So much of dubstep sound, iconography and references are to reggae - did you grow up listening to reggae or were you cast into the outer darkness of dublessness?

I was introduced to a lot of the classic hooks second hand from the samples in jungle, so I feel a deep connection but only started hunting down the originals a while back. I helped run a techno and D'n'B soundsystem so I appreciate the power of outdoors bass. My favourite stuff is the really stripped back dub & early digi-dancehall: Scientist, King Tubby and Mad Professor in particular have a huge influence on my production. I've sampled the tape hiss from some of the 70's stuff and layered it on top of beats to steal some of that warmth.

Dubstep is, somewhat surprisingly, still producing a heap of very good music - and your stuff is absolutely right up there. Do you think quality is going up at the moment?

It's a very versatile tempo and can soak up a lot of styles. The best stuff blows my mind; the boring stuff is well... boring. I think it's a good scene to belong to; there are loads of decent people involved who are in it for the music, as hard as people try the sound remains undefined and there's still a lot of talented people exploring and getting their hands dirty.

You must get heaps of dubs from unknowns. Can you name some unsigned producers that you think will blow up this year?

99% of the demos I get sent seem to be really polite "deep" tunes that just sort of float about. The only thing that's ripped my bollocks off in the last few months is James Blake who we've just signed for a 12" on Hemlock. He's got a great sound, the tunes we've got have a mad blues (or dare I say it) folk vibe to them, they're songs as well as tunes but with tough beats and crazy random noises going on.

Have you started to experiment with funky?

I'm directly inspired by it, but don't want to make it. I prefer the rawer percussive side and if I were to get on a tune I'd have to really concentrate on nailing that sound, I'd be thinking more about whether it sounded authentic rather than just letting it flow like I do with dubstep. Roska's just remixed a tune of mine - he's killing it right now, I'm also feeling what I've heard from Apple and Cooly G. I'll keep my sets mainly dubstep for the moment but like the idea of mixing tempos up on the odd occasion.

Untold's Five Favourite DJs

Ben UFO

Untouchable for coherently blending Baltimore, grime, garage, funky and dubstep. He's got that knack of making tunes you know sound different when he draws for them.

Kode 9

Owns the most exiting record box in electronic music. That and he played Source Direct's (under the Hokusai moniker) "Black Rose" at FWD recently. Oh...Beautiful

Oneman

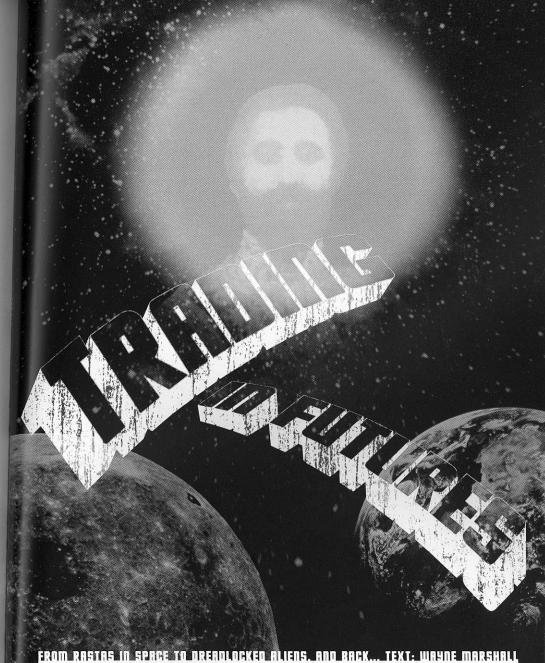
Because he seamlessly mixes Mala anthems into obscure garage b-sides whilst jumping around like a madman.

Youngsta

Cold. Never heard him drop a hi-hat. The way he plays the eqs is just amazing, I respect that he's stuck to his sound and pushed tunes he feels, not the just the latest dub.

Mala

He holds back so many of his tunes so there's always a huge sense of anticipation when he steps up. One of my favourite nights out was hearing him play all his unreleased dubs back to back at 100% dynamite a few years ago.



"IT'S AMAZING HOW WE NEVER DIE." - SIZZLA

The impossible survivalism expressed in a line like Sizzla's refers of course to the contemporary, to the postmillennial perseverance of the perennially persecuted, a dubiously "chosen" people. "4000 years," he intones, "yet no one cares," projecting a legacy of slavery well into the past by yoking the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the plight of the ancient Israelites.

But he could as easily be projecting into the future, joining a contrapuntal chorus of writers, producers, and artists who have imagined "techgnostic" Rastafarians in any number of possible futures and alternate universes. Reggae shifts in Caribbean-US demographics, gives musicians and Rastafarians themselves have, of course, contributed the lion's share of such visions, bending to their own earthy, deconstructionist purposes the devilish tricknologies they view with a healthy skepticism, turning recordings (which nevertheless shares some strategies with inside-out and Bibles "upside-down," as British-Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall once put it. Putting on "iron shirts" to chase Satan from earth. Meeting Space Invaders on their own turf. Dubbing culture into a parallel universe.

Taking their cue from this prophetic-dystopic tradition, right around the time that reggae and Ras- ing with the devil. Trading in futures. tafari were colonizing metropolitan spaces and media ("in reverse," as Miss Louise Bennett once put it), white cyberpunk authors such as William, Gibson and Bruce Sterling performed their own dubbing of possible worlds, bringing remarkably colorful and unkempt futures to life through the ironic shock of dreads at the controls. If we read them generously, we might hear how, by amplifying the additive rhythms of resilient Rasta technicians, these authors remixed sci-fi's supposedly "raceless" futures which, by default, nearly always looked white, clean, covered in chrome. In cyberpunk's dread futures, rather, archipelagos of black self-sufficiency - colonies called Zion, islands in the net - take root on the margins of unevenly developed worlds. Today's planet of slums prefigure tomorrow's improvised cybershantytowns. Rastafari stands alone.

Alien and alienated, these Rastas in space - as imagined both by reggae visionaries and sci-fi writers - appear as key avatars in what some have dubbed Afrofuturism, a field of cultural production inspired by Afrodiasporic musicians, writers of black (science) fiction, and cyberpunk authors, among others. On both sides of the Black Atlantic, cultural theorists such as Mark, Dery and Kodwo Eshun have outlined and elaborated what sci-fi scholar Lisa Yaszek describes, in an essay on Ralph Ellison, as "an intellectual, aesthetic movement concerned with the relations experience. "The central fact in Black Science of science, technology, and race [which] appropriates the narrative techniques of science fiction to put a black face on the future. In doing so, it combats those whitewashed visions of tomorrow generated by a global 'futures industry' that equates blackness with the failure of progress and technological catastrophe."

And yet, the other side of the coin to this critical, challenge offers a funhouse-mirror distortion of dread. Just as 1950s science fiction films gave

us now quaint images of their own anxieties projected into future worlds and onto alien races Hollywood's increasingly dreadlocked aliens of the last two decades, a timeline tracing seismic us the postcolonial American version of sci-fi's classically temporal/present vision of the future. Dreadful images, no doubt. But in a very different way than one finds in reggae or even cyberpunk Hollywood), filmic representations mobilize Rastafarian symbols - especially 'locks - primarily to conjure fear, danger, and militant difference.

This is a story, then, of an other-worldy Jamaican music industry exchanging images and ideas with Babylonian regimes of representation. Deal-



"THE IDEA OF SLAVERY AS AN ALIEN ABOUG-TION MEANS THAT WE'VE ALL BEEN LIVING IN AN ALIEN-NATION SINCE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY." - KODWO ESHUN

Black sci-fi writers, of course, have long imagined parallel worlds where race remains a fact of life, marking an always-already sense of alien Fiction," contends Mark Sinker in a 1992 piece for The Wire tellingly titled "Loving the Alien." is an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened: that (in PE's phrase) Armageddon been in effect. Black SF writers - Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler - write about worlds after catastrophic disaster; about the modalities of identity without hope of resolution, where race and nation, and neighbourhood and family are none of them enough to obviate betrayal ("Every brother ain't a brother cause a colour / Just as well could be undercover" raps Chuck D in "Terrordome"),

The existential challenge to black politics posed by this state of apocalyptic alienation is a critical question, one that Delany, for instance, approaches with a great deal of care and nuance both in his writings and in exchanges like this one whose orbital colony was cobbled together with Mark Derv:

Dery: Have you ever felt, as one of the few blacks writing SF, the pressure to write science fiction deeply inscribed with the politics of black nationalism?

Delany: The answer there depends on what your question means. If you mean: Do I feel that, deep within my work, I've situated material that encourages the reader's engagement with some of the political questions that the disenfranchised people in this country, victimized by oppression and an oppressive discourse based on the evil and valorized notion of nationhood and its hideous white - no other color - underbelly, imperialism, must face but cannot overcome without internalizing some of the power concepts and relationships inescapably entailed in the notion of "nation" itself? Well if that's what you mean, my answer is: Damned right I have! Certainly from my 1974 novel Dhalgren on, that's been a major plank, reason, and justification in, of, and for my project.

If, on the other hand, you mean: Do I feel that the surface of my work must blatantly display signs of solidarity with those who, through the real despairs imposed on them by oppression, have momentarily abandoned any critique of the presuppositions of nationhood and its internal contradictions, and that, through such signs in my work, I endeavor to speak back to those people in a voice indistinguishable from theirs, confirming what in them cannot question, what in them does not have the luxury of being able to critique the grounds on which they stand - a confirmation which, while I acknowledge that its project is an endlessly practical and necessary one, and one which I can usually support at some level of abstraction? Well, if that's what you it has hardly been tempting for black writers of mean, then, alas, the answer is: No. That's not of it in others.

And yet Delany has also famously said, speaking to an audience in Harlem, that we all "need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most." It's important to note, then, against this backdrop, that Delany voices explicit disapproval of Gibson's "Rastas" later in the same conversation, challenging Dery's more romantic interpretation:

Dery: For me, a white reader, the Rastas in Neuromancer's Zion colony are intriguing in that they

hold forth the promise of a holistic relationship with technology; they're romanticized arcadians who are obviously very adroit with jury-rigged technology. They struck me as ... bricoleurs from space junk and whose music, Zion Dub, is described by Gibson (in a wonderfully mixed metaphor) as "a sensuous mosaic cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop."

Delany: Well, let me read them for you as a black reader. The Rastas—he never calls them Rastafarians, by the way, only using the slang term are described as having "shrunken hearts." and their bones are brittle with "calcium loss." Their music, Zion Dub, can be wholly analyzed and reproduced by the Artificial Intelligence, Wintermute (who, in the book, stands in for a multinational corporation), so completely that the Rastas themselves cannot tell the difference—in fact the multinational mimic job is so fine that with it Wintermute can make the Rastas do precisely what it wants, in this case help a drugged-out white hood and sleazebag get from here to there. As a group, they seem to be computer illiterates: when one of their number, Aerol, momentarily jacks into Case's computer and sees cyberspace, what he perceives is "Babylon"—city of sin and destruction—which, while it makes its ironic comment on the book, is nevertheless tantamount to saying that Aerol is completely without power or knowledge to cope with the real world of Gibson's novel: indeed, though their pseudo-religious beliefs, they are effectively barred from cyberspace...

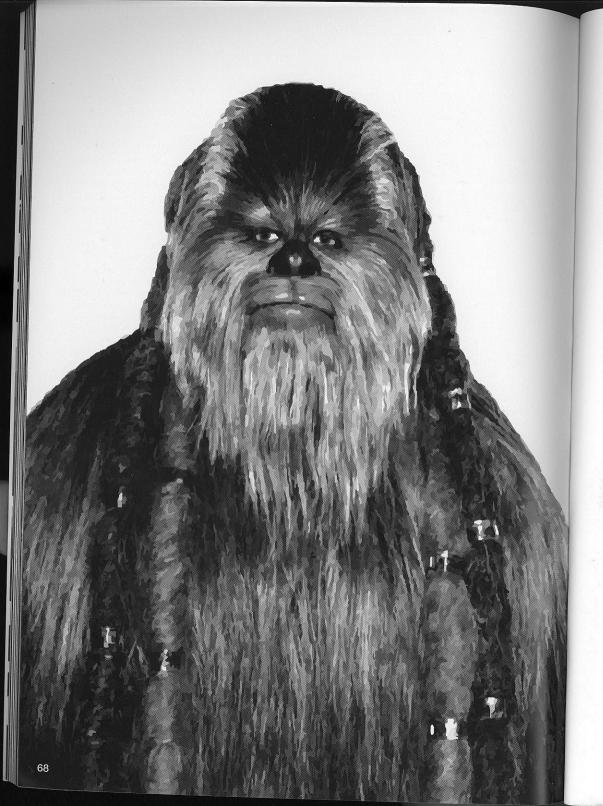
You'll forgive me if, as a black reader, I didn't leap up to proclaim this passing presentation of a powerless and wholly nonoppositional set of black dropouts... as the coming of the black millennium in science fiction.

Precisely because, as African-American cultural critic Greg Tate says, "Black people live the estrangement that science-fiction writers imagine," science fiction to invest token black characters part of my project — even though I often approve with the same level of romance as their would-be brethren in the futures trade.

> Putting it more bluntly, Kali Tal observes.

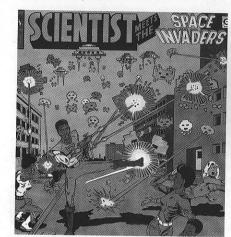
No African Americanist could miss the repetition of the figure of the black technoprimitive in science fiction





in general and cyberpunk in particular. From the "Rastas in space" exoticism of Buckaroo Bonzai and the reggae-flavored data havens of Bruce Sterling's Islands in the Net, to the gritty street cred of the characters played by gangsta rapper Ice-T in Johnny Mnemonic and Tank Girl, the magical touch of the Brother From Another Planet, and the wise guides of The Matrix, the sci-fi/cyberpunk trope of blackness as simultaneously a site of wisdom, danger and unimpeachable hipness is baldly apparent to anyone with an eve to see it.

Thus, even if, as in Dery's reading, the Rastafied projections of race into the future by Gibson, Sterling, the Wachowski bros (as I'll discuss in a moment), et al., might be interpreted as significant commitments to making race matter in their speculative fictions, we can also admit that this sort of noble savaging, if you will, cuts both ways, as it always has.

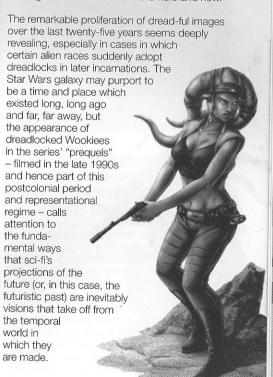


"IN SPITE OF THEIR BESTIAL APPEARANCE, WOOKIESS WERE HIGHLY INTELLIGENT AND HAD MASTERED ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING HYPERSPACE TRAVEL." - ENTRY FOR "WOOKIEE" ON WOOKIEEPEDIA ("THE STAR WARS WIK!")

Scanning representations of the alien in science fiction films from the last few decades, one bears witness to a striking shift: dreadlocks have become increasingly commonplace signs of the alien in Hollywood, serving as markers of violent difference even when, as is also often the case, conferring an ironic techno-savvy or exotic allure on the characters in question.

For better or worse, then, reggae musicians, Rastafarians, and cyberpunk writers have together produced a powerful set of tropes for Hollywood. We should note, though, that they were aided and abetted by the US news media's feverish stereotyping of the threatening black alien during the 1980s, when Jamaican drug posses made their presence felt along the Eastern Seaboard - right around the same time, or just before, dreadlocked aliens began showing up in films. We might see dreadlocked aliens, then, as symptomatic of a particular historical moment, a point in the postcolonial process whereby American culture projects anxieties about "internal others" in the form of familiar if far more radically foreign objects: predators from outer space, treacherous tribes, sexy slaves, fierce warriors, and doltish but colorful characters to be exploited, distrusted. destroyed.

A survey of dreadlocked aliens in some of the biggest sci-fi blockbusters (and some of the hugest flops) reveals how coded representations of blackness as otherness – especially via dreadlocks – can bleed all too easily into reproducing racial stereotypes and stoking fears of others among us, rather than employing sci-fi's quintessential grappling with otherness as another way of coming to terms with race in the here and now.



Similarly, the Nausicaans of Star Trek do not sport dreads in the 22nd millennium portrayed in the original series filmed in the 1960s, whereas some of their 24th millennium descendents, as seen in the series filmed in the 80s and 90s, have apparently decided to lock-up.

As the case of Wookiees suggests, however, the filmic projection of dreadlocks into sci-fi futures can at times appear innocuous or, in some cases, might even be read as progressive. Dreads become signs of resistance and resilience, markers of ironically earthy commitments to human values. Just as Gibson's "Rastas" are portraved as resourceful if exploitable figures, making due on a space colony called Zion, the fortified human hideaway in The Matrix goes by the same name and is, indeed, populated, in part, by dreadlocked denizens who let loose inna dancehall style for their cathartic war-dance, raving to tribal techno and busting a little post-apocalyptic perreo.

It may be instructive to continue sifting out the banal if complicit deployment of dreadlocks from the spectacular and specious. Dreadlocked and quasi-dreadlocked characters have appeared in such films as Men in Black and The Fifth Element, for example, without obviously connoting any of the racist notions that too often go hand-in-hand with such images. On the other hand, as with the several subspecies of Eredar (e.g., the Draenei) with dreadlock-like features who help to animate the bellicose fantasies of World of Warcraft.

no instance of dreadlocked creatures can

be completely innocent when all such images circulate through the same discursive networks. shared representational and interpretive regimes, serving however cuddly or remote from Caribbean connotation - as symptoms of anxieties about aliens among us. (Incidentally, despite his Caribbeanness, which has already been much remarked and critiqued, the floppyeared but dreadlockfree Jar Jar Binks and

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the Gungans fall beyond the purview of this survey.)

"WE ARE HOSTILE ALIENS, IMMUNE FROM DYING." - THE SPACE APE

It seems fair to assert that the preponderance of dreads-from-space serve to signify the sinister, or other spurious associations recalling racist tropes - from the primitive and exploitable to the treacherous and fearsome. And this association hardly seems coincidental if observed alongside the contemporary chorus of fear about dreadlocked, drug-running, cooland-deadly gunmen (an image, it might be noted, that some dancehall performers - and maybe a few rappers - eagerly adopted). The bounty-hunter alien from Predator is perhaps the purest if absurdist example. If the creature's dreadlocks and mesh marina seem like far too subtle evocations of the Jamaican alien in the American imaginary, the sequel actually introduces Jamaican posse gangsters as players in the plot, serving at once to underscore and to estrange the Predator's familiar foreign-

notation – as symptoms of anxieties about aliens among us. (Incidentally, despite his and his ilk's cartoonish Caribbeanness, which has already been much remarked and critiqued, the floppyeared but dreadlock-free Jar Jar Binks and list is remarkable – and revealing – how many of Hollywood's dreadlocked alien races have histories haunted by slavery. Given that slavery represents a constitutive concern for Rastafarians as the peculiar project that produced their exilic and abject state, it seems like maybe a bit much for sci-fi scribes to play with such a site of pain, memory, and unfinished business. And yet they do, over and over again, suggesting perhaps that ignorance, more than insensitivity, guides their appropriations. Take, for instance, the Scientology agitprop flop, Battlefield Earth, which stars a dreadlocked John Travolta as both a colonist and a slaver.

Notably, the Star Wars universe, which includes dreadlocked Wookiees and tendrilheaded Nautolans (such as Jedi Master, Kit Fisto) as well as the non-locked but suggestively named Mustafarians, also offers some odd connections between dreads and slaves, especially in the Twi'leks, who are described on Wookieepedia as

"an omnivorous humanoid species originating from the planet Ryloth. ... Their distinctive features included colorful skin, which varied in pigment from individual to individual, and a pair of shapely prehensile tentacles that grew from the base of their skulls. The tentacles, called "head-tails," "lekku," or "tchun-tchin," are advanced organs used for communication and cognitive functions. ... The natural grace and exotic beauty of the female Twi'leks made them a popular target among slave traders. Many Twi'leks actually encouraged the slave market on their own planet. ... Regardless of how it came about, many Twi'leks lived as slaves or entertainers and were considered status symbols, especially the females of rarer skin hues: the Rutian and Lethan Twi'leks."

Without making it an object of analysis in itself, it's worth noting how this seemingly flat, encyclopedic description reads like thinly veiled racialist commentary, invoking a number of familiar stereotypes. The Twi'leks are perhaps most familiar to viewers as Jabba the Hut's servants in Return of the Jedi. The creepy doorman/henchman, Bib Fortuna, and the doomed dancing-girl, Oola (played, tellingly, by black British actress, Femi Taylor), both sport the long "prehensile" tentacles on their heads which, especially in later imaginings, seem rather like dreadlocks, which many Rastafarians, again inviting the comparison, have likened to antennae.

There's a strange kind of exchange in all of this, an historical process brought to our attention by the increasing presence of dreadlocks as an alien trope, a shift clearly linked to the growing prominence during the 80s and 90s of Caribbean migrants in American and British society alike. Thanks in part to Jamaicans' and Rastafarians' own projections of power and allure and, in the case of the posses, unthinkable ruthlessness, dreadlocks become a convenient symbol for filmic representations of dangerous otherness, signaling the alien without referencing blackness per se.

Reggae musicians have also fed this machine, courting this regime of representation through their own iconic amplifications of alienation

and out-of-this-world-ness. Hence, we witness - perhaps increasingly, in an age of "The Matrix Vs. Vvbz Kartel" YouTube mashups - a complicated trading in futures (not unlike that between hip-hop and reggae, as I've argued elsewhere), especially when Star Wars imagery finds itself, in turn, appropriated as dub kitsch (Scientist And Jammy Strike Back). This is not an innocent exchange, however. To assume that reagae's visions of the future are equally potent (or proftiable) as Hollywood's is to overlook profound differences in implication between these two entangled regimes. When Sizzla expresses a kind of surprised pride at black people's timeless resiliency, he bears witness to contested notions of freedom and humanity, the withheld promise of mobility and citizenship - specters of slavery that sexy Twi'leks, never mind dreadlocked Wookiees. hardly conjure.



"IT WAS ONLY FOUR TRACKS WRITTEN ON THE MACHINE, BUT I WAS PICKING UP 20 FROM THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL SQUAD." -LEE "SGRATCH" PERRY

As I've noted, it was through their own projections of Africanized technology, of dreadlocks as antennae, of blackness into space and the future, that Rastafarians and reggae musicians appealed to writers like Gibson and Sterling and Dery, not to mention – we can only surmise – directors like George Lucas. Examples abound here as well, emerging in interviews, lyrics, and album art, as when Mutabaruka looks down on Earth from his perch in space on the cover of The Mystery Unfolds, or in the more recent, reggae-inspired albums of L.A.'s Ras G, who frames himself, in another circuitous nod to film. as a Brotha From

Anotha Planet offering up some Ghetto Sci-Fi. Lee Perry in particular has become Afrofuturism incarnate for a host of writers and thinkers. Having described himself in interviews as "an alien from the other world, from outta space" and the Black Ark, his studio, as "a space craft" where one "could hear space in the tracks," Perry clearly invited this conferral. "What is most important about Perry and his astounding musical legacy," writes cultural critic Erik Davis, "is how they highlight an often ignored strain of New World African culture: a techno-visionary tradition that looks as much toward science-fiction futurism as toward magical African roots."

It is hardly surprising then that dub, that music of the ghosts of future-past, is what seeps through the soundscapes of cyberpunk, if sometimes, as with the "Rastas" themselves, in somewhat funhouse-mirror form – from Gibson's "dub" as "a sensuous mosaic cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop" (a description that perhaps better fits GirlTalk, save for the "sensuous" bit) to the mashed-up "dig-Ital" deformations, or "demented noise," overheard on Sterling's vision of Grenada as a data-pirate haven:

Light background music was playing. Laura listened with half an ear. Some kind of slick premillennium crooner on vocals, lots of syrupy strings and jazzy razzing saxophones . . . "(something something) for you, dear . . . buh buh buh boooh" She could almost identify the singer . . . from

..." She could almost identify the singer ... If old movies. Cosby, that was it. Bing Cosby.

Now digitizing effects started creeping in and something awful began to happen. Suddenly a bandersnatch had jumped into Cosby's throat. His jovial white-guy Anglo good vibes stretched like electric taffy—arroooch, werewolf noises. Now Bing was making ghastly hub hub hub backward croonings, like a sucking chest wound. The demented noise was filtering around the diners but no one was paying attention.

Laura turned to the young three-pen cadre on her left. The guy was waving his fingers over Laura's tote and looked up guiltily when she asked. "The music? We call it didge-ltal... dig-ital, seen, D.J.—Ital... Mash it up right on the ship." Yeah. They were doing something awful to poor old Bing while he wasn't looking. He sounded like his head was made of sheet metal.

Now Blaize and Andrei were lecturing David about money. The Grenadian rouble. Grenada had a closed, cash-free economy; everybody on the island had personal credit cards, drawn on the bank. This policy kept that "evil global currency," the ecu, out of local circulation. And that "razored off the creeping tentacles" of the Net's "financial and cultural imperialism."

Creeping tentacles indeed! And once again we see (and hear?) how dread tendrils reach both ways.

"SOOR FORWARD." - RASTA PARTING PHRASE

As William Gibson has famously remarked, "The future is already here." Indeed, maybe by listening to dub, not to mention such tentacle-like offshoots as dancehall, hip-hop, jungle, and dubstep, we might have heard the future all along – or at least received some flashes, echoes or reverberations, some Memories from the Future, as proposed by Afrofuturist brethren like Kode9 and The Space Ape, transmitting their Hyperdub from, "a mutant satellite to the grime/dubstep scenes."

Beyond the future of the stars, and much closer to here and now, what else might we hear or have heard? Could we have heard New York and London mutating? If we missed it the first time, could we listen again? Can we hear the future from the past? In the present? What do we make of so many worlds of possibilities?

The other half of Gibson's oft-quoted phrase also bears repetition in this context, for not only does the author say the future is already with us, he adds, importantly, that it's "just not evenly distributed." Here, from the vista of this uncomfortable asymmetry, we might appreciate how reggae's grounded flights of imagination, launched from the solid foundation of postcolonial persistence, tend to differ in kind from Hollywood's more predictable versions of the alien. Whereas mainstream sci-fi seems intent on creating racy monsters to be dealt with by white men with chrome weapons, dubwise brethren hold the torch aloft for those on the short end of the futures trade.

For all the talk of dreads at the controls, sometimes the most imaginative uses of technologies are those which repurpose, refresh, and remix the here and now in order to see things differently, to make things new, to get beyond perceived constraints. Or as Busy Signal puts it, "Mi brain nuh need no visa fi fly."

Wayne Marshall is the co-author of 'Reggaeton', available from Duke University Press.

http://www.wayneandwax.com

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