

Space is the Place: Reflections on Arabfuturism

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Paulina Sobczyk

Abstract

This paper focuses on Arabfuturism, the movement of Arab artists that reformulates colonial themes of the Space Race, its temporality and spatiality, to rethink the history and memory of occupation beyond Eurocentric narratives. Simultaneously embedded in the past and anticipating a different future, Arabfuturism is a practice of creating fictitious realities, which signal a conflict between what is imagined and what is real. It forces us to deepen reflections on the categories of time, space, solidarity and the speculative. In its comprehensive structure, it provokes the use of diverse and mutually complementary methodological optics, from chronopolitics through counterfuturism, to the concept of queering the future, which, although they do not exhaust possible interpretations of the Arabfuturistic movement, become an intellectual provocation for further reflection on its artistic and political potential.

It was Eldridge Cleaver, a leader of the Black Panther Party, who in 1969 during his self-imposed exile in Algiers criticized the Space Race by calling the Apollo program a “circus to distract people’s minds from the real problems, which are here on the ground.”¹ On July 15, 1969, civil rights leader Ralph Abernathy marched to Cape Kennedy in Florida (the Kennedy Space Centre), where the Saturn V rocket was set to launch, with a sign that pointed out strongly “\$12 a day to feed an astronaut. We could feed a starving child for \$8,” and exhorted “We may go on from this day to Mars and to Jupiter and even to the heavens beyond, but as long as racism, poverty and hunger and war prevail on the Earth, we as a civilized nation have failed”.²

Hailed as humankind’s greatest achievement and emphasized as pivotal in JF Kennedy’s presidency challenge to land a man on the Moon and return him safely to the Earth Apollo’s political priority was in fact much more down to earth. Catalyzed by the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957, and Yuri Gagarin, the first human into orbit in 1961, Apollo was fueled both with belief in American exceptionalism and the urge to beat the Soviets at their own game, shifting the questions about moon landings from its memory to its triumphalist legacy. Yet while NASA paved the way to be the first to set foot on a lunar surface, culture outside of its gates was undergoing significant changes overlooked by the popularity of the Space Race. For many Americans under crippling financial burdens in a nation wracked by the Vietnam War, problems of racism, sexism and inequality problems that were best summed up in Gil Scott-Heron’s 1970 song *Whitey on The Moon* that contrasts Black communities’ poverty with the scientific and military investments made on behalf of the Apollo project Apollo seemed like a waste of state resources. Martin Luther King himself questioned the program’s high price and possible justification while the situation of millions of African Americans was marked by poverty. “In a few years we can be assured that we will set a man on the moon and with an adequate telescope he will be able to see the slums on Earth with their

intensified congestion, decay and turbulence,” King said during his speech at the US Senate meeting on race and poverty in 1966.³

Thus, despite backstories now fortunately covered by various texts of culture⁴ echoing and positioning achievements of others responsible for his success, Armstrong’s giant leap for mankind was in fact mostly a project for white America. “It is instructive to watch an Apollo launch on a black man’s television set,” wrote Jack Roberts in his report *Space is not Black* that appeared in *The Nation* just over a week after Apollo’s landing:

*The astronauts are white; the doctors interviewed are white; the engineers and contractors who describe the \$135 million space capsule and the commentator who interviews them are white. For ten days white flight controllers and scientists tell how black is outer space while teenagers in the living room snort. When the capsule finally splashes down, children make a game of trying to find a few black faces in the welcoming crew on the carrier deck.*⁵

As Assif Siddiqi aptly sums it up in his text *Whose Apollo Are We Talking About?*, “for many indigenous populations, as well as non-Americans, Apollo was nothing more than an echo of conquest and colonialism.”⁶ Therefore, commemorations of the Apollo 11 landing must also include and reflect on the troubled history of spaceflight. “The Outer Space Treaty” (1967) stated an anti-imperial ethos, ensuring that no nation could declare sovereignty in space. But as Haris Durrani rightly notes, despite the fact that this statement received well-deserved attention, “it by no means represents the history of spaceflight and outer-space law as practices by countries and corporations in the Global North.”⁷ The history of spaceflight is the story of two strong nations racing to subjugate our natural satellite and doing it by means of marginalized communities both within their borders and throughout the territories of developing countries. Filled with natural resources, they were the territories that were quickly recognized as particularly valuable to launch sites and establish space centers, providing strategic military position for those, who claimed that years of their colonial expansion are already behind them.

Claims and instrumentalization of territory, populations and resources point to the inequalities that funded spaceflight development and emphasize the enormous capital that should have been accumulated to even access space. How come, then, when 50 years ago Neil Armstrong and Edwin Buzz Aldrin stepped on the moon for the very first time, millions around the globe were watching? Present for the launch of Saturn V, Ralph Abernathy himself for a second suspended his protest. “For just a moment when that rocket launched into space, it wasn’t about hunger, it wasn’t about poverty, it was about an accomplishment of human beings to go forth. And that’s miraculous within itself,” we learn from the memories of his daughter, Donzaleigh Abernathy.⁸

I find Ralph Abernathy’s example important as it best pictures the significant difference between people’s palpable, evident fascination with moon landings even despite its troubled history and the symbolic, almost universal aspect of imagery produced by Apollo and the entire Space Race, which vastly exceeds its times. Nixon’s presidency and his Space Doctrine put an end to the human exploration of space beyond low-Earth orbit in the twentieth century. The 37th President of the United States cut the Apollo program and refused to build a base on the moon, mandating that the space program should be treated as one of the domestic government’s programs with limited resources. With these actions, public space frenzy that specific spirit of the time started to wear off. The idea of space, however, with its groundbreaking and emancipatory character that almost leveled the moon landings with a collective achievement of society, survived reuse in the most imaginative of ways and in contexts far more distant than only American or Soviet.

Ticket to the Moon

In 1964, during what were the early days of space travel, Austrian journalist Gerhard Pistor walked into a Vienna travel bureau wishing to reserve himself a flight to the moon. His request was rejected by Soviet Aeroflot, but transferred to the Pan American Worldwide Airlines, which took his reservation into account and started to launch what later became the First Moon Flights Club.⁹ The company orchestrated a large-scale promotional campaign, boosted after Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* featured a fictional Pan Am Space Clipper, which by becoming a product of pop culture that long dominated visual imaginations about space, "made that future easy to imagine," we read in the memories of Jeffrey Gates, member number 1043.¹⁰ Between 1964 and 1971, the year in which the club officially closed, the airline issued to its global members on both sides of Iron Curtain nearly 94,000 "Tickets to the Moon," later distributed in material, paper as a souvenir-like form to those on a waiting list. Some of its holders believed that first commercial flight within their lifetimes was a real possibility.

The Club eventually included members of each US state and over 90 countries, including Ghana, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Pakistan, New Zealand and Iceland. Yet as we learn from *Ticket to the Moon* (2019) a documentary film by the Czech director Veronika Janatková dedicated to these particular events Pan Am's archives indicate that the second biggest group of Moon ticket holders were Czechoslovaks, among them the director's grandfather, Zlatěk Maršák. In 1969, when Armstrong stepped on the moon, Czechoslovakia had to cope with the situation of imposed "normalization" a return to hard-line communism and the aftermath of the Soviet-led invasion to suppress the Prague Spring in 1968. Censorship was resumed, freedom of association was restricted, and people critical of the new reality were removed from office. Yet it was from that oppressed reality in the midst of the Cold War that hundreds of Czechoslovaks decided to reserve tickets to the moon.

Part of the explanation for this phenomenon might be sought in the social imaginary of the time, which was dominated by space and its technological and political manifestations. Sci-fi seeped into popular consciousness, every child wanted to become a cosmonaut (or an astronaut?) as Soviet propaganda gladly reported on the Space Race as proof of the potential of a new socialist society that would bring humanity's wildest dreams to life. Silent support for the Americans had an explicit political and subversive dimension, where owning a ticket was a symbolic part of the far West that you could have just slipped into your pocket. It was a small yet individual act of resistance. But having a "Ticket to the Moon" was also an expression of stimulated utopian thinking. People clashed between expectations of a better future and the constrained experience imposed by a present were driven by a relentless ambition to escape. In these ways a "Ticket to the Moon" became embedded within debates about emancipation. It emerged from a sense of collective dissatisfaction and responded to a particular hope that another future was possible.



Cristina de Middel, *The Afromauts*, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist, www.lademiddel.com)

It was also in 1964 that the British protectorate over Northern Rhodesia came to an end, giving way to a new independent African nation: Zambia. But alongside the independence movements taking place across the African continent in 1960s, 1964 was also a year in which Edward Mukuka Nkoloso the Zambian activist and science teacher who fought for his country's freedom from colonial rule single-handedly founded the Zambia's Academy of Science, Space and Philosophy at an old farm outside Lusaka. Nkoloso claimed that Zambia could join the Space Race, and could do it with flourish beating both Soviets and Americans by sending the first African to the moon, which in his opinion was doable within a year.

The story of Nkoloso and his space brainchild was recalled through *The Afromauts* project by Spanish photographer Cristina de Middel (2011) and the *Afromauts* movie by Ghanaian American director Nuoatama Frances Bodomo (2014). As we learn from these and very few other texts covering this subject, Nkoloso had been training his cadets with the seventeen-year-old Matha Mwamba the first female to be sent to the moon and then to Mars by rolling them down hills in empty oil barrels and swinging them on a long rope, which was then cut off at the highest point to resemble the feeling of weightlessness.¹¹ Nkoloso presented his project to the state, but the dreamlike vision in which the girl, two cats and the missionary were to land on the moon must have been treated by the Zambian government as a joke. His efforts received no support and eventually died a natural death. They are sometimes remembered by those who in the story seek only absurdity, rather than reading this particular African occurrence as an encapsulation of speculative political fiction, as it in the words of Bodomo "contemplat[es] the larger ramifications of launching the Black body into space."¹² So treated, Zambia's Academy of Science, Space and Philosophy might be read as a critical project, which after years of apartheid regime and enslavement intended to articulate a history of dispossession as part of the imaginary future.



Cristina de Middel, *The Afromauts*, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist, www.lademiddel.com)

Space for the Dispossessed

One might think about the function of this somewhat lengthy introduction and the legitimacy of recalling contexts so distant from the main issue of this text: Arabfuturism. However, the history of black America in the face of the Apollo program, the Czechoslovak “Ticket to the Moon” that gave hope of escape from the yoke of Soviet normalization, and the Zambian venture to establish a space station, reformulate the image of the space race as a clash of two powers American and Soviet directing us to micro-optics and peripheral stories of those times. What connects these situations is the fact that they all address certain groups for whom the future was foreclosed or prescribed from the top down. Once opposed or unavailable space or available only within tropes of the imagination became a synthetic, synchronous narrative that combines seemingly unconnected and geographically distant situations and discourses. It thus offers the function of establishing links between very diverse civic movements and political struggles, many of which grow out of race history or the economic struggle for territory. The same contexts also fueled Arabfuturism.

Yet to fully understand these movements it is important to position them within a trajectory not only of geopolitical, but also chronopolitical thought that recognizes the hybridity, multiplicity and double inscription of temporalities as uneven cultural politics of time. We inhabit time differently, because the social fabric is composed of a chronography of power. A sense of time and possibilities within time differ for specific individuals and groups. Those deprived of time often also expropriated of voice, subjectivity and place fall into the category that Judith Butler calls *ungrievable*, as they acquire and lose value depending on the framework and historical perspective within which they are regarded. “The ungrievable are those whose loss would leave no trace, or perhaps barely a trace,” those whose life does not belong to the racial schema, a life not worth preserving, socially negated, orchestrated by a necropolitical “letting die” rule.¹³

Numerous historical and contemporary examples of human rights violations show vividly that when we connect space with the future, we should think about those whose future has been arbitrarily taken away in advance. Through the gesture of giving voice and place within time to those already forgotten, time itself becomes “mobilised as an effective, active force in contemporary political sphere,” that in recognition of Jussi Parikka “functions as a way to invent different horizons of existence as well as to connect them to the lived genealogies

of dispossession".¹⁴ Extraterrestriality thus becomes a hyperbolic trope that through space and distance allows a kind of recognition and identification within which relationships between preferred future(s) and the given present are being imagined and engineered that allow for the residual "deployment of other times in the present."¹⁵

These co-created forms of fabulation, which urge us to picture possible futures while using the potential of cosmic distance, resonate in contemporary art practices, which have the capacity to both affect the political imagination and grasp non-linear conceptions of time. Through these means, art practices can become a productive tool to investigate the conditions of specific groups in the contemporary moment they might, again in Parikka's words, "help us to understand already existing forms of temporal power, territorial claims and dislocations, as well as sometimes offe[r] audiovisual forms and narratives that prescribe a post-colonial future for times to come."¹⁶ Undertaken in conflict areas, where imagination is a form of courage for designing another, better world, or assertive opposition to the existing one, these practices cannot be considered as purely aesthetic, but demand to be approached as strategies with a huge epistemological potential.

Among them, still only occasionally addressed in academic discussions, is Arabfuturism, a movement of Arab artists who started to redefine an orientalist toolset of narrativization projected upon the Middle East. From astronauts, spaceships and intergalactic travels, Arabfuturism hijacks the colonial theme of the Space Race and uses its spatial and temporal dislocation to challenge and rethink the history and memory of occupation in a more preposterous way,¹⁷ as a "backward glance that enacts a future vision."¹⁸

Space Refugee

In 1987, the Soviet-manned space flight Soyuz TM-3 set out on a 7-day, 23-hour and 5-minute journey to the ——— (peace or world in English) orbital station. In addition to once igniting the American imagination with the launch of Sputnik 1 and the first man in outer space Yuri Gagarin it was the third of the most important achievements of Soviet cosmonautics. Few, however, know that this flight was also an important event in the history of the Arab Republic of Syria. Aboard the ship was Muhammed Ahmed Faris, the first Syrian cosmonaut, who in 1985 was invited to the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Russia, where he defeated 60 other participants, including his kin and candidates supported by Hafez Assad's government, to eventually become part of the mission.

In a little over a week's journey time, he conducted numerous experiments and photographed Syria from outer space. After returning to Syria, Faris became a national hero. In popular consciousness, he became the Neil Armstrong of the Arab World and was quickly incorporated as a propaganda tool in the hands of the government. Syrian streets were named after him and later renamed when he openly opposed the policy of the state by taking part in demonstrations for peaceful reforms in Damascus. These demonstrations, along with those in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and other Arab cities, experienced increasing violence against demonstrators and came to be defined under the common header of the Arab Spring. In 2012, Muhammed Ahmed Faris crossed the border into Turkey, where he still lives. He is a member of the Syrian National Committee for the Coordination of Democratic Change and has associations with anti-government and anti-violence profiles. He remains the highest-ranking refugee of Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship.



Halil Altındere, *Space Refugee*, 2016 (Courtesy of Pilot Gallery, www.pilotgaleri.com)

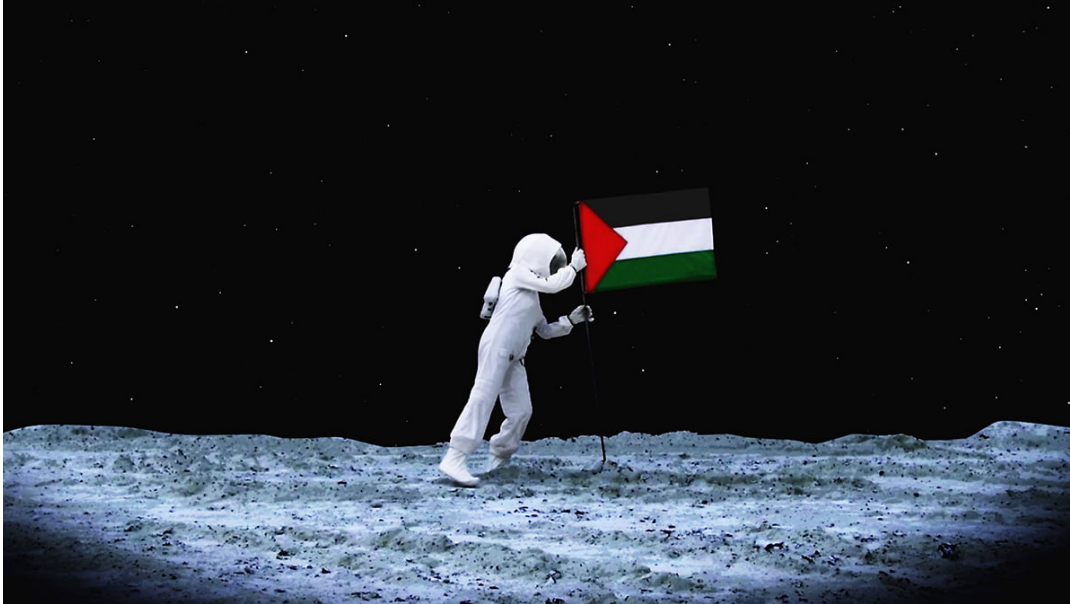
The tension between these two extreme stages of Muhammed Ahmed Faris's life Faris national hero and Faris refugee and oppositionist is used in the work *Space Refugee* (2016) by the Kurdish, Istanbul-based artist Halil Altındere. *Space Refugee* is a twenty-minute, quasi-documentary film in which Muhammed Ahmed Faris, a homeless hero, is again, symbolically recruited to the mission of life. This time though, his task is to lead the Syrians to... Mars. In the reality arranged by Altındere, Mars is simulated by the red glow of Cappadocia. The setting of Cappadocia is not accidental a site inhabited in the past by Christians, as refugees of the Roman Empire at a time when the Turks, in an imperial march, conquered territories west of Anatolia. An intertextual reference could also be found in the name of the mission itself, Palmyra, which refers to one of the first ancient cities and cultural centers in central Syria also known under the Arabic name Tadmur, in this form still appearing in the Old Testament¹⁹ that experienced severe damage as a result of Syrian Civil War. The specter of the first founders, the Palmyra Mission and other historically thought-out contexts, however, only provides a background for the main issue of work, where Faris exceeds his individual tale by becoming a synecdochical impulse for the story of the refugee crisis.

Thus, the reality sketched by Altındere, in which serious, logistical steps to populate another celestial body are being considered, is actually an expression of disappointment with the world in the face of a humanitarian tragedy. For this reason, Altındere is not looking for his mission's new start in Western Europe or America, but he deliberately focuses on a distant planet. This bitter resentment is punctuated by Kaya Genç, the Turkish political commentator and essayist, who interprets the artist's work as a provocative question: "If no country wants them, why don't we settle the world's refugees on Mars?"²⁰ *Space Refugee* should not therefore be read only in the Turkish context it is a story of Western Islamophobia as much as it is Ankara politics.

Space Exodus

"The oppressed must find another way to tell their story."²¹ These words by Larissa Sansour, an artist who in 2009 planted the Palestinian flag on the moon and paraphrased "That's one small step for Palestinians, one giant leap for mankind," are a valuable addition to Genç's question. They were part of her video work, *A Space Exodus*, in which Sansour expressed the need and designed an alternative reality for Palestinians, and her artistic image that depicted her, dressed in a spacesuit, walking on the lunar surface and wielding the flag an attribute of Palestinian

subjectivity to the sounds of the slightly orientalized Richard Strauss's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. "The film offers a naively hopeful and optimistic vision for a Palestinian future contrasting sharply with all the elements that are currently eating away at the very idea of a viable Palestinian state," the artist states in her own description of the intention that stands behind the video.²²



Larissa Sansour, *A Space Exodus*, film, 5—, 2009 (Courtesy of the artist, larissasansour.com)

Space within the Palestinian context was also invoked in the participatory project by Swiss artist Gilles Fontollet, *Palestinian Space Agency* (2010 2012). "Moments without gravity" the gravity of the Palestinian situation are assumptions that characterize this particular undertaking.²³ What was first born in virtual space as a fictitious institution and a response to limited travel options and checkpoints in the West Bank, materialized, with engagement of locals near Nablus, Palestine, in the physical form of *AMMANI* (2011) a space shuttle of 4.5 x 4.7 x 2.8 meters and an estimated weight of one ton that travels through space and time. During the then ongoing peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, Fontollet tried to develop his vision of an initiative that would somehow improve the life of Palestinians through research and commitment that would come to an understanding of what it means to actually live in Palestine. What is possible and what is necessary? Hidden in his studio, Fontollet started to work on his first sketches of a space ship, wandering through local markets, showing his incipient idea to vendors and gathering encouraging feedback. The idea of a Palestinian Space Agency, with the increasing commitment of locals volunteering their time and skills, sprouted in a couple of days, eventually becoming a material symbol of a collective Palestinian subconscious and longing. As the artist states in the publication that is a chronological narrative of the Palestinian Space Agency from the initial concept to the launch of the Shuttle:

*One of the observations I made again and again during the many hours which we spent together on the building site is that many people went up to the shuttle quietly and remained in front of it without saying a word. Suddenly, out of the silence, they start to talk about dreams. Visions. Driven by memories of places which they never have been. "Hope. A sign of hope," is what I could hear them saying over and over again. I do not really know what they mean by hope. But I can see memories and pieces of the past which are being brought into the present.*²⁴



Halil Altındere, *Space Refugee*, 2016 (Courtesy of Pilot Gallery, www.pilotgaleri.com)

Rewriting history to create alternative scenarios that restore a causative potential for marginalized groups is distinctive to Arabfuturism. The concept first appeared in the work of Jordanian artist Sulaiman Majali's *Towards a possible manifesto; proposing Arabfuturism/s*. The three-part project began in July 2015 as a discussion that turned into an attempt to map alternative narratives "in the wake of a disintegration and collapse in the contrived fortresses of European geopolitical identities."²⁵ The result of the conversation was a (possible) manifesto that defines Arabfuturism as a state of becoming, a question, a post-postcolonialist reflection, which has at stake the power to self-definition. Majali explains the use of Arabfuturism's completive, "futurism," which, though invested in the futuristic frame of thought, is neither intended to refer to Futurism as a movement nor to be explicitly "futuristic":

*Instead "futurism" is anticipating a future, it signifies a defiant cultural break, a projection forward into what is, beyond ongoing Eurocentric, hegemonic narratives... these ideas can contribute to a growing counterculture of thought and action that through time will be found and used in the construction of alternative states of becoming.*²⁶

As a phenomenon, Arabfuturism was born somewhat on the sidelines of Afrofuturism. The term appeared for the first time in Mark Dery's "Black to the Future" (1993) article to describe the African-American use of science-fiction as an instrument to create different visions of the future. The movement was primarily associated with Sun Ra, a visionary musician and creator of the film *Space Is The Place* (1974), which is a combination of motifs derived from both science-fiction and magical realism, in which the African-American minority inhabits the non-existent planet *The Archestra*.²⁷ Nowadays Afrofuturism is equally co-created by pop culture and academic inquiry an observation expressed in the 2013 manifesto *Afrofuturism 2.0* that equated the phenomenon with not only an aesthetic, but also geopolitics and the philosophy of science.²⁸

In "Afrofuturism and Arabfuturism: Reflections of a Present-day Diasporic Reader" by Lama Suleiman,²⁹ another article considered to be part of the movement's founding and at the same time a review of the cross-sectional book *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*³⁰ the Palestinian researcher traces how the Afrodiasporic culture reinvented and transformed the feeling of despair and discourses of victimization into narratives that

explore notions of temporality and possible future(s). Suleiman treats the title “Astro-Blackness” a state “in which a person’s Black state of consciousness, released from the confining and crippling slave or colonial mentality, becomes aware of the multitude and varied possibilities and probabilities with the universe”³¹ as a starting point for a reflection on the need to pose similar questions in the context of Pan-Arab culture, its past, present, future and the (re)construction of these “in a manner that infiltrates territorial and mental borders.”³²

Future, fiction and extra-terrestriality thus become operative categories for Arabfuturistic artworks, suggesting that beside their possible reading as a kind of antiphrasis each time referring beyond the text itself, each time implying the opposition between what one says and what one wants to understand they can also be interpreted as strategies for creating fictitious realities. Arabfuturistic artworks deploy “what ifs” and “as ifs” in the present time, shift well-known situations into paradoxes and unexpected constellations, and, because of that, signal conflict between what is imagined and hoped for, and what is real.

Arabfuturism as Part of a Willful Archive

“What happens in Palestine is so surreal that it is sometimes more surreal than the fiction itself,” says Larissa Sansour who explains how she implements this statement into her artistic strategy:

*I think working with a parallel universe [makes it] easier for me to talk about what’s really happening politically in present day Palestine by using an almost positive equation instead of just using the same lingo and same rhetoric and same negative language that has reached an impasse. Finding a new equation might be a better way of trying to deal with the situation that has been going on for 60 years.*³³

The need for a positive message articulated by Sansour sums up well what is clearly visible in these often absurd, ironic works, let it be remembered, arising in conflicted, postcolonial areas, and that are attempts to move beyond only dystopian representation. Arabfuturism, even if growing out of a difficult past and present, is more of a cultural break, a place of opportunity, expression and potential emancipation. Thus understood, it is a counter-futuristic strategy between intent and effect. Instead of changing people, it provides means for change, allowing individuals to change themselves. It is a pick-and-call tool, a kind of demo-phonic practice that provides viewpoints to individuals from which they can re-evaluate their place and function in society and as society.

Fiction once again acts as the vestibule of collective consciousness, through which radical ideas have a chance to penetrate the collective imagination. But fiction and imagination woven into artworks also suggest that the future can be viewed from the perspective of Jean-Paul Sartre’s existential philosophy.³⁴ In the interpretation of the French philosopher, issues of the imagination and freedom are connected by a dialectical relationship. It is through modes of the imaginary, he argues, that individual consciousness is able to experience a lack of freedom, captivity, imprisonment. Therefore, it is also possible to see through the imagination a different situation, which brings the possibility of changing *what is* and enabling what *might be*. Arabfuturism’s radical fictionality thus refers to the visual language and symbolisms of science-fiction, but also if not mostly to fiction’s Latin root source, *fictio*, meaning “creating” and “shaping,” which indicate its performative dimension rather than merely a literary reference. The imagination conceived through *fictioning* is thus understood as crucial in epistemological and even ontological terms: it not only notices, captures and transforms the multiplicity of possibilities, but with its introduction into the sphere of the imaginary it is allowed to create its own determinants

of what one could call normativeness, a transformative force that affects existence.

But to stand against the world, to embrace the feeling of against-ness and to create something that does not agree with what is given might require willfulness. A “willful subject,” a term coined by Sara Ahmed, is a disobedient subject, a subject willing to turn a prescribed diagnosis into an act of self-definition and self-description, sometimes simply by being persistent and protesting when asked to let go.³⁵ Willfulness as a kind of politics means not only to decline to go with the flow, but in order to survive it might also mean being willing to cause its occlusion. History is condensed in acts of willfulness as it might be understood as a crucial horizon for politics. These do not necessarily take the form of an individual subject, but may also be understood as people, culture and practice. Feminism, queer and anti-racism history could be, as Ahmed points out, “thought of as histories of those, who are willing to be willful.”³⁶ That way we can think of these histories, and some character traits within them, as a willfulness archive, as a line of connection between others and specific practices of disobedience, persistence, and imagining differently. Arabfuturism surely is that kind of practice.

Footnotes

1. Makemson, Harlem. *Media, NASA and America's Quest for the Moon*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing. 2009. p. 183.
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4. See, for example, Shetterly, Margot L., *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*, which tells the story of NASA’s African-American female pioneers: Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson.
5. Robertson, Jack. *Space is not Black*. *The Nation*. July 30, 1969. www.thenation.com/article/archive/archives-space-is-not-black/. (accessed: 2020-04-03).
6. Siddiqi, Assif. *Whose Apollo Are We Talking About?* *Los Angeles Review of Books*. September 28, 2019. Available at www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/whose-apollo-are-we-talking-about/. (accessed: 2019-09-28)
7. Durrani, Haris. “Is Spaceflight Colonialism?”. *The Nation*. July 19, 2019. Available at www.thenation.com/article/archive/apollo-space-lunar-rockets-colonialism. (accessed 2019-03-22).
8. Smith, David. “‘Whitey’s on the moon’: why Apollo 11 looked so different to black America”. *Guardian*, 14-07-2019. www.theguardian.com/science/2019/jul/14/apollo-11-civil-rights-black-america-moon. (accessed 2019-09-13).
9. Aeroflot kindly, but ironically, informed Pistor that all seats on the flight to the moon had unfortunately

already been sold out, but they could offer him accommodation in Hotel Crater. Pistor gladly accepted this offer.

10. Gates, Jeff. "I Was a Card-Carrying Member of the 'First Moon Flights' Club". *Smithsonian Mag.* October 20, 2016. Available at [www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution-i-was-card-carrying-member-first-moon-flights-club-180960817/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/i-was-card-carrying-member-first-moon-flights-club-180960817/) (accessed: 2019-10-15).
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12. Cited in: Lopez Cassell, Dessane. "Parsing the Real and Unreal Stories of the Zambian Space Academy". *Hyperallergic*. September 4, 2019. Available at www.hyperallergic.com/515006/afronauts-nuotama-frances-bodomo-interview/ (accessed 2019-10-25).
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15. *Ibid.* p.43.
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