Louis Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016. x + 268 pp. (Paper US\$27.95)

To many observers, blackness and technology would seem to be rather distant, if not antithetical, concepts. *The Sound of Culture* aims to reanimate the connections between Blacks and machines by uncovering an alternative genealogy encompassing unsuspected homologies between race, technology, colonialism, industrialization, and slavery. Connections between technology and blackness have been drawn before under the purview of Afro-Futurism, which has come to have increasing purchase in both the academy and popular culture since the mid-2000s. Louis Chude-Sokei works on a broader scale than Afro-Futurism's usual focus on black Anglophone cultural production of the past 50 years or so, and his theoretical claims and guiding questions are more ambitious.

The bibliography alone is worth the price of admission, as Chude-Sokei puts into dialogue robots and slaves, minstrels and phonographs, W.E.B. DuBois and cybernetics theorist Norbert Wiener, *Frankenstein* and Darwin, Italian futurism and the Harlem Renaissance, cyberpunk novelists and Caribbean philosophers of creolization. While its narrative can be dizzying at times, the questions the book engages are fundamental. How have the limits of the human been constituted around the figures of Blacks and machines? And how does black cultural production engage technology as a kind of play that deranges those limits?

The first two chapters are dedicated to a historical explication of the human, the nonhuman, and the near-human, by examining the enduring history of a discursive constellation implicating both the human and its foils—the slave, the automaton, the animal, the minstrel, and the robot—, each of which is constituted by different configurations of excess and lack (for example, of rationality, free will, or a soul). This discursive genealogy is traced through Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter's idea that the limits of the human in Western thought are indebted to the delineation of white male humanity in the milieus of the plantation and the colony. Chude-Sokei both unearths obscure texts (a robot story by the Harlem modernist Jean Toomer) and gives against-the-grain readings of well-known texts (uncovering the racial politics of Norbert Wiener) in order to set out the notion that the tenuous inhumanity of both Blacks and machines are products of the same historically situated discursive project, most clearly visible in the barely submerged race metaphors of Karel Čapek, whose neologism “robot” glossed the Czech word for slave, and the figure of Joice Heth, the elderly black woman, often taken by audiences to be an automaton, whose display established the career of P.T. Barnum in the 1830s. Freud's discussion

of the uncanny guides Chude-Sokei's description of the anxiety these demi-humans provoked, although he also identifies how the vexed techno-animalism described in swing music was also quite productive in white appropriations of jazz. He goes on to describe the significantly racial and colonial flavor of the anxieties that appear in writing on lost races, alien invasions, and robot revolutions beginning in late Victorian protoscience fiction.

The arguments of the final two chapters reexamine notions of the posthuman, found in discussions of cyberspace and Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," by reading the cyborg through the work of Caribbean philosophers of creolization, particularly Édouard Glissant, Wilson Harris, and Sylvia Wynter. His overall argument suggests that creolization theorists' break with racial and even *human* absolutism is increasingly necessary as artificial intelligence projects become viable and as human-robot entanglements proliferate. Along the way, he masterfully traces the difference between African-American and Caribbean racial projects and recovers creolization within Césaire's Negritude, to shed light on the evergreen debate between racial particularity and transcendence.

Unfortunately, as much as sound and music seem to have inspired the book, they are not as central as the title would indicate. And the relentless whirl of discursive riffing (in which, for example, the figure of the Sambo careens between being lacking and being excessive, from being animal to being machine to being suprahuman) might occasionally tax the credulity of readers more accustomed to the firmer ground of historical or ethnographic methods. But the book is meaningful beyond the spectacle of watching a virtuoso draw dazzling connections between seemingly unrelated texts. The general contours, and even the specific ones, of Chude-Sokei's argument hold up on consulting the texts he cites. His resolute refusal to predetermine the nature or the location of black politics and aesthetics, looking, for example, outside the United States and beyond comfortable liberatory or even democratic political orientations, gives his discussion of black "techno-poetics" a welcome suppleness. Above all, the underlying argument—that intellectual, technical, and aesthetic production on race and technology both constructs the limits of the human and engages with their entanglements in terms that deny their absolutisms—is deeply generative and particularly timely at a historical and political moment marked by the continuing dehumanization of Blacks and the advancing humanization of technology.

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