Future Sounds: Afrofuturism, Percussion, and the Communication of Afrofuturist Themes in Music

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Abstract

On the very first Monday of my first year at Colorado College, I had made plans to audition for a student band called Frog. This would be the first band I had ever joined, culminating in an album release and an east coast tour in the summer of 2018. After that, it was Arc Trip, Parents, Public Indecency, Worm Weather, Bongo Saloon, and now Host Body. Each project has been an opportunity to develop my musicianship, exposing me to new musicians, genres, and general life experiences. After COVID-19 destroyed the worldwide music scene, playing with other musicians became a health risk. My relationship with drumming was partially fractured, and as most people can probably relate—I felt more stagnant than ever. Despite this, I continued to practice and explore my ideas outside of a band context; consequently, this evolved into a desire to create music that was representative of my own abilities and interests. Around this same time, I began discussing the possibility of creating a small duo project with Evan Hirshorn. We both wanted to create something representative of our musical abilities; furthermore, we wanted to create something that sounded professionally mixed and mastered. The intention was to create an auditory résumé, which we can share as proof of our abilities when we're trying to get gigs in the music industry. These objectives laid the foundation for formulating my capstone project, which has flourished into a collection of songs that we are both extremely proud of.

Throughout the writing process, we both drew inspiration from various artists to compose our individual parts. This allowed me to digest my written drum parts from an analytical perspective, drawing connections to specific artists, patterns, phrasings, and other ideas. This exploration into broader percussive elements transformed into a concentrated interest in Afrofuturist percussion. I wanted to examine the development of percussion throughout

Afrofuturist music, define its characteristics, and determine if anything I had created shared similarities with Afrofuturist percussion. Exploring these sonic elements of Afrofuturist music begged the question—does Afrofuturist art require a visual component? Throughout this paper, I will attempt to answer this question by analyzing the percussive ideas of three Afrofuturist albums, dissecting percussive ideas within my own project, and bringing both into conversation with one another. This will help determine whether or not Afrofuturist percussion can be concretely defined, and if sound alone can communicate Afrofuturist aesthetics.

Analysis Part I - Afrofuturist Percussion

Introduction

Mark Dery was one of the first people to formally articulate Afrofuturism within the realm of higher education, using the term in his 1994 essay "Black to the Future" (Kettle). In this essay, he defines Afrofuturism "to describe a flurry of analysis fueled by sci-fi-loving Black college students and artists who were passionately reframing discussions about art and social change through the lens of science and technology" (Womack 16). I would argue that art is the primary focus of modern-day Afrofuturism, but its commentary implies social change through a reinterpretation of science and technology. The reason I make this distinction is because it would be unlikely for Afrofuturist discussion to center around issues of diversity within science/tech-related industries.

This Afrofuturist reinterpretation of science and technology is presented in a number of ways; for instance, some associate Afrofuturism with fictional timelines that explore immense African technological development as a result of no European interference. Others approach Afrofuturism as a means of exploring a socially perfect future, in which humanity has embraced its differences and flourished into an advanced civilization through a unified effort. Then there are other Afrofuturists who explore ideas of inter-planetary liberation, or the liberation of Blacks through the African colonization of another planet—presumably in a galaxy far, far away. This reference brings me to modern day discussions of Afrofuturism, in which social commentary and reinterpretations of science and technology are approached through the lens of art; specifically, the science-fiction genre in film, literature, music, poetry, dance, or anything that requires creativity and imagination.

I'm presenting all this information as a means of prefacing my history with this topic. Ytasha Womack argues that simply recognizing the lack of diversity in the original *Star Wars* trilogy would make you somewhat of an Afrofuturist (Womack 7). In this case, perhaps Afrofuturism revolves around the approach of sci-fi genres and the utilization of this genre to provoke social change. A great example of this is *Star Trek*, which is infamous for its social commentary. I'd argue that my introduction to Afrofuturism began with the exposure to sci-fi series such as *Star Trek*, as well as other famous works like *Black Panther* and *Star Wars*. While I didn't realize it at the time, I was being exposed to Afrofuturism outside of a musical context.

Afrofuturist music was foreign to me before I started listening to Erykah Badu and Outkast. They served as the catalysts to introduce me to artists like Janelle Monae, Parliament Funkadelic, Flying Lotus, Bootsy Collins, and Sun Ra. This is when I began to see the deep roots of this cultural aesthetic, as I had never really understood Afrofuturism outside of visual media—despite the fact it largely originated in the late 1960s/early 1970s jazz scene. It was clear to me that Afrofuturist music spanned a diverse array of genres, from jazz all the way to pop. This diversity is what made it a fascinating topic to approach in the first place. I rooted my study into Afrofuturist percussion within the context of three Afrofuturist albums. These albums are

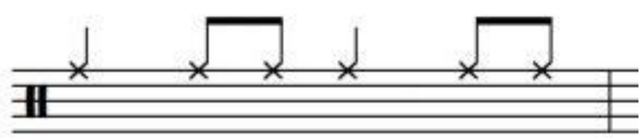
Space Is the Place by Sun Ra, *Baduizm* by Erykah Badu, and *1983* by Flying Lotus—respectively released in 1973, 1997, and 2006. These three albums are all recognized as Afrofuturist due to their influence on the movement, their aesthetics, and their commentary on issues of racial injustice.

Space Is the Place **(1973)**

Afrofuturism is most commonly associated with visual aesthetics, but its original conception began in the 1950s Chicago jazz scene. It was about this time that Sun Ra began formulating his own commentary on racial injustice, which wouldn't be presented until the late 1960s. He laid the foundational aesthetics and philosophy of the movement, "landing" on Earth in 1969 to deliver a message of intergalactic liberation (Newman). His 1973 album "Space Is the Place" is recognized as a cornerstone Afrofuturist album, promoting the notion of escaping Earth to colonize a new planet free from oppression. Sun Ra's method of transportation was music itself, meaning that anyone who listened to his music would be transported to his new colony—providing a physical liberation through music. This may suggest that he believed music could be a form of liberation, albeit mental or spiritual as opposed to physical. This liberation may be accomplished by opposing the oppression of Black bodies through the shameless expression of Black joy. This is an important aspect of Afrofuturist music and Black protest music in general: the empowerment of Black people through unification, joy, and the continued fight for true liberation.

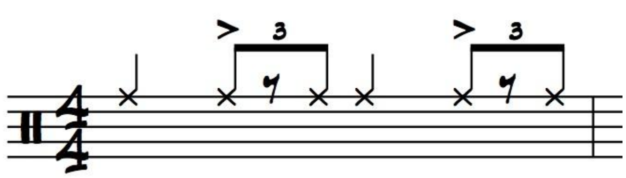
The drummer on this album is Lex Humphries, who is known for playing with other well-known jazz artists like John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Dizzy Gillepsie, and Yusef Lateef. Much of the drumming on the album is indistinguishable from traditional jazz drumming. On most tracks, he uses a modified version of the classic jazz ride pattern. In swing music, this pattern is written as depicted in figure 1; however, it is played in a triplet feel as depicted in figure 2. Lex Humphries modifies this pattern by keeping the quarter note steady, and adding in the swung eighth note whenever he feels like it—as opposed to strictly playing the swung eighth note on the "and" of 2 and 4. This adds more liveliness and space to the ride cymbal, while providing freedom for the performer to explore. The idea of playing swung is an important concept in jazz that influenced later developments in Afrofuturist drumming. This will be discussed later in the paper.

Figure 1



Source: Vaartstra, Brent. *Figure 1*. 2017. *Learn Jazz Standards*. https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/JazzRide-8s-300x116.jpg

Figure 2



Source: Vaartstra, Brent. *Figure 2*. 2017. *Learn Jazz Standards*. https://www.learnjazzstandards.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/24-jazz-ride.jpg

The noteworthy rhythmic complexities in this album are really embedded within the rest of the instrumentation. Right off the bat during the title track, listeners are thrown into a traditional swing feel before the vocals enter. The line “space is the place” is chanted throughout the song, cementing the vocals in 4/4. There is a distinct call and response between a number of vocalists, which is an extremely common theme in traditional African drumming. The rigidity in the vocals is important around the 5 minute mark, when the bass and trumpet begin to play in 5/4. During this part, the consistency of the vocals keep everything locked together while the bass and trumpet explore a different time signature. “Discipline 33” features a slow, sluggish groove, as well as lots of percussion for the purpose of adding texture. This is something we experimented a lot with when writing the interludes, as we wanted those tracks to be opportunities to explore unfamiliar percussive instruments. “Sea of Sound” can best be described as a sea of sound. It’s a dissonant and chaotic tune that incorporates elements of free jazz. “Rocket Number 9” returns to the all-too-familiar 4/4 jazz ride pattern feel, with an urgent and hurried pace that suggests the rocket is literally about to take off.

The track I really want to focus on is “Images,” which features a 2:3 polyrhythm. This pops up briefly in some background percussion at the 2:00 mark, but appears much more prominently around the 4:55 mark in a cymbal of some sort. I would loosely define a polyrhythm as the simultaneous occurrence of rhythms that suggest different time signatures. These rhythms can stack, providing multiple polyrhythms within a single time signature. The best way to conceptualize the 2:3 polyrhythm is by playing eighth notes in one hand, and eighth note triplets in the other. A mnemonic phrase to learn this is “hot cup of tea,” in which the words “hot,” “cup,” and “tea” make up a complete eighth note triplet. See figure 3 for the mnemonic device and transcription composed of eighth notes and eighth note triplets.

Figure 3

Source: Musical U Team. *Figure 3*. 2020. *Musical U*.

https://www.musical-u.com/learn/making-sense-of-polyrhythms/

***Baduizm* (1997)**

Jumping 24 years into the future, we're met with Erykah Badu's iconic album *Baduizm*. Her work is often extremely reflective, touching on subjects such as the erasure of Black history and culture as well as the resistance against oppression that reinforces this erasure. She is widely recognized as an Afrofuturist due to her sci-fi imagery and lyricism, which she begins exploring in her debut album *Baduizm*. For this record, she recruited the help of Questlove, who had gained notoriety due to his work with The Roots beginning in 1993. He's well known for mixing jazz with hip-hop styles, which is probably what sparked Badu's interest in recruiting him for the project. He only performs on one track, but the influence of his sound echoes throughout the album. Since the majority of the drumming on this album is based around simple R&B/funk grooves, it's not worth diving into each track individually; however, what I want to talk about is the various tones that she and Questlove were able to achieve in the recording process. There are 5 main sounds that are used: the bass drum, the ride, the hi-hat, the cross stick, and the rimshot. The bass drum, ride, and hi-hat are all self-explanatory, but the cross stick and rimshot require more explanation. Before discussing how these tones are combined to construct grooves, I'll quickly explain the cross stick and rimshot.

The first track is titled "Rim Shot - Intro" as a reference to this technique. Its importance is immense, as it supplies the "cracking whip" sound that is associated with studio-quality snare tones. It is a fundamental concept in funk, rock, punk, as well as any genre that features a prominent snare (ex: disincluding traditional jazz). The sound of the rimshot is accomplished by striking the center of the snare with the tip of the drum stick, while simultaneously striking the rim of the snare with the middle of the stick.

The cross stick is most apparent in latin styles, R&B grooves, country, and soft rock. It provides an echoey metallic tone that's perfect when playing at a lower dynamic. In R&B specifically, this tone is heard in more "laid-back" grooves that require feel over technique. If you were sitting in front of a drum set, then the cross stick would be accomplished by doing the following: turn the drum stick around and place it flat against the center of the snare. Point the butt of the drum stick at 2 o'clock and the tip at 8 o'clock, and move the tip about an inch or two onto the snare head. Lift the stick from the reversed fulcrum while laying your hand on the snare, and drop the butt of the stick onto the rim at 2 o'clock. See figures 4 and 5 for a visual reference of the rimshot and cross stick.

Figure 4

Source: George, Ezekiel. *Figure 4*. 2020. *Eezee Drumz Music*. *Facebook.* https://www.facebook.com/103858198008670/posts/rim-shot-rim-shot-is-the-stroke-method-to-hit-rim-of-the-snare-and-snare-at-the-/137495667978256/

Figure 5

Source: Harry. *Figure 5*. 2019. *Imgur*. https://imgur.com/gallery/FwepWEG

In tracks like "Rim Shot - Intro," "Apple Tree," and "Next Lifetime," the beat is played on the hi-hat with a rimshot. The tones with the two of these are incredible—the hi-hat is perfectly crisp, while the rimshot has that essential feel of a cracking whip. On the other hand, "On & On" is an example of a track that utilizes ride and cross stick. The ride sounds super dry here, occupying the eighth notes with a very subtle ping—but the cross stick is the element that steals the show. The track opens with a short bass drum intro, followed by an earth shattering cross stick on beat 4—the perfect way to introduce *Baduizm*'s cross stick for the first time. It's bathed in reverb, lengthening its tonal duration to a half-note and filling the orchestration with a warm earthiness. Some other tracks that feature this cross stick are "Other Side of the Game" and "Certainly," but the cross stick is most prominent in "On & On." The complexity of *Baduizm*'s snare tones shine on "4 Leaf Clover" and "No Love," where it's pretty much impossible to tell if the snare tone is a cross stick or a rimshot. Regardless, the overall tone is performed with unmatchable consistency and a very deep pocket.

The drum tones on this album are amazing, but they're also heavily processed. This isn't a bad thing at all, but it wasn't what I was going for with this project. Despite this, I was still aiming to have a tight snare and hi-hat sound that was somewhat inspired by Questlove. This meant tuning the snare way up to achieve a good crack on rimshots, overdubbing a completely different snare for cross sticks, and switching out my 14-inch hi-hats for miniature hi-hats consisting of two 8-inch splash cymbals. Using smaller hi-hats eliminates a lot of the sloshy sounds that are commonly heard in genres like rock, punk, and metal, providing a much crisper and tighter sound that feels more precise. The reason I decided to overdub my cross stick on the interlude for song 2 is because I wasn't satisfied with the cross stick in the original take. I dug around in the percussion room for a while and found a snare with a deeper rim, which is somewhat ideal for playing cross stick. After tuning it to an acceptable sound, we recorded a take and processed it with convolution reverb. The end result isn't nearly as impactful as "On & On," but with some more tweaking I think it can get close.

***1983* (2006)**

This brings us to Flying Lotus' debut album *1983*. This album precedes his recognition as an Afrofuturist, but this doesn't mean the album doesn't contain Afrofuturist themes. He aligns with the Afrofuturist perspective of pioneering the future, which can be examined through his genre-bending style that fuses analog and digital technology. This use of technology to advance Black art directly corresponds with the Afrofuturist notion of technology being used to advance society and Black prosperity. This analysis is very brief, as Flying Lotus incorporates loops of similar grooves. The repetition and style between songs doesn't provide a lot to analyze.

The opening track "1983" already presents familiar sounds, as he incorporates synthesizers to create a soundscape that may certainly be interpreted as a nod to Sun Ra. Most of the drumming can be described as "J Dilla beats," since J Dilla is the one who really pioneered this style of processing, sample use, and drum production. We can hear this on tracks like "Bad Actors" and "São Paulo," where dequantization provides a more human-like feel to the electronic drum production. While ideas like these may sound simple, they require disciplined timing and a solid grasp on swing. On "São Paulo" in particular, the timing required to perfectly land the final kick drum on the "a of 4" requires a strong familiarity with the instrument. Drummers aren't thinking of timing when they're playing something like this, but instead lock into the pulse to create a delayed or heavily swung feel. This is often referred to as playing "in the pocket," which usually requires all musicians precisely internalizing the pulse.

Analysis Part II - My Own Percussion

Creative Process, Recording Process, and Influences

This brings us to the analysis of our own songs, which currently consists of three full songs and two interludes. The creative process began in early June, when Evan and I began living together. We would play together casually, picking out ideas that caught our ear or provoked a noticeable reaction from either of us. This is how all of the songs for this project were created. We found that playing together allowed us to explore our interactions, inspiring different ideas from the both of us. This allowed us to lay the framework of each song with the guitar and bass, providing a structure for us to work with. Once a framework for a song was practiced to death, we'd go in and record takes at the studio. From there we could layer bass, percussion, horns, vocals, or whatever else we wanted.

Having access to the Packard studio provided us with a wealth of resources to obtain high-quality recordings. I was set up with the drum set in the live room, while Evan was in the control room with his guitar. In order to keep a consistent sound between tracks, we used the same microphones for every take. The guitar was amplified through a Fender Custom Deluxe and mic'd with a Shure SM57 and an AKG C414. I settled on using SM57s for the resonant head of the snare, the rack tom, and the floor tom. On the other hand, the batter head of the snare was recorded with a Sennheiser MD 421-II. A Shure Beta 52A was used for the kick, which is an industry standard microphone for picking up those low-frequency thumps. The last microphones we used were two overhead Schoeps Colette Series MK4, for a total of seven microphones on the drums. The bongos, cabasa, shakers, and suspended cymbal were all recorded with a C414.

Some of my influences going into this project include Yussef Dayes, Sarah Thawer, Mark Guiliana, and JD Beck. Yussef Dayes often incorporates a very fast yet precise playing style. The second track from my capstone project uses one of his songs as a reference, which will be discussed later. Mark Guiliana has been incredibly influential to me throughout college, and I've drawn a lot from him when focusing on composition. He's also influenced me to think about the intersection between composition and improvisation, which has consequently impacted the way I solo. A lot of the licks I play during my solos, especially on the hi-hat, are largely influenced by him. Sarah Thawer specializes in incorporating tabla rhythms onto the drum set. I try to incorporate some of her ideas in some of the overdubbed percussion, although quite unsuccessfully. Last, but not least, is JD Beck—the youngest drummer of the three. He's only 17 years old but has already developed an incredibly unique sound. He's one of my newest influences, and by transcripting some of his ideas I've been able to work out a lot of new licks based in linear playing. Other influences include drummers like Zach Hill, Mike Mitchell, Cleon Edwards, Elvin Jones, and more.

Before beginning the analysis, I want to stress that these tracks are not finished. This project is an ongoing endeavour, and a polished release isn't expected until late 2021 or early 2022. We anticipate adding more instruments, getting the project professionally mixed/mastered, and writing more songs if time permits. The absence of additional instrumentation also allows for a much more focused analysis on the skeletal structures that keep these pieces together. Analyzing the percussion on these tracks will help explain how I approach my instrument, while allowing me to isolate specific ideas that can be compared to the Afrofuturist ideas I've explored.

"Track One"

The original goal of the project was to create a fusion of jazz and funk, but we strayed from that overall sound early in the project. When the first track was created, we were still adhering to this theme—which is why a lot of jazz ideas are present. This track features an ABCABCAABBCD form. Much of the drum composition is traditionally jazzy, which is accomplished through a dominating ride pattern, no backbeat on the snare for the majority of the song, and the incorporation of traditional jazz licks.

The A section is in 5/8, which I internalize through the ride pattern I'm playing . The B section switches into 6/8, providing a more natural time signature. The first time through the B section I don't play a backbeat to maintain a jazzy feel, but for the rest of the song I add a backbeat to morph the feel into a slow rock shuffle. The C section returns to 5/8 with a collection of rhythmic hits that boost the intensity leading into the repeat. My dynamics deliberately crescendo throughout the course of the entire composition. The first ABC is quiet, the second is slightly louder, and the AABBC is very loud. The AA is where my solo is, which I'll talk a little bit about.

The solo is jarring at first, due to the immediate departure from the triplet based swing feel. Departing from the swing feel and playing "straight" is what makes my solo immediately stand out. Another way of describing this is that swing feel corresponds to triplets, while straight feel corresponds to basic groupings of quarter, eighth, sixteenth, and thirty-second notes. This is a common idea used by Mark Guiliana, but he's perfected this concept to a much more impressive degree. The other section that stands out is when I lower my dynamics and play on the floor tom. Lowering your dynamics in a solo is crucial for grabbing the listener's attention, especially in such a dynamic instrument like the drums. It's a classic technique in drum solos and I think it worked really well on this take.

"Track Two"

The next track's drum part was heavily inspired by Yussef Dayes. Earlier in his career, he teamed up with British keyboardist Kamaal Williams to produce the project *Black Focus* under the name Yussef Kamaal. Like I said earlier, Dayes' playing style incorporates a very fast and precise method that blends funk, jazz, electronic elements, world music, and more. The main drum part for this composition was a deliberate effort to mimic his style. While the drum part may sound more complicated than the previous track due to the speed, it's actually much simpler for a number of reasons. For one, the entire thing is in 4/4. My right hand is also simply playing straight eighth notes, so I don't need to think about my right hand at all. The somewhat difficult part is the interplay between the bass drum and the snare, as well as the accents. I'm not putting a lot of thought into it when I'm actually playing, as simply understanding where the accents are is enough to keep the main groove in reference.

The other groove I use pops up in the B section. The easiest way to describe this groove is by labeling the overall time signature in 4/4, while stating that my right foot and left hand are playing a repeating pattern in 3/16. When all of that is put together, my right hand is playing straight eighths on the ride, my left foot is playing the upbeats on the hi-hat, and my right foot and left hand are playing the pattern KLL (kick, left, left/kick, snare, snare) in 3/16. The only other noteworthy thing in this track, besides my solo, is a drop into half-time that occurs at the very end.

This solo was heavily inspired by drum and bass styles of playing, which drummers like Louis Cole, Mark Guiliana, and Jojo Mayer are all credited for pioneering. Drum and bass consists of sporadic interplay between the right hand, left hand, and right foot. In my solo, I'm mostly playing straight eighths on the hi-hat while mixing in random groupings of two consecutive sixteenth notes. A lot of drum and bass relies on playing eighth notes with the right hand on the hi-hat, while using linear sixteenth-note comping between the snare and kick drum. There's also a lot of reliance on the intensity of the kick drum, which frequently plays double strokes in this style.

"Track Three"

The final song I'll be touching on has one of my favourite drum parts, largely due to the strict drum composition and unforgiving rhythmic changes. The song is in 6/8 for its entirety, but I do a lot of things in an effort to force the listener into perceiving a different time signature. The song begins with the ride and hi-hat only—no guitar, bass, or any other instrumentation. I play two bars of 6/8 by myself, and then me and Evan enter together on the third measure. There is a little bit of metric trickery in this intro. The song is in 6/8, but I'm playing a traditional 4/4 jazz ride pattern that is interpreted as 4/8 to the uninformed. While me and Evan hear the first two bars as 12 eighth notes divided into two measures of 6/8, the listeners may hear this as 12 eighth notes divided into three measures of 4/8. Since there are no other rhythms to help conceptualize the song in 8, this tricks the listener into thinking that they are simply hearing a regular 4/4 jazz ride pattern.

There's a lot of other stuff going on throughout the song, but what I want to focus on is a familiar idea I incorporated in the B section. During this section, the song seems to abruptly switch between 6/8 and 4/4. This is accomplished through the 2:3 polyrhythm that was analyzed from *Space Is the Place*. The only difference is that in our song, the 2 is the home time signature as opposed to the 3. To clarify—in "Images" the home time signature is 4/4 and the polyrhythm suggests 6/8 over 4/4. In our track, the home time signature is 6/8 and the polyrhythm suggests 4/4 over 6/8. They are fundamentally the same concept, just applied in different contexts. I extend the 2:3 into a 4:6 polyrhythm; for every measure of 6/8, I play 4 equidistant beats. To turn this into something that sounds like it's in 4/4, all that needs to be added is an accented snare on the third beat. It's an interesting moment and you need to immediately internalize the 6/8 pulse as quarter note triplets played over 4/4, otherwise everything becomes jumbled and inaccurate. The first measure of figure 6 is the first groove played in the B section that maintains 6/8, while the second measure of figure 6 is the second groove that suggests 4/4 over 6/8. This is just a basic skeletal transcription that loosely explains what I'm playing. If this is in treble clef, then the low F is the kick, the A is the floor tom, the C is the snare, and the high G is the hi-hat.

Figure 6

Source: Thomas, Benjamin. *Figure 6.* 2021. *Groove Scribe*.

Conclusions

There are clearly a lot of similarities between my drum parts and some of the Afrofuturist music I examined. It would be fair to say that my drum parts were created with fundamental ideas that are the same in Afrofuturist percussion. This includes concepts such as playing with a swung feel, polyrhythms, tone color, and a complex application of basic rudiments. When it comes to playing swung, we see this characteristic inherited from Sun Ra's free-jazz and developed into dequantized drum programming. In my own playing, I incorporate swing throughout my tracks and solos. There is also the commonality of the 2:3 polyrhythm, as well as my own attempt to mimic Questlove's tone colors. The complex application of basic rudiments manifests itself in linear playing, which is incredibly important in funk—another rhythmic idea inherited from an Afrofuturist pioneer, Parliament Funkadelic.

After all this has been said, you may be wondering where this brings us within the discussion of defining Afrofuturist percussion. I would argue that the percussive elements that tie these three albums together are inherited from jazz-styles of playing. That being said, I don't think there is a definitive way to describe Afrofuturist percussion and drumming in general. The drumming we've heard on these albums follow the progression of drum set ideas as a whole, reflecting developments in the way the instrument is played. Based on these albums, I would argue that Afrofuturist drumming is no different from jazz, hip-hop, R&B, and funk drumming.

This is partially due to the popularity of these genres amongst Black artists, but Afrofuturist drumming will continue to be redefined as Black artists explore new genres and styles of playing.

That being said, that doesn't mean Afrofuturist aesthetics cannot be communicated sonically. Through the analysis that I have presented, it would be reasonable to conclude that Afrofuturist ideas can be communicated without a visual component. In the case of Sun Ra and Flying Lotus's music, these aesthetics are largely communicated through synthesizers. This familiar sound appearing on Flying Lotus' *1983* is what links it to its Afrofuturist roots. Sun Ra is the one that can be credited for this association, as his cheesy sci-fi synth wobbles create an extraterrestrial ambiance. His synthesizers sound heavily inspired by the effects used during the alien's arrival in the original 1951 release of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, suggesting that sonic associations of cosmic themes may derive from other forms of sci-fi media.

The free jazz elements in Sun Ra's "Space Is the Place" also present a departure from traditional Western structure, especially within the percussion. This could be interpreted as a means of Afrofuturist music creating new Black culture that is separate from European and white influence, which is a truly Afrofuturist notion. In the context of Erykah Badu, we see Afrofuturism communicated through lyricism. On the track "On & On," she says "The mothership can't save you so your ass is gon' get left," serving as a direct reference to Parliament Funkadelic (Aghoro 335). Lyrics like these may also communicate Erykah Badu's issues with Afrofuturist fantasies of liberation through intergalactic transportation. From her perspective, Afrofuturism is important as a cultural critique and alternate timeline to the African diaspora. It cannot, however, save you from the issues of systemic racism that are ingrained within society, as tackling these issues require more than commentary based in science-fiction. I would be inclined to agree, but I do not say that to diminish the importance of Afrofuturism and its commentary.

While this conclusion is satisfactory for answering my overarching questions, it introduces a new problem: if Afrofuturism is insufficient for enacting social change, then what needs to happen? This is a much more difficult question to answer, as it's fair to say that eliminating systemic racism requires eliminating the very system it exists within. This means the complete dismantling of capitalism, which has been designed as a new way to oppress Blacks. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the systemic oppression of Black people has carried on in the form of the convict leasing system, the Jim Crow laws, redlining, the "War on Crime," the "War on Drugs," mass-incarceration, and now police brutality. These structures are woven together so tightly that they've reinforced implicit racism inherited from slavery, preventing meaningful progression in the movement for liberation.

In order for these issues to be properly addressed, there needs to be an increased social consciousness on social injustice. This brings me back to Afrofuturism and its ability to properly enact social change. While Afrofuturism cannot enact social change by itself, it has the ability to raise the social consciousness on issues of systemic racism. This is not exclusive to Afrofuturist music, as all music can serve as a vessel to communicate a message. Art supplies a freedom of expression that allows marginalized individuals to voice their experience and spread messages of injustice. Kendrick Lamar is a great example of an artist who has done this successfully, as his embracement in the mainstream music scene has allowed him to appeal to masses all over the world. Perhaps the global influence of music now has the ability to inspire change in different countries, expanding the messages of the Black liberation movement into a greater fight against systems of oppression all over the world.

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