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## **Afrofuturism in Contemporary American Music Video: Themes, Aesthetics, Politics**

### **SUMMARY**

The aim of the dissertation is to analyze the themes, aesthetics, and politics of contemporary Afrofuturist music videos.<sup>1</sup> I argue that Afrofuturist music videos do not merely recycle but expand the cultural practice of Afrofuturism as they are able to accurately reflect the current historical moment under the guise of futuristic aesthetic and utilize a wide range of audiovisual techniques that enrich lyrical storylines with additional meanings introduced by the signature Afrofuturist audiovisual aesthetic. The idea to write a dissertation devoted to Afrofuturist music videos emerged as a response to the insufficient number of critical tools, operational concepts, and cultural contexts which could be employed in the analysis of this particular body of work by selected Black American artists and directors. Music videos are ubiquitous in popular culture, present in academic discussions, widely analyzed and interpreted by both scholars and journalists but it seems that when filtered through the lens of Afrofuturism, their distinct history, internal dynamics, or aesthetic tradition has not been yet scrutinized. My primary goal in selecting music videos for this dissertation was to focus on such examples that use music video as an audiovisual form in a creative way and consequently develop the cultural practice of Afrofuturism by introducing it into another medium.

The methodological approach taken in this study is mixed, basing on analytical frameworks from literary, media and film studies, Black Studies theories in North American scholarship, and close reading of case studies. The dissertation follows the methodological

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<sup>1</sup> Afrofuturism is here defined as a body of cultural texts and practices, discourse, and a mode of expression created by Black people which constitutes “an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation.” Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Lawrence Hill Books, 2013, 9.

framework of music video analysis developed by Carol Vernallis, which draws attention to four main points: narrative, editing, camerawork, and diegesis (2019), combining it with Shaviro's research on digital music videos and Isiah Lavender's, Lisa Yaszek's and Ytasha L. Womack's scholarship on Afrofuturism. In my dissertation I also draw on Erik Steinskog's study of Afrofuturism and sound.

Being the first larger body of work devoted entirely to the study of Afrofuturism in music video, the dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first two provide literature review and introduce the reader into the further analysis of Afrofuturist music video, while the other three comprise textual analyses of selected music videos, focusing on how they explore Afrofuturist themes and aesthetics as well as reflect on the current historical moment in the United States.

The first theoretical chapter offers introduction to Afrofuturism by means of outlining its history in literature, audiovisual media, and art and contextualizing this cultural practice and body of texts. Subsequently, the second chapter offers detailed overview of the music video as an independent medium. It focuses on outlining and explaining distinctive characteristics of this medium including intermediality (Mathias Bonde Korsgaard), audiovisuality (Michel Chion), dispersity, density and visual multiplicity, discontinuity, responsiveness and reciprocity (Carol Vernallis), as well as innovativeness (Steven Shaviro).

The following parts of the dissertation provide analysis of case studies. The third chapter features the discussion of three selected music videos exploring the theme of Afrofuturist spirituality. All three music videos analyzed in this chapter employ spirituality as a technology used to establish and develop identities rooted in African speculative thought. Chapter Four concentrates on Afrofuturist aesthetics and visual techniques contributing to creating the effect of Othering, having great significance in the context of Black experience in the United States. The chapter elaborates on three different technologies employed in selected case studies,

including significant modulation of the pre-recorded video achieved in post-production, glitch as a marker of discontinuity, and so called “bisexual lighting.” Finally, Chapter Five offers an analysis of the ways in which selected music videos address matters of political nature. These include the position of gender non-conforming individuals of color in the American music industry and beyond, the instances of institutional racism in the contemporary media, and the problem of healthcare marketization and its impact on Black Americans.

The analytical chapters are followed by the conclusions that discuss study findings and possibilities of future research considering not only the evolving nature of technological advances but also the development of Afrofuturism as a cultural framework for reflection on the current social and political moment in the United States.

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