

Uniting Alternative Futurisms

a one-day symposium

June 29th 2020, University of Kent

Keynote artist talk: Elizabeth LaPensée (Michigan State University)

In “Black to the Future”, Mark Dery famously wrote that African Americans “inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies” (180). By 2003, Anishinaabe scholar Grace L. Dillon coined the phrase Indigenous Futurisms to describe the intersections of imagination, science and technology, and resistance in literarily and artistically projected futures reciprocal with looking to the past while acting in the present. As David Gaertner notes, “In many ways



Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism are pragmatic antidotes to contemporary reconciliation narratives, insofar as they look towards the future survivance of Indigenous peoples and people of colour within a system that, reconciled or not, continues to inflict violence against their bodies.”

In 2014, Rhodri ap Dyfrig coined the term “cymroddyfodoliaeth,” translated as Welsh, or Celtofuturism. Similarly drawing on Afrofuturism’s foundations and extending to Indigenous Futurisms, cymroddyfodoliaeth proposes Welsh (language) science fiction as a means to bridge the gap between past and future, wherein writers, musicians, and artists envisage an alternative culture to that which “tradition” attempts to preserve in aspic. While the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and Celtic communities and their relationships to race and coloniality are necessarily very different, they nevertheless share a common experience of colonisation and domination by external forces that laid waste to cultural and linguistic practice. This move arguably reflects a proliferation of “futurisms” in the last decade, from Latinx to Queer Futurisms, Arab to Hip Hop Futurisms and many more, now being collated by Dillon and others under the collective term of “Alternative Futurisms,” which seeks to take “back the narrative, discard the imperial gaze, and replace it with a vision of the authentic experiences of people who historically have survived domination and conquest as told and retold from those lived experiences.”

With the hope of bringing together voices across these varying modes of Futurisms, a one-day symposium will mark the closing of Elizabeth LaPensée’s three-week residency in Paris and Canterbury.

We invite proposals for individual papers, roundtables, panels, performances, or other forms of presentation that speak to any aspect of Alternative Futurisms and that focus on any media.

Please send 300-word abstracts with a short bio to David Stirrup (dfs@kent.ac.uk) by April 30th 2020.

This event is hosted by the AHRC-funded project “**Beyond the Spectacle: Native North American Presence in Britain**” and the **Centre for Indigenous and Settler Colonial Studies** at the University of Kent.

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