is a pervasive human need to alienate from oneself those who appear to be different-i.e., to create Others” (Zaki 241). This is probably why Butler does not only believe in the existence of perfect and ideal societies made up of perfect human beings; rather, she reconstructs a dystopic vision on unfit societies. Her understanding of the alien as “the other” reveals the dominant ideology of her Afrofuturist form and it obviously symbolizes how African Americans are racially coded, classified and treated in the US. Indeed, the racial use of “the other” in science fiction is not only limited to African Americans but it can be extended to all the minorities in the US. In science fiction and fantasy, Smith argues, “people of color and

ethnic minorities are still regarded by the United States-at least in the law and in the language-as Other and other than fully human" (Smith 387).

To highlight the grotesqueness of her characters, Butler generally presents them with a distorted appearance or a physical deficiency who "suffer catastrophic losses of identity, family, community, or even species, just as enslaved Africans and many Native Americans lost their homes, their history, and their heritage to an alien race" (Smith 387). When reintegrating future societies into a more dystopian direction, science fiction becomes "the window Butler used to open the imagination of readers about the problematic of the (Black) body" (Hampton 247). In Butler's fantastic world, one can find extraterrestrial beings such as aliens or vampires, strong women figures, inhumane creatures and even mixed-race societies all together and "their bodies themselves are genetic technologies, driven to exchange, replication, dangerous intimacy across the boundaries of self and the other, and the power of images" (Haraway 379).

The construction of otherness in Afrofuturism becomes a primary site to extend the discourse of marginalized bodies in Butler's literature. A simultaneous reading of Donna Haraway and Octavia Butler can be helpful to understand the role of feminist body politics. Both Butler and Haraway created a feminist and ideologic discourse under their research on feminism, cybernetism and post-colonialism. They both created a ground-breaking interpretation of how a strong female body is reflected through cyborgs. As a cybernetic organism, a cyborg represents a human being with artificial and technological components and it is generally portrayed as robotic yet organic. Haraway published a Manifesto on cyborgs in 1995 in which she rejected the simple and paternalistic definition of cyborgs as part-man, part- machine and she disproved the rigid dichotomies such as 'body and 'nature', 'human' and 'animal' or 'human' and 'machine'. As Melzer articulates, "her new perception on cyborgs contributed to the notions of postmodernity and posthumanism dominated by technologies and institutions" (26).

Butler's conceptualization of a strong female body which is not imprisoned under a black skin and can expand to other living or technological organisms refuted the idea of a biological limit a woman can have. Butler wants to save her female characters from the racist hierarchies by making the link more concrete "between land, biology,

and the historical oppression of marginalized bodies" (Hampton 100). With a number of futuristic talents of her black female characters such as metamorphosis, mobility or time travel, Butler crossed the boundaries of paternalist and racist practices women had to endure because of their skin color, gender and body. Indeed, the path her characters follow to survive in a catastrophic dystopia that matters, not the place they are originally coming from.

Butler recalls the African American experience of slavery and proceeds it to another level in which she becomes the forerunner in using neo-slave narrative as a new tool in Afrofuturism. Butler contributed to the concept of Afrocentrism flourished centuries ago and she moves it beyond the original African roots. traditional understanding of African American science fiction. When rethinking the history with a modern yet unusual perspective, Butler particularly employs in *Kindred* a neo-slave narrative, a post-colonial discourse and the recurring motif of time travel as the basic motifs of Afrofuturism and the protagonist "Dana extends that ideology and aesthetic of the slave woman's memoir into the late twentieth century" (Crossley xxi).

3.3 *KINDRED:* DUAL TIME OVERLAP

"I wanted to reach people emotionally in a way that history tends not to"

- Octavia E. Butler

Butler published *Kindred* in 1979 before Afrofuturism was accepted as a separate and unique genre in American literature. The story basically follows the adventures of an African American woman named Dana who is depicted as a contemporary black author, like Butler herself, living in Altadena, California in the 1970s with her white husband, Kevin. The novel begins with Dana's own prologue in which she depicts her suffering in a hospital room with a lost arm. Even though Kevin is accused by this damage, Dana insists that her husband is innocent. All of a sudden, the novel goes back to the Antebellum South after she feels a dizziness. She finds herself in Maryland in 1815. In her first mental travel to the Antebellum South, Dana saves a young white boy, Rufus Weylin from drowning in the river, the son of Tom Weylin- the slave holder of the plantation. In each journey, Dana experiences a dilemma to save Rufus' life and in the following chapters she realizes that Rufus is one of her ancestors

who raped Alice and had a girl named Hagar, who was supposed to be Dana's grandmother. Rufus' obsession with this enslaved woman Alice continues when Dana appears on the plantation. As she is transported back and forth, she knows that she had to save Rufus' life in order to ensure her survival. However, she had to murder Rufus at the end of the novel when he tries to rape her.

Throughout the novel, Dana experiences mental time travels from modern day California to Antebellum South to collect the pieces about her genealogical map. Although it is hard to classify *Kindred* within a single literary genre, there is no doubt that it is a remarkable example of Afrofuturist tradition. Even though Butler herself could not put *Kindred* into a specific category, many black scholars accept its functioning role as a bridge between science fiction and fantasy.

The novel is one of the earliest and the most successful harvests of Butler's adolescence. The re-interpretation of her own growing-up experience with the whole black race sets the basic understanding of *Kindred*. She wrote her book in a period when black nationalism had spread as an ideological and philosophical tenet among Blacks throughout the US. Butler's literary reflection during the Black Power Movement of a largely historical piece establishes the general discourse of *Kindred*. She says, "I wrote this book because I grew up during the sixties - that was the period of my adolescence - and I was involved with the black consciousness raising that was taking place at that time" (Beal 15). Butler's race, gender and identity politics in *Kindred* are reflected through the recurring motif of slavery. In that sense, it is important to analyze *Kindred* not only on a literary basis, but with its historical connotations, as well.

As a new tool in Afrofuturism, Butler employs neo-slave narrative in *Kindred* which is "an African-American genre that investigates the history of slavery and reworks the nineteenth-century slave narrative tradition" (Vint 241). After Butler did a thorough research on the historical papers documenting the horrifying realities of slavery during the 19th century, she began exhibiting it through her creative literary response. In an interview, she admitted the pre-writing process of *Kindred* was not easy at all, and probably it was the hardest among all her novels. Reading slave narratives would not be enough for Butler to fully understand what slavery was like during the 19th century in Maryland. She knew that she herself had to understand before she passed its

striking effects to her reader, so she went to Maryland. Butler called this experience as "scary." In New Frontier Panel Discussion with Barnes, Due, and Hopkinson, as Butler explained how it all happened:

> I think the most research I did for a novel was for *Kindred*. And I didn't really know how to do it. I didn't have a clue because I had never done anything like that before. GoinCg to the library wasn't enough. I read all the slave narratives I could find and I read some general history. I knew I had to go to Maryland and that scared me because I didn't know anything about traveling. I'd been to Clarion and I had traveled a little bit, but going to Maryland to do research sounded scary to me. (qtd in Hampton 146)

In *Kindred* Butler creates a protagonist like herself. Dana, as a strong, sophisticated, modern black figure, is a representative of contemporary black women's writing. At this point, it is crucial to highlight the recurring motifs in *Kindred* such as revealing self-sufficiency and self- awareness through literacy. During her journey back to Antebellum South, Dana witnessed the cruel racial practices of the period. She saw a captive black man whipped and tormented by the "Patrols. Groups of young whites who ostensibly maintained order among the slaves. Patrols. Forerunners of the Ku Klux Klan" (Butler 37). As Dana depicts the cruel racist practices that she witnessed:

> I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. (36)

Butler's reconstructing historical slave or colonial narratives with a futuristic approach is relatively a new device in literature. When arguing whether *Kindred* should be considered in SF or not, Vint strongly recommends considering "how it enables us to think about sf in new ways" (241). *Kindred* is not a typical science fiction novel which is full of supernatural elements, aliens, time machines or white superheroes. Rather, it reshapes the traditional understanding of science fiction and it represents the fantastic dimension of the Enslavement, one of black history milestones. Vint further argues that "fantastic neo-slave narratives revise and resist the tropes of nineteenth-century slave narratives, particularly their increased emphasis, influenced by Civil Rights and feminist struggle, on embodiment and embodied experience for understanding slavery" (242). This "embodied experience" that Vint argues summarizes both the historical and individual struggle to become a full self. Butler's neo-slave narrative basically recites

the nineteenth century plantation life and symbolizes the suffering of black women even in the twenty first century. Even though slavery ended decades ago, *Kindred* "rebels against rebels against both white and black texts that were predominantly male or paternalistic, a rebellion that Butler undertakes in order to carve out a space for black female literature, specifically black female literature on slavery" (Miletic 273).

A production itself of the Post Civil Rights of the late 1970s, "*Kindred* reveals a compelling trend in post-1965 speculative texts about slavery and Africa that points strategically to the importance of remembering the past to critique and manage one's positionality in the present" (Commander 30). Although the question of how much of the black-white relations has been repaired in time is still in quandary, Butler's characters can get the opportunity to witness the ancestral past and to interpret it in the light of modern America. To Butler, history has no capacity "to reach people emotionally," yet literature has. When narrating the historical background of what African Americans went through during slavery, Butler does not use a simple informative narrative. In that sense, it is easy to say that *Kindred* differently defines both pre and post racial America more thoroughly than its black science fiction equivalents published in that period. As Zamalin argues, "as a historical revision meant to trouble its moment's post racialism, *Kindred* upended vaunted American liberal consensus narratives of racial progress and equality that were booming in the post– civil rights era" (123). Zamalin further discusses Butler's "skepticism of civil rights liberal integrationism and black Power racial separatism" (125) determines her narrative. Neither stands with the integrationist nor separatist ideals, Butler prefers radical aesthetics to politics. When combining the liberal and radical ideals of the Post Civil Rights Era, she employs a radical utopian understanding in most of her novels including *Kindred*. It had been the first time since Sun Ra for a black author "to dramatize ethical and moral vision" of Utopias (Zamalin 126).

In *Kindred*, each chapter is built around quick transportations from the present California to Antebellum South and vice versa. Dana's sudden disappearances and reappearances after a "dizziness and disorientation" enable her to travel beyond time and space. In the opening chapter, while she is celebrating her 26th birthday on the 4th of July, which is a meaningful date for Americans to celebrate their independence, Dana, Butler's black heroine, experiences her first deep and spiritual journey from her living

room to the Old South, Maryland and finds herself in the middle of slavery of antebellum past. As she depicts that moment:

> I bent to push him another box full, then straightened quickly as I began to feel dizzy, nauseated. The room seemed to blur and darken around me. I stayed on my feet for a moment holding on to a book¬ case and wondering what was wrong, then finally, I collapsed to my knees. I heard Kevin make a wordless sound of surprise, heard him ask, “What happened?” I raised my head and discovered that I could not focus on him. “Something is wrong with me,” I gasped. I heard him move toward me, saw a blur of gray pants and blue shirt. Then, just before he would have touched me, he vanished. The house, the books, everything vanished. Suddenly, I was outdoors kneeling on the ground beneath trees. I was in a green place. I was at the edge of a woods. Before me was a wide tranquil river, and near the middle of that river was a child splashing, screaming. (13)

Dana’s time travels, however, are not carried out with the help of a physical time travel machine. Contrary to traditional definition of time travel as a general concept in science fiction which enables someone to physically move into the past or the future, Butler uses the power of neuroscience by allowing Dana to have mentally carried out journeys to the past, then to the present. Dana’s ability to manage the past and present simultaneously thanks to her episodic memory affects her decisions throughout the novel. Mental time travels, or with its scientific name *chronesthesia*, are followed by an episodic memory which is an ability of the brain to encode past events to evaluate present. As Tulving explains, episodic memory “makes it possible for a person to be consciously aware of an earlier experience in a certain situation at a certain time. Thus, the information of episodic memory could be said to concern the self's experiences in subjective space and time” (67). Thanks to the “neurocognitive memory system that enables people to remember past happenings,” Dana could access her own past and to interfere with her own acts with a conscious awareness. (Tulving 67). Because of these mental time travels, it is hard for Dana to convince her husband Kevin, her present counterpart, and Rufus, her past counterpart, while she has been experiencing a journey across time and space.

As Sun Ra attached utmost importance to spiritual transportation and teleportation to take black people into his space colony in *Space is the Place,* Butler also integrates the power of these teleportative tools to her plot to be able to transfer black body and soul into a fantastic realm. “How had Rufus heard Kevin and me across

time and space? I didn't know" (31), says Dana, to attract attention to the teleportation between them. In *Kindred*, Dana calls this situation a "sheer insanity" (63). As she tells her experience "after all, how accepting would I be if I met a man who claimed to be from eighteen nineteen—or two thousand nineteen, for that matter. Time travel was science fiction in nineteen seventy-six. In eighteen nineteen—Rufus was right—it was sheer insanity" (63). Because of the quick transitions between time and space both in Antebellum Maryland and present-day California, *Kindred* is basically classified "as a transcultural, transgenerational, and transhistorical novel" (Hampton 153).

Commander calls this type of time travel as a diasporic one "in which the protagonist assumes an active role on a slave plantation; dreamscapes and hallucinations about the protagonist's ancestors and her African pasts and futures; and the author-protagonist's physical return to the African continent or other symbolic Africas" (28). Dana's journey into past also symbolizes a journey into the meaning of her ancestral past. The reader recognizes that her existence directly comes out of her slave ancestors.

Apart from the modernized slave history, Butler also tries to uncover the lineage of formerly enslaved people by exploring family ties. As the title of the novel proclaims, *Kindred* as an old-school term, illustrates the blood relations across generations. It is not clear how much black people succeeded to maintain their family ties because of their lost roots during Enslavement. As a black woman herself who grew up with her mother and grandmother, without a father figure, Butler is addicted to exemplifying these family patterns, hierarchies and interactions. She reflected these dynamics mostly in a disturbing way in *Kindred*. Indeed, the core idea of *Kindred*, as Butler explains in one of her interviews, was formed by a young guy during her college education at Pasadena City College in the 1960s. Butler believed that there was black ageism among black youth during the Black Power Movement which appealed to the youth to show their racial pride throughout the US. These rebellious young blacks did not prefer to act in a way their ancestors had to decades ago. Butler further explains how she came up with the idea to Rowell:

> I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other

> people. He said, "I'd like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my own parents." When he said us he meant black people, and when he said old people he meant older black people. That was actually the germ of the idea for *Kindred* (1979). I've carried that comment with me for thirty years. He felt so strongly ashamed of what the older generation had to do, without really putting it into the context of being necessary for not only their lives but his as well. (51)

This young student's wish to kill elderly black people, who accepted to be humiliated and insulted by the white, could eventually end up with the idea of killing his ancestors first. This dilemma echoes Dana's trouble throughout the novel whether she has to save or kill Rufus Weylin, the white boy living in Weylin Plantation with his family. In the opening chapter of the book, Dana saves Rufus from drowning in the river and later she recognizes that Rufus could be one of his ancestors and she tries to acknowledge that if she could reach any of her relatives in this plantation:

> But…we're still in Maryland, aren't we?" I had relatives in Maryland—people who would help me if I needed them, and if I could reach them. I was beginning to wonder, though, whether I would be able to reach anyone I knew. I had a new, slowly growing fear. (Butler 26)

Dana's struggle to reach and meet one of her ancestors shows how Butler employs family ties to survive as one of her key themes in *Kindred*. After Dana finds herself in Antebellum South, she recognizes she could find her great grandmother Alice Greenwood. Indeed, Dana's sudden recognition of how she guarantees her own existence by helping Rufus establishes the *epiphany* in *Kindred*. This sudden yet crucial moment of realization changes the rest of Dana's journey in Antebellum past. In the course of the novel, the reader understands Rufus' role on Dana's journey to complete her genealogy. In other words, if she did not save Rufus, she wouldn't have been existed at all. Dana says:

> Again, what would have happened if the boy had drowned? Would he have drowned without me? Or would his mother have saved him somehow? Would his father have arrived in time to save him? It must be that one of them would have saved him somehow. His life could not depend on the actions of his unconceived descendant. No matter what I did, he would have to survive to father Hagar, or I could not exist. That made sense. (Butler 29)

Each time she went back to the past, she had to save Rufus' life in favor of both her own and her family's survival even though she later understood when he grew up, he

became a slave holder and raped Alice. However, to figure out what her family went through in Maryland, Dana had to solve this dilemma. “Dana's obligation to Rufus' life, which is also an obligation to her own,” Parham quotes, “structures the interplay of history and morality that motivates Butler's plot” (1318). Indeed, Dana’s basic motivation does not only demonstrate her intention to bring the pieces together about her family but mostly centers on staying alive in each trip. At the end of the novel, however, during her last visit to Maryland, Dana had to kill Rufus to prevent him from raping her. Here it is important to highlight that Butler’s black heroine had to ensure her own survival against male hegemony. Even though removing Rufus, her ancestor, from history with her own hands could darken the family lineage, Dana had no choice except killing him. As she describes:

> I could feel the knife in my hand, still slippery with perspiration. A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her. And Rufus was Rufus—erratic, alternately generous and vicious. I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover. He had understood that once. I twisted sharply, broke away from him. He caught me, trying not to hurt me. I was aware of him trying not to hurt me even as I raised the knife, even as I sank it into his side. He screamed. I had never heard anyone scream that way—an animal sound. He screamed again, a lower ugly gurgle. (260)

In this traumatic moment, Dana could not differentiate whether she was about to kill Kevin or Rufus because of dual time overlap, who are the white antagonists of the book. Kevin and Rufus reflect same characteristics in different realms and the reader witness that Dana’s personal battle to survive is not only against racism but also the sexism both in Antebellum Maryland and modern California. As Crossley argues, “the convergence of these two white men in Dana’s life not only dramatizes the ease with which even a progressive white man falls into the cultural pattern of dominance, but suggests as well an uncanny synonymy of the words husband and master” (x). When insisting on the gender of the protagonist in *Kindred*, Butler argues that it is not easy for a man to survive against the historical and social obstacles and he would eventually have been killed. But a woman, Butler says, “might be beaten, she might be abused, but she probably wouldn't be killed and that's the way I wrote it. She was beaten and abused, but she was not killed” (Rowell 51). Here Butler integrates sexism in favor of her female protagonist to survive in all difficult circumstances.

The above idea that survival is the basic component of *Kindred* will be allegedly linked to one of the key understandings of Sun Ra's philosophy. Sun Ra believed in the power of mythocracy rather than other "ocracies" or doctrines, and he particularly defends that myth is undeniably necessary to survive. Ra's concept of astro-black mythology evolving out of ancient Egyptian history enabled him to believe in setting up a genuinely black colony "beyond the stars." Reviving the memory of the ancestral past, Butler also highlights the importance of survival. In her vision, "the highest goal for humanity is survival by any means necessary, but the means often illustrated is to accept difference and acknowledge the inevitability and omnipotence of change" (Hampton 247). She basically redraws the border between fiction and fantasy and establishes new communities and uncanny characters in order to ensure their survival in all diasporas.

In *Kindred*, Butler does not plainly indicate the role of myth, but she makes it explicit in Dana's survival in both worlds after each time travel. Her reincarnation symbolizes Butler's mythology which goes all the way back to Africa of the early 1800s. At this point, it is crucial to explore Butler's adaptation of West African metaphysics to the broader historical context of slavery. To Setka, Butler uses a "panthasmic trauma narrative" by adopting Igbo cosmology[11] "as the mechanism of Dana's travel, thereby denying Western delineations of time and being, but also the way that it encourages readers to link her experiences to issues of trauma, repression, and cultural memory" (93).

Among Igbo people, there was a strong belief in reincarnation. As a peculiar Igbo myth, Setka pays attention to the *ogbanje* that is able to reincarnate and survive and she further describes it as a "a spirit being capable of traveling between worlds and known as the born-to- die or spirit child" (94). Even though it is depicted in the form of a human-being, the ogbanje is never attributed with gender or race. Setka discusses that because of "border-crossing potention" of this spiritual being, Dana could access the past and evoke the ancestral spirits (94). Through this transatlantic experience, the reader can easily make an identification with Dana to analyze both the horrorful side of slavery in the past and also Dana's personal struggle against continuing racism and

[11] Igbo is a name given to an ethnic group living in a part of Southeastern Nigeria.

sexism in the 1970s. As Setka further articulates the reader's identification with the protagonist's feelings toward past and now thanks to the *ogbanjism* in *Kindred*:

> Thus, when *Kindred'*s Dana finds herself transported to the antebellum world of her ancestors, we feel her fear, confusion, and ultimately her refusal to accept the conditions of slavery. As a result, the novel opens up a space for readers to feel mimetically connected to the experiences of the protagonist even as they are cognizant of the difference between mimetic feeling and actual experience. (96)

When transporting an ancient-esoteric African myth to a modern American context, it is important for Butler to create a contemporary African- American discourse to revoke a historical memory, which is an undeniable component of neo-slave narratives. Dana's mental visits in both worlds are well-conducted across cosmic borders. In the realm of West African metaphysics, Butler recontextualizes African cosmology which plays an important role to survive, revive and rebirth. In her phantasmical journey, Dana is responsible for reflecting the past and now with a sense of historical awareness. Coming out of historical awareness and cosmic consciousness, Setka tells:

> The West African cosmological belief in the interconnectedness of all things and beings - living, ancestral, or in between - clearly drives Dana's time travel episodes, which transform her from a person lacking in historical awareness to one intimately acquainted with the stark physical and psychological conditions in which her slave ancestors suffered and perserved. (99)

"As the alien other of American history," Yazsek declares, "Dana is indeed deeply marked by—but at the same time an undisputed survivor of—that same history" (1063). Yazsek quotes that the term *alien other* is basically directed to black women in science-fiction/fantasy and it addresses that they are the alien other of political history. This is why Dana "immerses herself in other, distinctly non-American stories of race relations and cultural power" (Yazsek 1061). Butler's employment of time travel as a part of her Afro-diasporic discourse contributed to the reinterpretation of contemporary black-white relations and antebellum slavery from a fictional perspective. In other words, reconfiguring the accounts of racial slavery with an emphasis on Post civil rights era "has been crucial to Black American cultural identity and to the engagement with master narratives, which often marginalize the African descended from the nation" (Commander 28). As Commander further explores, "cultural trauma" embedded in the concept of black social marginalization is the starting point of political neo-slave

narratives. Rather than a physical or mental problem, cultural trauma is linked to "dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (qtd. in Commander 29). As a direct result of collective memory with its emphasis on a loss of black cultural identity including genealogical records, Butler's neo-slave narrative deals with the never-ending effects of slavery on African Americans. In the Prologue of *Kindred*, even though Dana returns to her normal life in present day California, she still suffers from the loss of her left arm after she was abused by Rufus in her last trip in Antebellum Maryland. The reader grasps that a loss of a body part during slavery necessarily affects the embodiment of the self and cultural wholeness in the present day. This is to say that Dana is still suffering what her ancestors physically, culturally and politically suffered in the past.

As it is earlier discussed in this chapter regarding Butler's philosophy on black feminism, it is crucial for Butler to reflect the negative impacts of slavery through her radical understanding on black female body politics. *Kindred* is thoroughly mirroring the traumatic side of slavery and its continuing affects by "observing and suffering the backbreaking field work, persistent verbal abuse, whippings, and other daily cruelties of enslavement" (Crossley x). In terms of considering the loss of identification and wholeness after cultural or physical trauma, Butler attracts attention to historical violence and otherized black female bodies. Her narrative shows that "an individual's body does not necessarily depend upon the flesh and bone or material element of an individual," rather it is the "re-figuration of the self" (Hampton 129-130). Through the portrayal of her protagonist, Dana, Butler exhibits how cultural wholeness and identity are contested and recovered. All in all, as an Afrofuturist novel written by a racially and sexually oppressed black female author to describe the survival of her black female protagonist in the past and present, *Kindred* is "directly correlated to the growing black female activism and literature of the 1970s, especially concerning the ownership of black female bodies" (Miletic 273).

CONCLUSION: ALTER DESTINY FLASH FORWARD

and so the world
comes to its end
but what is the end
the end is
what they desire
every desire
is an end
and every end
is a desire
then
the end of the
world
is a desire of the
world
what type of end
do you desire?

-Sun Ra *(the end)*

The intersection of the Cold War period and the Civil Rights Movement enabled African Americans to reinterpret their domestic struggle in international arenas. It was hard for the US government to ignore their political and social demands during the Civil Rights Movement in order to preserve its prestigious position against other nations, especially the Soviet side. Even though the government seemed to end racial discrimination with a number of so-called constitutional rights, Blacks were still suffering from unfair treatment based on their race and color. As they always did, they tried to find a creative response to the ongoing racial discrimination and stigmatization. However, this time they benefitted from the scientific and technological improvements of the Space race to fictionalize their own alternative realm.

The rivalry between these two countries has shown itself not only in foreign affairs and bureaucracy, but also in space technology and science. While the political dispute between the US and the USSR was escalating into a technological, or namely a space war, both sides were eager to leave the other out of the race through scientific moves. This technological race opened a new era in African American arts and literature, as well. Especially in this period, African Americans started producing science fiction, later called as Black Speculative or Black Science Fiction, which laid the core of Afrofuturism for the first time.

In the wake of political activism during the Civil Rights Movement, black authors, poets and intellectuals aimed to meet the cultural and aesthetic values of black politics under the Black Arts Movement. Indeed, as of the Harlem Renaissance, African Americans have particularly endeavored to reveal the uniqueness of black race through art. These attempts also continued during the Black Arts Movement in which a combination of black beauty and black Power was prioritized. The movement re-envisions a creative and radical growth in music, literature and art. Thematically, when creating their art during the Black Arts Movement, black authors and intellectuals attached utmost importance to the idea of blackness which is "the impulse to imagine the unimaginable" (Crawford 3). In other words, the dichotomy between the violent exertion on streets and the imaginary future in art became the core ideology of the Afrofuturism that blossomed within the Black Arts Movement.

The psychedelic atmosphere of the Space Age which meld into the political chaos of Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s impacted African American identity in many fields ranging from music to literature, and a galactic identity is adopted by Blacks. Apart from the astral music legacy of the 1960s initiated by Sun Ra, an Afrofuturist literary form was developed which allowed novelists to imagine a promising and cybernetic future: Black Speculative Fiction. It is the intersection of black cultures and imagination through the concept of liberation and technology. The struggle for African Americans to survive in a genuinely black future shows itself with the notion of Afrofuturism. As a new genre, it is an artistic, aesthetic and creative black response towards discrimination, humiliation and hatred.

Emerging from the coalescence of art and technology, Afrofuturism seeks to give Blacks a chance to find their soul and adopt a diasporic identity in a "race-free" world. Incorporating technology into art, music, dance, plays and literature has become the core ideology of this ground-breaking discipline of the 20th century. Afrofuturism describes and reshapes the concept of black identity, black culture and black aesthetic. This is not a limited category to put African American people in, but more of a transcendental viewpoint to renovate the way they imagine an alternative future in which African Americans could have the authority and dominion over their own tools for inventing the future black identity.

Bearing in mind the importance of the overlapping periods of the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement and the Space Age and the Atomic Age, it is also significant to describe Afrofuturism within the political, economic, social, and even technical inequalities in the United States or elsewhere. As a speculative genre, Afrofuturism presents a different kind of possibility, creating an imagination apart from the actual reality. It is a radical, metaphorical, metaphysical and ideological response to traditional notions of politics, religion and culture. Through this imaginative and creative response, Afrofuturists build new futures for themselves. This is because the power of imagination is vital to Afrofuturism, not only to envision the future, but also to evoke the transatlantic slavery past for a rooted historical consciousness.

Sun Ra believes that “every end is a desire” which is to create a black future by leaving the antebellum past. This desire, however, “is not a desire to escape the pain but to confront and get free of it. What gets done with this changed perceptual filter becomes important. Such desire“charges” the emotional register necessary to force social change by technocultural/technospiritual means” (Lavender 7). Ra was the first one who truly believed in the cosmic, atmospheric and “technocultural/technospiritual” advantages of the Space Age and he introduced Afrofuturism through his cosmic, astral music and poetry. Integrating myth, science and science fiction into his music, Ra claimed that he could take all of the people from his race to another planet with his spaceship fueled with music. To create his own utopian vision and mythology, Ra emphasized on the experimental tunes of his bizarre music. By claiming he was not from Planet Earth but from Saturn, Ra acted as almost a prophetic, mystic figure for African Americans during the 1950s and its afterward. His belief in Ancient Egyptian and Arab religion and mythology reinforced his ideals to set up a racially authentic black colony. Ra insisted that African Americans could wear an Astro black identity in outer space which is the place for an absolute survival.

Sun Ra was not the only person to use space imagery and theme in his music, this utopian feature, his pure belief that his music was powerful enough to create a better world that caused him to be apart from other jazz artists of his time. Sun Ra and his Solar Arkestra did not achieved much fame in the United States, but they embarked on a fairly extensive world tour from the early 1970s. They gave concerts in many cities all over Europe including the capitals of the Nordic states and İstanbul. They also

visited African states he admired during his life such as Nigeria and Egypt. With the revival of experimental music and Afrofuturism in the 1990s, Sun Ra was rediscovered and he is now recognized as the father of Afrofuturism. It proves that Sun Ra was right in saying that he was coming from the future.

An important factor when analyzing Afrofuturism is making connections between Afrofuturism and other genres created under this title. Widening scope of Afrofuturism can be first explored in artistic fields ranging from music to literature. The musical and literary legacy of African Americans gained another dimension during the 1950s and 1960s. As a musical expression of Afrofuturism, Astral music, BeBop, free jazz and funk were formed along with the flourishing concepts of liberation and technology. In literature, Black Science Fiction became popular in which black authors achieved to thematize their troubled past with a "possible future" in "possible communities" which is far from the real world. Ra's performative, tentative, anarchic visionary jazz revisits ancient black history, especially Egyptian history and mythology and he creates his own astro-black mythology with his Solar Arkestra. It is not an accidental choice for Ra to adopt the name of the Ancient Egyptian god of the sun. Even the bizarre costumes he wears during his performances symbolize Ra's grotesque futurist image. He is seen in exotic cloaks and robes inspired by aliens and ancient Egypt. Moving away from the Westernized norms, religions and values, Ra went all the way back to Africa and blends the genuine African beliefs, rituals and practices of the past with a modern interpretation of space. Thus, Ra introduces Afrofuturism for the first time and invites all African descendant people to follow his path.

As a literary expression of Ra's Afrofuturist music, Black speculative fiction became popular in Afro-American literary canon during the 1970s. Even though Mark Dery coined the term Afrofuturism in his famous essay "Black to the Future" in 1994, some of the black authors were already producing Afrofuturist novels back then. Here it is important to highlight Dery's description on Afrofuturism. He said Afrofuturism is a speculative fiction that bridges across imagination and possibility and it creates the "techno-culture" of the late 20th century. Modern technology and the birth of techno-cities help Blacks to have a "science-fiction futurism." Through this imaginary concept, African American authors created an African Diaspora culture. Speculative or science fiction is no longer dominated by the white. Stimulating an alternative future for

themselves, African Americans created their own realist fiction through "techno-scientific" modernity. In this different historical legacy during the Space Age, Afro Americans excluded color and race from literature and black science/speculative fiction was developed as a separate speculative genre under the umbrella term Afrofuturism. For Afrofuturist authors, Black Science Fiction is a historical, political and cultural departure from the traditional Americanness.

When analyzing black science fiction, it is undeniable that Sun Ra has a great influence on its birth and development. In the Afrofuturist canon of the 1970s, there were black intellectuals, musicians, authors and visual artists who could dare to imagine an alternate realm beyond Planet Earth as Sun Ra did years before. As the predecessor in Afrofuturism, Ra introduced his astral music to African Americans during the Space Age and he invited his black colleagues to "the world of abstract dreams" he built. Ishmael Reed and Octavia E. Butler accepted Ra's invitation to re-envision a Black diasporic approach. Rather than occupying a place in music, they preferred being a part of the cultural dimension of this technospace. As Lavender argues, "Using afrofuturism to re-interpret black literature enables us to travel in time and across space to better understand this black utopian impulse, to create counternarratives, and to illustrate the many challenges we face" (84). Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Butler's *Kindred* uses Afrofuturism as a combination of science fiction, fantasy, occult, myth and cultural history embedded in Ra's "outer-darkness" ideology.

In this thesis, it has been underlined that Butler and Reed's literary styles have a base in Ra's Astro-Black mythology. They both changed the haunted definition of African American history, especially the slavery, with a new, original realm through their post-colonial, neo-slave narratives and mythological metaphors. They fictionalize the setting, plot and characters by creating a fictional atmosphere and an imaginative black consciousness and create a mythic African diaspora. Whereas Butler reflects post-blackness through an entropic and dystopic vision in her neo-slave narratives; Reed explores an alternative black aesthetic by focusing upon his own spiritual Neo-HooDoo style, Voodoo tradition and multiculturalism.

Throughout his career, Reed has produced important novels for the Afrofuturist canon in which there are the echoes of Sun Ra such as experimental/astral jazz,

Afrocentrism and rewriting ancient Egyptian myths. He uses history as a tool to approach both black and white American society with a sarcastic tone. Even though he respected the past, he was never haunted by it. Reed employs a speculative genre which he could reformulate its style and content. Published in 1972, set in the 1920s' Harlem, depicted the ancient folklores and myths, *Mumbo Jumbo* provides a surrealist, absurdist view of the ancient secret societies and tells the never-ending challenge between good and evil; the oppressive forces seeking a monolithic and controllable future and the liberatory forces pursuing to receive life with its fortunate falls and accidents. Identifying these two opposing sides on many levels, as in the example of Set and Osiris of ancient Egyptian mythology, Reed gives a spiritual and metaphorical reinterpretation of racial struggle in the US. His aim in *Mumbo Jumbo* is to show that African Americans have the power to create their "own future Text" to spread black music and black culture. Reed alters Eurocentric norms with an esoteric and magical interpretation of political, social and religious corruption and creates a future where black art and black beauty are never prevented by Western norms and hierarchies.

As a black author writing science fiction and fantasy against hierarchy, hypocrisy and gender discrimination, Butler was an outcast in the US. She created new universes and fantastic worlds to present an alternative future for African Americans, particularly black women. Her fictional world mostly relied on the basic motifs of what Afrofuturism requires. This fantastic realm, however, is sometimes articulated in a chaotic, imbalanced and violent atmosphere of dystopias. To Butler, creating an Afrofuturistic discourse is not all about traveling to stars and creating a peaceful black colony far away from the oppressive practices of whites. Instead of focusing on the ideal and perfect order of political utopias located in the future, Butler's Afrofuturist ideology mainly relied on feminist dystopias. Published in 1979, in *Kindred*, Butler replaces slave-holding paternalism of the old South with a new, relatively maternal formation through post-colonial/ neo-slave narrative and the metaphor of time-travel. In other words, she fictionalizes the old-fashioned, masculinist and racist practices of plantations by formulating a fictional-diasporic society where she questions poverty, sexism and racism.

All in all, Both Reed and Butler used speculative fiction in their Afrofuturist novels so that they could re-formulate black history and identity. Their immediate

departure from the traditional notion to a more innovative and revolutionary one shows their interest in a futuristic discourse. Black science fiction authors contributed to Afro-American canon with their works in which Sun Ra's heritage echoed. They reinterpret the concepts of black aesthetic, Afrocentrism and rewrite the ancient African myths.

Afrofuturism is still in tune with popular culture. It is still appearing in art, visual studies, and performance. In general, Afrofuturistic works include the novels of Samuel R. Delany, Octavia Butler and Ishmael Reed; canvases and paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat and Angelbert Metoyer, photography by Renée Cox, the extraterrestrial myths of Parliament-Funkadelic Jazz by Sun Ra, Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix, John Coltrane, Gary Bartz, Eddie Henderson Miles Davis and Lee Perry. As well as the protest movements in art and literature, the contemporary singers and hit movies of the 21st century also occupy the modern Afrofuturist understanding. A new generation of recording artists, including Rihanna and Beyoncé, have embraced Afrofuturism through their music. Other artists such as Missy Elliott and Janelle Monáe expanded Afrofuturist themes by incorporating the use of cyborgs, metallic visuals and androids into their styles.

In recent years, film producers tried to document Afrofuturist imagination when they were still suffering from being discriminated against such as *Black Panther* and *The Hidden Figures*. The 2016 movie *Hidden Figures* chronicles a team of black female mathematicians contributed the technological and scientific process at NASA to win the space race against their rivals in the Soviet Union, while also seeking to get equal rights and opportunities without being discriminated as "colored." Their efforts to eliminate discrimination in space can be regarded as a big step in Afrofuturism. The 2018 movie *Black Panther* is another great example of Afrofuturism. The story envisions a technologically advanced utopia, a culture free of Eurocentric imperialism. The high-tech utopian world of Wakanda in the movie Black Panther introduced this genre to many people. Although the events in the film take place in the present, it makes predictions that combine futuristic elements and social criticism. These increasing number of Afrofuturist interpretations in modern life demonstrate that this elegant trend Ra started decades ago is getting stronger and more visible.

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