Introduction

The Future’s Queer Histories

Futurity Now and Then

We are living in the future. At least, we often say we are. A Google search for the phrase at any point in the 2010s would bring up technologies that exist in the present, from wearable computers to 3D printing. The act of internet searching itself invokes the runaway pace of technological change; futuristic technologies from a few years ago look dated and old-fashioned now. And the projected social futures of dystopian fiction have become everyday touchstones for current political events and ongoing technocultural transformations alike. What do we gain and what do we lose when we call our present the future? What does the language of futurity make possible, what does it exclude, and what are the histories that have brought us to this point? And what happens to the futures we have imagined once they have been superseded by real-world events? This book asks what it has meant to conjure alternative futures, including no-futures, from the standpoint of a potentially apocalyptic present. Recognizing that our present moment, the second decade of the twenty-first century, is not the only one that has experienced an obsession with futurity, it delves into the archive of futures that have been imagined and that failed to come to pass, identifying a queer tradition of critical speculation in the twentieth century that continues to make itself felt in the twenty-first.

Searching online for “the future” brings up not only real-world technologies and political thinkpieces but also the iconic spaceships and flying saucers of popular science fiction. Narratives of possible futures have given us languages through which to understand our present. But the discourse of “the” future has never been a singular one. Living in the future for some may mean that the twentieth century’s technological utopias
are playing out in continual wireless connectivity and media availability. For others, it means laboring to build that future amid violent, dystopian realities. In the language of capital, the future is a matter of financial speculation: traders gamble on possibilities for the sake of profit, rarely attending to other long-term consequences. Meanwhile, the spectacle of speculative destruction converges intimately with the unpredictable yet repetitive events of catastrophic climate change; science fiction imagery becomes indistinguishable from news reports. The end of the world as we know it seems continually imminent. Yet we live in the debris of many ended worlds, whose inhabitants continue to live on.

The history of the imagined future has been written before. Scholars have shown how the idea of the future was central to the creation and maintenance of imperial domination and technological modernity, shaping the tropes of what we now call “science fiction” as it arose in the United Kingdom and United States.¹ *Old Futures* focuses on works that counter these narratives even as they are part of them—the possible and impossible futures speculated by and for oppressed populations and deviant individuals, who have been marked as futureless or simply left out by dominant imaginaries. Feminist science fiction, Afrofuturism, and new media studies are three areas in which futurist imaginaries have been extensively studied; this book participates in the scholarly conversations in all three fields even as it pursues an idiosyncratic archive for each. The texts and moments I explore bring marginalized futures into conversation with the radical reconceptualizations of temporality offered by recent scholarship in queer studies. My goal is to better understand the social, political, and cultural forces we invoke when we practice the art of living in the future, of imagining the consequences of the present as we seek to change it. Grappling with the dense futurities of the present and the past, the project adds new dimensions to the scholarly frames of queer theory, to studies of temporality in narrative and media, and to existing critical discourses on speculative narrative genres and the publics that surround them.

The cultural politics of the imagined future follow some familiar trajectories. Humanity’s continuation seems to demand the privileging of heterosexual procreation; technological capital seems to define the possibility of advancing toward a desirable technoscientific future, leaving those who cannot access it behind in the past. Movements against ra-
cial and imperial domination also rely on a future toward which adherents can work, even as scholars in postcolonial and black studies have highlighted the influence of empire on ideas of historical time. Queer temporal theory has insisted on a nonlinear approach to the production and reproduction of futures. It asks what worlds are made and what pleasures found when time is not a relentless onslaught of future generations angled toward progress, degeneration, or some combination of the two. Scholarship on queer temporality has highlighted ways in which political and social orientations to futurity often reproduce conservative norms, suggesting backwardness or ephemerality as alternative formations. Yet the narrative act of imagining the future has received little concern in queer scholarship. Meanwhile, in the most influential literary and cultural studies of the speculative genres, the gendered and sexualized underpinnings of futurity itself remain relatively uncomplicated. In recent years, scholarly attention to the radical potentialities of imagined futures and speculative or science fictions has been growing exponentially. Throughout its gestation, this book has been in conversation with thinkers both inside and outside the academy who are attending to the politics of speculation. Its major contributions to that conversation are twofold: to think through the queer cultural politics of speculative narrative with a breadth and depth not yet attempted; and to offer a historical grounding to show one possible genealogy for the act of queer world-making through speculative imagining. Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility is simultaneously a partial shadow history of speculative fictions, centering on oppositional and marginal works that tend to appear as footnotes at most in genre histories and taxonomies, and an intervention in contemporary queer theories of temporality and futurity.

Since the publication of Lee Edelman’s No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive well over a decade ago, something of a consensus on the relationship between queerness and the future has emerged. Queer time signifies breaking with straight and narrow paths toward the future laid out for the reproductive family, the law-abiding citizen, the believer in markets. Instead it lingers or refuses, flashing up in moments of ephemeral utopia or doubling back to reanimate the pleasurable and/or painful past. Queer theory offers creative and fertile ways to think about time. Yet so far it has rarely considered the possibility that vital queer
alternatives may lie at the end of linearly projected, even reproductive, futurist imaginaries. What if, instead of a queer present reshaping the ways we relate to past and future, turning to the futures imagined in the past can lead us to queer the present?

At the same time as the fashion for no future arose in queer theory, narratives of apocalyptic conditions in a world pushed seemingly to its end by speculative capital and environmental destruction have become dominant in transatlantic cultural commentary, leading both to technological solutionism and to expressions of the abandonment of hope. Old Futures turns to often-forgotten insights and narratives to find approaches that take up the future as a transformative possibility without either idealizing or demonizing the past. The queer possibilities invoked are not always hopeful, desirable, or even livable. To open up a future for speculative contemplation is not the same as to demand it be brought into reality. But old futures cast unexpected light into the present. If we attend to them closely enough, we might find that queer futures’ histories underwrite our present efforts to imagine possibilities for the future, to enact transformations in the present, and to think critically about time.

This introduction unpacks what is at stake in my identification of a queer cultural politics for speculative fiction, in terms of both queer studies’ relationship to the speculative and scholarship on science fiction as a genre. It also explicates the archive that I have brought together, whose three sections each address one queered formation of speculative futurity. Centering on feminist utopian/dystopian reproductive futures, on futures of racialized gender as imagined in black science fiction, and on images of speculative possibility that queer the temporalities of moving-image media, Old Futures gathers an archive of feminists, queers, and people of color who insist that the future can and must deviate from dominant narratives of global annihilation or highly restrictive hopes for redemption. By broadening the ways we think about speculation in the mode of the political, I seek to better account for the roles of gender, race, and sexuality in the production and destruction of futures both real and imagined.

In the epigraph, I cite a famous remark from William Gibson, the science fiction writer whose coinage of the term cyberspace has immortalized him in media history: “The future is already here, it just isn’t evenly distributed.” The project of this book is to ask what imagined futures mean
for those away from whom futurity is distributed: oppressed populations and deviant individuals, who are denied access to the future by dominant imaginaries, but who work against oppression by dreaming of new possibility. Each chapter chronicles some of the myriad means by which uneven distributions of discursive and material futures takes place: through eugenics, utopia, empire, fascism, dystopia, race, capitalism, femininity, masculinity, and many kinds of queerness, reproduction, and sex. In each case, I try to show what we can learn from negotiations and transformations enacted by speculative fictions’ engagements with and critiques of the future’s discursive creation—to highlight cultural producers’ efforts to imaginatively redistribute the future.

A Brief History of Queer Time

The history of queer scholarship is a history of futures. As a politicized anti-discipline growing out of a longer history of gay and lesbian studies, queer theory emerged in the early 1990s from the convergence of activist energies with the US academy at what Janet Halley and Andrew Parker describe as “the riveting nexus of the feminist sex wars with the crescendo—which at the time we did not know would diminish—in AIDS-related death among United States gay men.”8 Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and other instigators wrote criticism and theory that was motivated by a compulsion to change the world in such a way that gay people’s futures would no longer be curtailed, whether through death from AIDS or via the policing and delegitimization of deviant desires. Their work built on Michel Foucault’s epistemological histories, which had foregrounded the intersections of gender and desire with power and ideology—showing the imbrication of power and resistance yet also opening spaces for a future when those relationships could look different than they had in the past.9 Queer theory and activism pushed against structures that seemed immutable, insisting on the contingent past and unpredictable future of masculinity, femininity, kinship, and desire. How could attempts to envisage possibilities outside heteronormative structures not involve a certain futurity? There is a powerful speculative element in the move from deconstructing existing binaries to visualizing—one might even say fictionalizing—how the world might be changed by those binaries’ subversion or destruction.
In one of the first uses of the phrase “queer theory,” in 1992, Teresa de Lauretis asks whether “our theory could construct another discursive horizon, another way of living the racial and the sexual.” A queer future is held up as hopeful prospect at the end of 1990’s *Gender Trouble*, too, when Butler writes that “if identities were no longer fixed . . . a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old.” Queer theorizing has been, in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s 1995 description, “radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being.” Radical queer politics has been seen as a potential way out of the normativities imposed by the capitalist, neoliberal political economy of dominant Western (particularly American) culture. Queer theory began as a way to imaginatively activate new or emergent ways of life through intellectual work, through writing or teaching as well as philosophizing. Even as queer studies becomes part of academic disciplinarity, this speculative intensity has continued. Donald E. Hall’s 2003 primer in queer theory, for example, explicitly invites its undergraduate readers to become queer critics, joining “a volunteer organisation devoted to working very hard to queer our future.”

The queer worlds and new horizons to which early queer theorists allude tend to be located in subcultural ways of living, buried in the insufficiently documented past or between the lines of existing texts. Yet recurrent theoretical emphasis on the newness of queer perspectives suggests—as José Muñoz would later make explicit—that the queerest space and time was viewed as one that had not yet come into being. Figurative futures in queer scholarship have invariably been invoked, but rarely imagined in the literally representational terms I explore. To precisely name what a queer future might look like would seem to go against queerness’s refusal of binding normative constraints, tying things down to an overly predictable future. I argue throughout the book that this is not, or at least not simply, the case.

Propositions like Hall’s suggest that an ahistorical future will remain perpetually ripe for queering. But the actual political future that US-based queer activists had a hand in creating did not resemble early queer scholarship’s implicit utopias. Instead, a politics of what Lisa Duggan named in 2003 as “homonormativity” emerged, and the most privileged of those formerly excluded from heteronormative life—often well-off, white gay men—consolidated “a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in
domesticity and consumption.”

Same-sex marriage activism, in which working towards equality becomes synonymous with participating in the couple form and politicizing the consumption of wedding-related commodities, has become a primary signifier of homonormativity.

At the same time, critics of queer theory’s relative lack of attention to class and race were calling for an understanding of queer possibility untethered from genealogies of gay assimilation. In a field-defining 1997 essay, Cathy Cohen argues that the “transformational” potential of queer politics could be realized only through a “radical intersectional left analysis” that would attend closely to the ways that “heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class assimilation” and acknowledge that racialized heteronormativity is oppressive to more than just individuals who hold LGBTQ identifications. Even as liberal gay and lesbian activists have succeeded in campaigns for marriage, military inclusion, and hate crimes legislation, radical thinkers and activists refuse to be satisfied with a politics based on assimilation into conservative nationalist timelines, restrictive racialized gender norms, and the reproductive family home. They focus instead on queerer possibilities, such as the social and political transformations required to challenge the continuing curtailment of marginalized queer and trans people’s futures.

In his 2011 book *Normal Life*, Dean Spade describes a radical transgender politics as necessitating “a shared imagination of a world without imprisonment, colonialism, immigration enforcement, sexual violence, or wealth disparity.”

In his *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), Jack Halberstam writes that queerness should be considered less as a question of gender’s interface with desire and more as the site of “strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” that open up “queer relationships to time and space.” From this branch of queer politics has emerged a definition of queerness as a site where the lines between past and future created by heteronormative structures of social and biological reproduction can be diverted or broken off. In this context, the proposition of a queer future requires new ways of thinking about temporality itself.

Perhaps the single most influential work on queer time has been Edelman’s flamboyantly argued *No Future* (2004). *Old Futures* came into being as a search for alternatives to the relationships between queerness and
futurity that have come to seem like common sense in the wake of Edelman’s work, and I engage with specific elements of his critique in some depth as part of the “History of No Future” that I trace in part 1. Arguing that to be queer is to oppose futurity, Edelman coined the term *reproductive futurism* to describe the overwhelming tendency for political value to be defined in terms of a future for the children. He insists that the power of queer critique inheres in its opposition to this narrative and therefore to politics as such. Working within Lacanian theory to create a psychoanalytic response to the assimilation of queer difference into conventional modes of familial time, Edelman insists that invocations of a better social reality for future generations are inextricably entangled with a straight ideology that narrows the terms of debate to those that ensure the protection of a symbolically innocent “Child” and the dream of a clean, new future it symbolizes. Political futures are “kid stuff”; forward-looking temporalities are by definition part of a normative model that grinds out the same social relations over and over again while pretending to advocate progressive change and obscure the horrifying fact that “the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past.” There is little room for speculative futures of queer possibility when queers are assigned to embody the “death drive” that unmakes subjectivity, the “grave” that “gapes from within . . . reality’s gossamer web” and exposes its fragility and falsehood. The oppositions between queerness, negativity, and futurity are never as straightforward as Edelman lets them appear, however. Among the old futures of feminist and queer speculative fiction I explore in this book, there are moments in which the anti-futurist negativity he names as queer is used for multiple political ends.

My work rebounds from Edelman’s to attempt an intersectional understanding of queer anti-futurism by broadening and deepening the archive of futures on which an analysis of reproductive futurism can draw, attending particularly to the articulation of fictional futures with nation, empire, race, and gender. One way that I do this is to think intensely about reproduction itself. In a rare discussion of gendered embodiment that takes place in a footnote, Edelman argues that queer anti-futurism is most often embodied by male figures because of “a gender bias that continues to view women as ‘naturally’ bound more closely to sociality, reproduction, and domesticating emotion.” This gendering of futurity and sociality, to which Edelman briefly alludes, will be a
consistent theme throughout Old Futures, especially though not exclusively in part 1, which focuses on the reproductive politics of feminist speculation. The historical and political presence of reproductivity shapes the gender politics of the future: if children are the future, someone must bear and parent them, and the significance of that biological and social reproduction cannot be written off as a byproduct of patriarchy.

Feminist theory has long challenged women’s relegation to a reproductive position subordinate to men’s productivity. Shulamith Firestone’s 1970 polemic The Dialectic of Sex is an important example: not only does Firestone call for the abolition of gestation and its replacement with cybernetic wombs, but she also insists that childhood itself is an oppressive dystopian structure that ought to be abolished. Childhood for Firestone is the imposition of adult fantasies of innocence on individuals who should be acknowledged for their existence, not only for their potential. When Firestone talks about reproduction, she is as much concerned with the perpetuation of means of production and ways of life through reproductive labor, as understood in the Marxist sense, as she is with baby-making. She insists that the only way to reproduce a future that would not continually oppress women would be to separate the former from the latter senses of the term. And, because “the heart of woman’s oppression is her child-bearing and child-rearing role,” biological reproduction must be ended in order to stop women being dehumanized by their role as incubators for the future of the human race.

Few feminists have seriously contemplated demands as revolutionary as Firestone’s call to abolish children and mothers, but they have often imagined what it might mean to reconfigure the gendered politics of reproduction. Queer scholarship and activism, by contrast, has tended either to elide feminist critiques of reproductive labor or to take them as a given, moving immediately to the ways reproduction can be resisted and alternative temporalities and futurities explored. Queer worlds seem self-evidently not to include reproductive futures. Yet reproduction and heterofuturity are not always easily equated.

This book devotes considerable space to recounting historical aspects of the critique of reproductive futurism and developing new ways to think reproduction and futurity together without, hopefully, submitting to the clichés of a singular reproductive futurism. My arguments assume and assert that same-sex orientations and queer political critiques do
not straightforwardly map onto one another, and that this disjuncture is not purely a product of the homonormative present but extends into the past. I consider the imaginative production of multiple reproductive futurisms at specific historical moments and ask how they are differentiated by gender, desire, colonialism, capitalism, nation, and race. What looks normative and oppressive through one lens may appear differently through another, and we will better understand the complexities of queer political possibility in the present if we angle our analysis through multiplex frames. In devoting a substantial part of this queer studies project to the cultural workings of reproductive bodies, I hope to show that it is necessary to pay attention to the deviances within what appears normative, as well as the normativities within what is, ostensibly, utterly queer. I look at the historical reproduction of bodies, races, nations, and social relations in white British feminist utopias (chapter 1), in white English women writers’ uses of futuristic fiction to engage with European fascism (chapter 2), and in African American figurations of reproductive futurisms that insist on the differential meanings of sex and reproduction across racial lines (chapter 3). In each case, “the future of the race” and the idea of “no future” or “the end of the world” are central fictional tropes that I unpack to show their exposition of historical contradictions and deviances and their resonances with queer thinking in the present.

The idea of queerness as oppositional to futurity emerged in critical response to queer theory’s more utopian emphases on hope and transformation, and to assumptions that sexual and political radicalism could naturally align to create fabulous avant-garde socialities. From a different angle, other queer theorists of time have emphasized the pull of the past on the present. In Feeling Backward (2007), Heather Love writes that “advances such as gay marriage and increasing media visibility of well-heeled gays and lesbians threaten to obscure the continuing denigration and dismissal of queer existence,” and draws on fictional depictions of queer subjects in the past whose self-articulation demands that they be seen as more than “the abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation.” Love insists that to let go of the past’s problems and discomforts in the hope of a better future is to give up on the misfit elements that have most shaped the meanings of queer existence. She challenges the optimism of future-focused thinking as well as its temporal flow. Elizabeth Freeman’s 2011 Time Binds begins
with a brief personal narrative that resonates with Love’s work. Freeman writes that she once “thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities,” but now accepts that “the point may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless.” Among the useless things she cites, with their “ways of living aslant to dominant forms of object-choice, coupledom, family, marriage, sociability, and self-preservation,” are “embarrassing utopias,” the futuristic emissions of outdated modes of being. Many of the oldest futures I discuss feel embarrassing to approach if we are looking for historical precursors for radical queer thought. Freeman’s and Love’s generosity toward the uncomfortable, ugly, and often violent past is a necessary tool for entering into what I argue is a necessary engagement with these works, without obscuring either problems or potentialities.

Time is not only a linear movement from past into present and on to the future, although this progressive or developmental model is predominant in much speculative fiction. It is also lived in the rhythms of the body. Freeman coins the term “chrononormativity” to talk about the bodily rhythms of normative time. Drawing from Dana Luciano’s writings on “chronobiopolitics,” she describes the way that temporal norms embed the rhythms of economic production into the body, shaping individuals’ lives into forms that enable them to participate in dominant histories and socialities. Chrononormativity is “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity”; through it, “institutional forces come to feel like somatic facts,” as “manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time.” The somatic and embodied aspects of temporality and futurity that chrononormativity describes come especially to the fore in part 3, where I engage the technological reproduction of imagined futures as experienced in the bodily tempos and routines produced by our interaction with the analog and digital screens on which imagined futures are displayed.

Chrononormativity weaves all who can follow its tempo into the fabric of dominant culture, making them part of the production and reproduction of social life and of capital. It leaves out or leaves behind
those who are out of step, who cannot keep up—often due to poverty, disability, race, or sexuality. To think against chrononormativity is to acknowledge that “within the lost moments of official history, queer time generates a discontinuous history of its own,” which is best told through the erotic entanglements of past, present and future.\(^{30}\) Freeman shows how dominant cultures exert power by naturalizing the temporal narratives they impose, leaving those who cannot or will not follow their schedules in a limbo of asynchrony. The official time line she describes is based on a state-recognized life narrative that follows marriage with reproduction and the creation of nuclear families to engage with capital as good producers and consumers. These privatized reproductive futures converge toward an ever-expanding future, a colonizing global modernity in which alternative modes of being will have been wiped out. Old futures are the traces that remain to show that the official narrative is never the whole story.

Chrononormativity and chronobiopolitics also mark the ways that gender and sexuality are racialized and classed. Thinking race, coloniality, and capital along with gender and sexuality is necessary to thinking queerly about histories, futures, and histories of futures, as will be evident in each formation of futurity analyzed in the book. Queers are most easily identified as those who evade the “straight” timelines of normalized heterosexual, reproductive life narratives. But matters of race, location, gender, and economics also affect the straightness of those timelines. Sara Ahmed unpacks this idea in the spatialized version of queerness she develops in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), where to be queer is to deviate from the expected social and structural “line.” Focusing on the “orientation” in “sexual orientation,” she insists that queer deviations can produce their own coercive directions:

If the compulsion to deviate from the straight line was to become “a line” in queer politics, then this itself could have a straightening effect. . . . Not all queers can be “out” in their deviation. For queers of other colors, being “out” already means something different, given that what is “out and about” is oriented around whiteness.\(^{31}\)

Ahmed reminds us to “avoid assuming that ‘deviation’ is always on the side of the progressive.”\(^{32}\) Even as this book seeks to highlight the
speculative production of queer possibility, it remains attentive to the co-production of possibilities and impossibilities along lines that histories of empire, race, nation, and global capitalism set in place.33

We are queered by more than the directions of our sexual desires. It is possible to deviate along one angle while holding the line and enforcing it for others in a different direction. Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, and other queer of color critics have highlighted the simultaneous exclusion of nonheteronormative subjects from the radical narratives of racial futures produced by movements against white supremacy, while race- and class-specific exclusions from heteronormativity (named by Cohen as “punks,” “bulldaggers,” and “welfare queens,” and figured by Ferguson as the black drag queen sex worker) are illegible to mainstream queer politics.34 Siobhan Somerville shows in Queering the Color Line (2000) that racial and gendered deviances have been co-produced in American history through the commingling of anti-black racism and gender normativity. Sexually deviant white bodies have been imagined as racially other and bodies of color marked as sexually deviant, with both understood to be out of time with relation to dominant culture.35 Valerie Rohy writes about the shared “anachronism” of black and queer subjects in US discourse, where they have been mutually implicated in the white supremacist, heteronormative, eugenic ideal that the best future would come from “assigning both homosexuality and blackness to the place of the past.”36 Black and queer temporalities would seem to differ in that to be heir to slavery is to have had one’s native sense of time ripped away, to have been forced into the past as other to European modernity alongside though not identically to other colonized and racialized populations, while to commit to a politics of queerness implies a rejection of the temporality foisted upon one—whether that is defiantly to refuse any futurity at all or to take on a form of subjectivity that can be fully realized only in the future. But these modes are neither separate nor separable, as I discuss in part 2, which is dedicated to the futures that arise at the intersection of black and queer speculative thought.

Kara Keeling uses Marx’s invocation of “poetry from the future” to assert that the when of those lost to imperial and reproductive timelines could have its own rhythms, worlds, and poetries, though these may not be available to the scholarly seeker whose institutional perch is always to
some degree contained by normative time. This book seeks to understand how speculative fiction writers, media producers, and audiences have depicted and transformed these dynamics.

The Cultural Politics of Speculative Fiction

The practice of imagining the future has been polished to a fine art in the genre and cultural field of science fiction, in which debates over terms and categories are fierce and ongoing. Many scholars have been invested in erecting clear boundaries between science fiction, speculative fiction, and fantasy. In the 1970s, Darko Suvin (whose work I discuss further in chapter 4) defined science fiction through a structuralist notion of cognitive estrangement, in which both the estranging act of thinking things otherwise and the use of a cognitive, rational practice to do so were necessary for a text to be worthy of the formal designation. Fredric Jameson stringently distinguishes science fiction from fantasy, arguing that science fiction maintains a rigorous material focus while fantasy, as “the other side of the coin,” speculates with a greater and more idealistic freedom. Roger Luckhurst writes that science fiction is a fictional engagement with “Mechanism,” by which he means the permeation of technology into everyday life. He asserts that the conception of time that allows the future to be a primary focus of speculative cultural production is “associated with modernity” in the way it “orients perceptions towards the future rather than the past or the cyclical sense of time ascribed to traditional societies.” This connection with technological modernity has also been central to genre analyses of science fiction film, where it filters through Susan Sontag’s 1965 contrast between the “intellectual workout” provided by science fiction novels and the “sensuous elaboration” of films (discussed further in chapter 5). In a popular guidebook to science fiction film published in 2009, Steven Jay Schneider asserts that “cinema itself is science fiction” because its technologies and special effects make the impossible seem possible. Spectacular visions of advancement, disaster, and adventure on a planetary or galactic scale showcase cinematic technology, seducing audiences to pay for what Garrett Stewart described in 1985 as “the fictional or fictive science of the cinema itself, the future feats it may achieve scanned in line with the technical feat that conceives them right now and before our eyes.”
All these definitions highlight important cultural and historical realities. Yet they also limit the extent of the cultural politics that the genre can be seen to engage. Feminized concerns about gender, sexuality, and emotional life are likely to slip into the margins, to be viewed as insufficiently cognitive, materialist, technological, or spectacular. Works that are about the future yet not overtly concerned with technological modernity (like Katharine Burdekin’s 1937 *Swastika Night*, a key text in chapter 2) or that speculate visually without the aid of special effects (like the films I discuss in chapter 5) may not seem to count as science fiction at all.

The search for a taxonomy of science fiction invariably overlaps with Damon Knight’s 1967 assertion that genre is defined by the communities who gather around it, so that “science fiction is what we point to when we say ‘science fiction.’” Concerned with an orientation toward futurity that crosses many genre lines, I prefer not to make such definitional gestures of my own, even as I engage queered visions of fictional futures that demonstrate the multiplicity of spaces and times within the Anglo-American modern period from which the genealogy of science fiction emerged. I have settled on “speculative fiction” as a term that is roomier, more evocative, and also more specific. This book centers on the act of speculation: of imagining things otherwise than they are, and of creating stories from that impulse. Understanding the terminologies and taxonomies of science fiction to refer to specific cultures and moments that have produced particular kinds of speculative narrative, I draw upon them as appropriate within individual chapters.

As a literary and media genre, science fiction has entered the archive of critical cultural theory in some well-defined ways. Politically engaged science fiction, utopia, and dystopia have often provided fictional evidence for Marxist theoretical models, as in Jameson’s use of the left-leaning speculative tradition to develop his theory of capitalism, utopia, and social change, or Carl Freedman’s assertion that “of all genres, science fiction is . . . the one most devoted to the historical concreteness and historical self-reflectiveness of critical theory.” Since the 1980s, feminist theorists have drawn on the well-developed, intertextual literature and culture of feminist science fiction to help them demonstrate the cross-fertilization between fiction and social movements. Feminist science and technology studies has also long seen speculative
and science fiction as a vital theoretical force, viewing it as creating fictional worlds where feminist ideologies can play out in greater complexity than theoretical writing will allow, or opening literary and visual spaces within which new formations of gendered technological embodiment can be imagined. Donna Haraway’s 1991 “Cyborg Manifesto,” whose influential theory of technocultural subjectivity is built in part from analyses of Anne McCaffrey’s 1961 “The Ship Who Sang” and Joanna Russ’s 1975 The Female Man, is a powerful example of how speculative fiction and speculative theory can converge.47 While feminist science fiction studies has been centered more on literature than on media, it has also had much to say about the sensuous elaborations of gendered embodiment that science fiction films invoke, uncovering the possibilities for reconfiguring gender and sexuality in the reproductive weirdness of the Alien movies or in the technological performances of The Matrix.48 This book does not engage in great depth with the texts and contexts most discussed by feminist science fiction studies scholars, but it stands on their shoulders as it reaches for less well-trodden sites of speculative gender and sexuality.

Sustained scholarly engagement with the interrelationships between queer theory and science fiction studies has been surprisingly rare, given the speculative force of queer theory and activism and the highly active queer world-making that takes place both in science fiction and fantasy writing and in its active fan cultures (the latter of which I discuss in the second wormhole and chapter 6). Literary science fiction’s tendency to concern itself with changing societies’ effects on subjectivities resonates strongly with queer critics’ articulations of nonheteronormative time and space, as Wendy Pearson’s important 1999 article “Alien Cryptographies: The View From Queer” demonstrates. The 2008 anthology Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction showcases the predominant conversations between queer studies and science fiction that have shaped queer science fiction studies as a small disciplinary subfield. In these essays, science fiction is articulated as a form of utopian writing that makes the queer future imaginable;49 as a signifier of sexual subjectification through technology;50 and as a politicized co-producer of queer realities.51 If queer theory deconstructs binary logics of identity and imagines how the world might be changed by their subversion or destruction in collaboration with activist political and sexual practice,
here it naturally seems to converge with science fiction’s imaginative production of sometimes-utopian futurities. This queer science fiction theory occupies the temporality of a promise, in which science fiction will offer an endpoint to queer theory’s anticipatory trajectories. But the relationship between queerness, science fiction, and futurity is far from self-evident, for one of the things that both queer theory and fictional speculation can do is question the structures around which we base our valuations of what progress signifies, who benefits from which forms of demand for social change, and what it means to “have” a future or be denied one. The convergence of queerness and science fiction requires that neither one be defined in advance. The expansive, emergent language of the speculative fosters such radical openness.

The choice of “speculative fiction” to refer to cultural production that imagines futures calls forth significant critiques. Science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany stated in a 1990 interview that “‘speculative fiction’ was a term that had a currency for about three years—from 1966 through 1969,” when it “meant anything that was experimental, anything that was science-fictional, or anything that was fantastic” and “was a conjunctive, inclusive term, which encompassed everything in all three areas—before it began to signify only experimental works that included science fiction elements, and eventually became a term used by non-science-fiction-oriented academic literature scholars, who used it to legitimate the science fiction that they liked.” Is “speculative fiction” simply a name used to increase intellectual capital by papering over the pop-culture connotations of science fiction? It is true that I initially settled on “speculative” over “science fiction” in some part because I hoped that it might encourage those not already enamored of the genre to pick up the book. Yet the cultural landscape, popular and otherwise, has changed greatly since 1990 and even more since 1966–1969. These days, “speculative fiction” is widely accepted in scholarly and fannish circles alike as a capacious term that “covers practically the entire fantastic end of the sliding scale of realistic vs fantastic,” including “science fiction, fantasy, alternate history, and everything in between.” And, while the scientific and technological elements of traditional science fiction narratives are praised by some members of science fiction fan communities, these are often the most socially and politically conservative elements, while science fiction publishers and organizations who encourage queer, feminist,
decolonial narratives draw from broader definitions.\textsuperscript{54} It is true that the majority of the works on which this book focuses could be categorized as science fiction according to many of the definitions cited above. Yet my elaborations of the cultural logics of speculative fiction could as easily be drawn from other fields and genres, and I hope that this project will prove to have relevance in contexts well beyond genre studies.

The speculative fiction whose cultural politics and queer possibilities \textit{Old Futures} explores is a varied mode of cultural and critical production. I am interested in one particular practice within it: the process by which cultural producers reconfigure their historical present in order to speculate about what a possible future might be like. Those futures may be (and are) optimistic, pessimistic, and/or critical of the concept of linear progressive time. The practice of speculating futures not only is enacted in fiction but also forms an approach to the world at large—hence my assertion in the previous pages that queer theory is itself often a practice of speculative fiction.

As I discuss above, queer scholarship does more than contribute to envisioning and activating possibilities for living queer lives in the future; it unpacks the significance of sexual norms and deviations to cultural constructions of futurity itself. Speculative and science fiction have rarely been associated with the currents in queer theorizing that emphasize queerness as countering assimilationist, normalizing politics through emphases on refusals, debasements, and impossibilities (although I will make such an association in chapter 2 and revisit it in chapter 5). They seem to have little to do with the genealogy of antisocial or negative queer theory that is most vividly associated with Leo Bersani’s work on the value of \textit{un}making rather than creating coherent selves and worlds.\textsuperscript{55} A fictional representation of an alternative future does feature as an exemplary text in Edelman’s \textit{No Future}; I discuss his use of P. D. James’s 1992 \textit{The Children of Men} further in the wormhole that links parts 1 and 2. In his infinitely more hopeful 1999 book \textit{Disidentifications}, Jose Muñoz writes movingly of Osa Hidalgo’s 1996 short speculative film \textit{Marginal Eyes}, which seeks to “imagine the future” as “a queer world as brown as it is bent.”\textsuperscript{56} Yet, making the same move Edelman does in the service of a quite different argument, the rest of his book moves away from this speculative representation of a literal future in order to root his queer temporality of performance firmly in the present. Muñoz’s stellar 2009
book on queer futurity, *Cruising Utopia*, does not mention speculative cultural production at all.

It is not difficult to understand why speculative and science fiction futures seem antithetical to queer understandings of temporality that question the self-evident value of progress. Linear, literal articulations of utopian visions, dystopian fears, and futuristic extrapolations are inextricably entangled with the reproduction of racialized heteronormativity, with spatial and cultural colonization, and—especially in science fiction film’s emphasis on special effects—with capital’s fetishization of commodified newness. Science fiction’s frequent voyages of interstellar discovery trace their lineage to early modern narratives of European encounters with “alien” indigenous peoples, as John Rieder demonstrates.57 The notion of traveling into space, colonizing what *Star Trek* called the “final frontier,” has often served conservative national political interests. And the genre’s focus on technological innovation has fostered a dynamic in which, as Kodwo Eshun writes, “Science fiction is now a research and development department within a futures industry that dreams of the prediction and control of tomorrow.”58 This is sometimes literally true, as in the case of technologists’ use of what Brian David Johnson of Intel Corporation calls “science fiction prototypes,” fictions “based on real science and technology” that are used “explicitly as a step or input in the development process” in order to “imagine and envision the future.”59 Speculative imaginaries and science-fictional representations can both lead capitalist and colonial temporalities to appear inevitable.

But just as some speculative fictions may be prototypes for the prediction of a future more or less like the present, others may preemptively imagine its collapse or transformation. Space travel has been imagined not only as a continuation of settler colonialism but as the opening of a space where black, indigenous, and other colonized people could create worlds that would not leave the earth behind so much as reimagine the possibility of relating to it.60 Science fiction prototyping could describe the imaginative work of speculating political possibility as much as marketable commodities.61 The cultural politics of speculative fiction are never not gendered and never not racial, any more than they can be independent of national and socioeconomic location. This is no less true for queer and feminist theory. But while futuristic fictions are reliant on
Introduction

the violent and gendered progress narratives of technological modernity, capitalism and colonization, they are not coextensive with them. Linear models of temporality give fictions of imagined futures shape and structure; yet an extrapolative orientation toward alternative futurities can also demonstrate the complex and contradictory ways such modes can be employed.

Constituted by and constitutive of scientific dynamics built with assumptions that Western European man signified the most advanced, most adult, and most human of subjects, fictional futures have also provided experimental sites for working out other ways of being. As a scan through literary anthologies devoted to science fiction’s queer, feminist, postcolonial, and indigenous versions will show, speculative fiction has cherished uses for those whose embodiments situate them at a deviant angle to techno-utopian futurities. Modernist discourses of technological development are never sufficient to understand the speculative practices of creators committed to envisioning futures for the nonproductive and nonreproductive, queer bodies, and bodies of color that colonizing and developmental discourses relegate to a “savage” and genocidally obliterated past. Fictional speculation often opens up alternative potentialities only to close them down into futures that are all too predictable according to dominant logics. A central argument throughout this book is that the failures of speculative fictions’ radical possibilities do not invalidate their meaning, their interest, or their capacity to make a difference.

Futures imagined through engagements with history’s structural exclusions tell us much both about dominant ways of thinking about time and about how we might create alternatives. Speculative imaginings that have not been encoded into the everyday realities of the science fiction present help to demonstrate that the future need not be closed down into familiar, straight lines. The lingering presences and possibilities of past futures open possibilities for thinking and living the present in different, deviant ways. If a forward-oriented narrative of historical development signifies the time of capitalism and colonialism, then the time of the colonized, excluded, and othered is most frequently to be found in the past. The temporalities of ghosts, the supernatural, and myth are those that discourses of European Enlightenment seek to associate with childhood, alterity, unseriousness, times gone by. Bliss Cua Lim
writes about how the cinematic fantastic “translates” between what Walter Benjamin called homogeneous, empty time and other temporalities that are supposed to have been wiped out but that surface as ghosts;\textsuperscript{67} Avery Gordon’s sociology of haunting similarly describes the perpetuation of the past in the present and the impossibility of ever leaving it behind.\textsuperscript{68} The old futures this project follows suggest that technological, scientific, and reproductive futurisms can exceed the homogenization of time. Appearing in modes both desirable and discomfiting, these are futures for sexual, gendered, racialized ways of being that dominant temporal politics have tried and failed to eradicate. They deviate both from the conventional timelines of familial norms and from the successes and failures associated with life under capitalism.

During the time between this project’s beginnings and its completion, the logics and politics of speculative fiction have become more central to the worlds of critical theory. This has not so much changed the relationship between theory and genre studies as it has begun to suggest new ways of thinking \textit{speculation}, a term that applies to finance capital as much as to possibilities and alternatives.\textsuperscript{69} Speculative theory is work that grapples with the dense futurity of the present, altering concepts of reality even as the real itself is continually cast into question. In 2012, Jayna Brown and I gathered a dossier for \textit{Social Text}’s online \textit{Periscope} on a theme of “Speculative Life.” Our introduction expresses this mode:

\begin{quote}
To speculate, the act of speculation, is also to play, to invent, to engage in the practice of imagining. And, as Ernst Bloch said, it may be in our imaginative worlds that we catch glimpses of utopian possibility beyond our present paradigm. At a moment when so many have been struggling to enact alternatives to the depressing world produced by Wall Street’s speculative failures, we need to practice imagining now more than ever.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Speculation in this modality is both the prospect of temporal elsewheres and a logic that enforces capitalism’s here and now, through the dominance of financial speculation.

Speculative critique, as Brown and I articulated it and as I seek to extend here, embraces the potentiality of utopias, forward-looking
timelines, and possibilities of radically different and better elsewheres. It also acknowledges the embeddedness of such imagination in the often dismal logics of the present’s inequalities. This structure underlies the queer possibility inherent in the cultural politics of speculative fiction, which provides tools for vernacular theorizing about the politics of the future. In their production of alternatives and deviations from and/or within predetermined progress narratives, returning to the possibilities embedded in old futures may allow such narratives to be occupied differently. Old futures insist that we acknowledge the extent to which temporal norms are not easy to repudiate; they force us to linger over processes of articulating what other ways of being in the world, anti-futurist lives, or non-normative temporalities might feel like.

In writing scholarship that seeks to be in dialogue with its political, cultural, or technological moment, it is difficult to resist the pressures, the inspirations and disappointments, of trying to keep up with a rapidly moving target. One begins a project focused on what is happening now, galvanized by the possible futures it portends, then finds that social and technological shifts have rendered one’s insights out of date before the first draft of writing is completed. This book’s emphasis on old futures offers, I hope, a way to sidestep such anxieties, lingering instead with the futures of the past and their effects in multiple presents. Attending to old futures might suggest some ways to redistribute the future in the present.

A Map of the Book

When I began to conceptualize a project that would conjoin queer critique and radical speculative fiction, I imagined I would find myself awash in worlds of marvelously desirable sexual and social possibilities, where space, time, economics, gender, race, and ability would be brought into new queer forms. This has occasionally been the case, but more often I have found myself recounting the limitations of works that aim to escape but are inevitably determined by the cultural conditions out of which they emerge, following the same logics of assimilation that have brought queer critique face to face with its own imperialisms and normativities. Certainly, queer sex is far from absent in speculative fiction, within the science fiction canon and elsewhere. But, as Candas Jane
Dorsey writes in a 2009 essay, most of the time “queer isn’t queer enough in sf.” As I have come to realize, this may not be the end of the world. If queer science fiction and queer speculative theory seem to be located at a permanently receding utopian horizon, there is still much to learn from the conditions of possibility for coming closer to that horizon and slipping away from it. Rather than wading through the margins of the contemporary to assemble an archive that would reflect the way I wanted to think of queer worlds being built, I found myself on a quest to understand where such an archive of possibilities might emerge from—and why it does not materialize as often as some of us might wish. This led me to construct an archive of my own that works to supplement the most widespread genealogies of queer theory and science fiction studies, by looking to speculative creativity produced in the margins of times and places where dominant futures were being constructed through colonial, capitalist, white supremacist, heteronormative temporalities. This book brings together works whose interconnection is rarely acknowledged: white feminist utopias and dystopias of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Afrofuturist narratives that turn the dehumanization of black lives into visions of transformation; and queer artistic adoptions and appropriations of science fiction media. In each case I explore how queer possibilities are constructed and deconstructed through speculative narrative, through extrapolative projections from the present and the past, and through excesses and margins that invite affective engagements with alternative temporalities.

*Old Futures* is structured in three parts, each addressing one particular convergence of political economy, theoretical framework, and narrative form that has given rise to a formation of speculative futurity. Two shorter sections, named “Wormholes” in homage to the science fiction genre trope of a time-space distortion that connects distant locations, draw in more recent examples to highlight continuing resonances of the old futures under discussion. Throughout the book, I draw on my archive of old futures to craft an alternative discourse around what Edelman named *reproductive futurism*. In queer studies, this has been a concept whose role is consistently that of an object of critique, a thing to be avoided, even when Edelman’s arguments are rejected. In contrast, I argue that there are many reproductive futurisms, often in conflict and contradiction with one another: reproductive Afrofuturisms, futurisms
of technological and biotechnological reproduction, futurisms that reproduce political activism, queer reproductive futurisms that are not simply a matter of new populations stepping onto a singular normative path.

Although this book is invested in resisting and challenging the logics of progressive and developmental time, it also acknowledges the impossibility of letting go of them entirely. And it invests in a progression of its own, spiraling gradually from imagined futures that do queer work within the bends and twists of normative temporalities—often reproducing them even while calling them into question—toward the production of futures out of time that take the raw material of dominant futurities and transport it to entirely different affective terrain. The book itself is a speculative work in many ways, often reaching out from interpretation and analysis to imagine, or at least gesture toward, alternate possibilities. I do not assume that readers will have encountered all or even any of the texts I discuss—even the best known are not routinely read or viewed outside of specialized audiences. Because I am interested in the theoretical and cultural work done by details of the worlds these texts create, a certain amount of summary is unavoidable. While I have tried not to include more than is necessary to make my arguments, I hope that some readers will find moments of pleasure in the moments of description, as I experienced pleasure in writing them.

In common with many of the works I engage, I follow a largely linear path while at the same time unfolding webs of entangled arguments. Though the book is intended as a cohesive monograph, its breadth and scope mean that readers will often be interested only in particular sections. Bearing this in mind, chapters and parts are written with the intention that they may be read separately as well as together, though references to the many connections among different texts and arguments encourage readers to pick up the book as a whole. I also aim to offer sufficient direction, in the form of footnotes and citations, so that readers will be able to pick up and pursue strands that particularly interest them. The structure is broadly chronological and thematic but also proceeds through associative logics that are unpacked at length in the final chapter, where I discuss my practice of video remix and the effect it has had on my critical methodology. This approach resonates with Yến Lê Espiritu’s methodology of “critical juxtaposing”: the “bringing together
of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories” such that, rather than viewing different elements as “already-constituted and discrete entities,” we come to appreciate “that they are fluid rather than static and need to be understood in relation to each other and within the context of a flexible field of political discourses.”

In part 1, “A History of No Future: Feminism, Eugenics, and Reproductive Imaginaries,” I argue that “no future” is a more capacious notion than Edelman has allowed, and that it need not necessarily be defined against the reproductive. Indeed, the notion of no future often becomes meaningful through various ideas of reproductivity (apportioning it to some, denying it to others). “No future” is also itself a concept that must be and has been reproduced. I historicize the idea of “no future” through both utopian and dystopian imaginaries: utopia as a vision of perfection that is also an end, and dystopia as a negative imaginary that participates in the creation of worlds. Chapter 1, “Utopian Interventions to the Reproduction of Empire,” engages the work of marginal middle-class women writers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. Situated at the heart of a metropole whose outward expansion had slowed or stopped, they used speculative fiction to reckon with what it meant to be charged with reproducing Englishness, empire, and the notion of a white race. Feminists have reclaimed, and later disavowed, the racially purist utopias of white American feminists Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mary Bradley Lane; their transatlantic contemporaries also have much to tell us about how feminist politics of reproduction and gendered embodiment function at the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race with mechanisms of white supremacy and state power. Chapter 2, “Dystopian Impulses, Feminist Negativity, and the Fascism of the Baby’s Face,” extends this analysis to show how feminist dystopian fiction of the 1920s and 1930s enacts the speculative production of futurelessness—which signifies not just an undesirable world for some, but the notion that the future could end altogether.

I sought out archives of early twentieth-century feminist speculation because I hoped to find imagined futures that would predict the radically, critically queer speculative projects of the more recent past. In the history of feminist speculation, I did not find works that severed the connection between white feminist politics and the reproduction of empire. But I did find narratives in which ambiguously utopian and dystopian gender
politics intersect with imperial speculation in complicated and disturbing ways. In the work of Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett and Susan Ertz, whose ambiguous utopias feature in the first chapter, and of Charlotte Haldane and Katharine Burdekin, whose dystopias are the subject of the second, genres of feminist debate, romance, and scientific speculation intersect to create visions of gendered futures that undermine and reproduce imperial dominance at the same time. Their articulations of anxieties surrounding the reproduction of the human race persist in the ways national futures are projected and reproduced in later media and fiction. In the first wormhole, I use a speculative engagement with Alfonso Cuarón’s 2006 film *Children of Men* to highlight the insights that the previous chapters’ archive of old futures can bring to questions of racialization, sexuality, and reproduction in contemporary transnational popular culture.

Crossing the Atlantic into part 2, “A Now that Can Breed Futures: Queerness and Pleasure in Black Science Fiction” offers a different set of perspectives on reproduction. Here I turn to histories of African diasporic speculation that have received significant media attention in the past few years and have been termed *Afrofuturism*, which Ytasha Womack describes as “the world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture.” Building on Afrofuturism’s focus on black diasporic speculative imagining as a way of creating futures for those rendered futureless by global white supremacy, I focus on the figuration of gender and queerness in black imagined futures as they have interfaced with the genre frameworks of science fiction narrative—including the persistence of reproductive Afrofuturisms that have sometimes overlapped with eugenic discourses. Chapter 3, “Afrofuturist Entanglements of Gender, Eugenics, and Queer Possibility,” introduces pleasure as a central term, tracing figurations of black women’s sexual futures that emerge from narrative foreclosures in W. E. B. Du Bois’s “The Comet” (1920) and following their trail into Jewelle Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* (1991) and Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* (2005), which demand we think reproductive futures outside the logics of heteronormativity and white supremacy. Chapter 4, “Science Fiction Worlding and Speculative Sex,” extends my analysis of queered and gendered black futurities to the realm of racialized queer masculinity. Linking the discourse of “world-making” developed in utopian theories of queer performance with the idea of “world-building” common
in science fiction theory, I analyze Samuel R. Delany’s science fiction iterations of 1970s and 1980s public sex cultures, which use genre tropes to initiate a process for reimagining sexual and racial temporalities in response to both the histories of enslavement and the beginning of the AIDS epidemic.

The second wormhole, “Try This at Home: Networked Public Sexual Fantasy,” connects the chapters on black queer science fiction with the media cultures the last part of the book analyzes by exploring sexual fantasy as a speculative world-making practice. This short, somewhat personal chapter reads a particularly queer and sexy scene from the science fiction TV show *Sense8* (2015–2018) to map correspondences between the depictions of gendered spectorship in Delany’s writings about male public sex cultures and the mostly female fan communities whose erotic fiction-writing practices form a speculative kind of sexual public.

In part 3: “It’s the Future, but It Looks like the Present: Queer Speculations on Media Time,” I turn to the cultural and technological reproduction of speculative futures in audiovisual form. Chapter 5, “Queer Deviations from the Future on Screen,” argues that the popular understanding of science fiction film as the genre of spectacular special effects has obscured the work done by queer speculative independent films that map a politicized imagined future onto the people and locations of a present whose shifting temporal location refuses progressive teleologies. I engage Derek Jarman’s 1978 *Jubilee* and Lizzie Borden’s 1983 *Born in Flames* as old futures whose narratives, aesthetics, and structures have sprouted unforeseen resonances in emerging political landscapes of the late 2010s. Sharing an intense focus on media and communication, the films offer contrasting strategies for building futures out of a present moment saturated with representations of the end of the world. Finally, chapter 6, “How to Remix the Future,” moves from futures depicted on screen to the audiences who take them up and respond to them, connecting my research on speculative fictions’ histories with grassroots cultures of video remix that have flourished in the digital age. Focusing on the critical and creative practices of science fiction television fans, I draw on an artistic community of which I am a member in order to complicate the promise of digital media as the democratization of media production. The chapter centers on the affective and political temporalities of fan-made music videos that reimagine the racialized
and gendered economies of digital media production and consumption, with the most extended analysis pertaining to the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–2009). I discuss my own video remix practice as a way to incorporate the insights of this form into scholarly production, coming full circle to reflect on the practice of remix as a methodological force in the composition of this book. *Old Futures* ends with a short epilogue that considers how the role of speculative futures in political discourse and popular culture have shifted over the period of research and writing, from approximately 2007 to 2017.

This book does not, and does not seek to, exhaust all possible iterations of old futures and their queer politics. As I have developed its analyses of transatlantic futurities in and immediately after the twentieth century, I have contemplated many other archives of old futures whose analysis I can only hope others might take up, joining the scholars and artists already engaged in the labor of speculative transformation and critique. The work of Grace Dillon on indigenous futurisms; of Aimee Bahng on transnational Asian futures and speculative capital; of Curtis Marez on the “farm worker futurism” of migrant laborers in California; of micha cárdenas on trans of color futures; of André Carrington on speculative blackness; of Shelley Streeby on speculative archives; and of Alison Kafer on disability and futurity—these are just a few possible approaches in a transdisciplinary network engaged in the production and critique of critical speculative world-making.74 The future and its queer potentialities mean differently across each of these contexts, and it is my aspiration that the work done here will add possibilities to the already multiple ways of seeing, analyzing, and enacting speculative futures, old and new.

A line from Delany’s *Dhalgren* animates the project’s frame: “It is not that I have no future. Rather it fragments on the insubstantial and indistinct ephemera of now.”75 The speaker, a queer, working-class, half-Native poet living with mental illness, knows that living without a future is not an uncommon mode of being. Delany’s protagonist is among those who fail to inherit. Yet “it is not that [he has] no future.” The double negative insists that futurity is not denied so much as dissipated among moments of joy, pain, sex, love, oppression, and resistance—whether in the immediate present or a stubbornly persisting past. Through processes similar to the logics of remix I explore in the final chapter, insubstantial and
indistinct moments reconfigure themselves into new kinds of possibilities and impossibilities—as Delany’s line does, repeated multiple times in slightly different form both in his novel and in this book. The future need not be figured as a straight line, but neither must any lines that may form be repudiated for the sake of implicit present potentialities. Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility takes this insight as its starting point.