



## AND SO SHAPED THE WORLD

Sheree Renée Thomas, Guest Editor

Imamu Amiri Baraka writes in his essay, “Technology & Ethos” (*Amistad* 2, 1974):

Western man’s freedom, unscientifically got at the expense of the rest of the world’s people, has allowed him to xpand his mind—spread his sensibility wherever it cd go, & so shaped the world...

Baraka argues that political power is not only the power to create—what you will—but to be free to go wherever you can go. For Baraka, Black creation—creation powered by the Black ethos—brings very special results.<sup>1</sup>

As a contributor to *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000) and as a writer who thought deeply during the Black Arts and Black Power Movement about the role of the Black imagination in shaping new worlds, Baraka would likely agree that today’s Afrofuturism is the result of many years of Black creation, powered by a rigorous, ever-evolving Black ethos. When I shared my call for submissions, Baraka answered with encouragement and support. His short story, “Rhythm Travel,” in which music is used as a weapon and a time machine (“the future is always here in the past”) was sent to me with a whimsical, hand-drawn color illustration, an original work that reflected Baraka’s broad interest and immense imagination.<sup>2</sup>

Afrofuturism—a term coined by Mark Dery in 1994 but created by the heavy, philosophical lifting done by his interviewees, science fiction pioneer Samuel R. Delany, scholar Tricia Rose, and cultural critic and

musician Greg Tate,<sup>3</sup> and then mainstreamed by sociological, artistic, and scholarly pioneers such as Alondra Nelson, Paul D. Miller (aka DJ Spooky), Anna Everett, Kali Tal—imagines that what was once presumed lost, forgotten, soiled, and stripped away can be found, can be reclaimed and resurrected, remixed and revived. In this ever-evolving, ever-changing creative world, old gods live again. New ones are born. They speak, sing, dance new worlds into existence and build in a space where all the artists are border crossers, perpetually dipping in and out of the past while forging new ways to reimagine the present, the future. Under the powerful lens of Afrofuturism, the impossible is possible. It is creative alchemy. The spirit and rhythm of a culture is preserved and transformed; the past is not only contested but sacred space.

When you choose to alter the history and ideology that has and continues to oppress you, you choose the path of a creator. You become the dancer and the interpreter of the dance. Afrofuturists create and examine work that explores a people whose Black bodies were seen as new world robots, whose production and labor was to be controlled, exploited, and repackaged for others' consumption. The battles we face today with the Black Lives Matter movement and beyond are the battles we faced when this country was first forged and founded—and oh, what a conundrum it is—for “we were never meant to survive,”<sup>4</sup> never meant to be free.