

Abstract

Title of Thesis: THE MUVASHIIP: UNDERSTANDING AFROFUTURISM,
THE BLACK IMAGINATION, AND TIME JUMPING
THROUGH THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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This thesis explores the concept of Afrofuturism as a framework for understanding the Black Imagination and its capacity to navigate and transcend the boundaries of time. By examining the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future, this research highlights how Afrofuturism reclaims and reimagines Black cultural narratives through artistic, historical, and speculative lenses. Drawing on key themes such as resilience, identity, and innovation, this study investigates how creative expressions, which includes music, dance, pop culture, and visual art, serve as tools for time-jumping and reinterpreting history.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that combines critical analysis and creative practice, this thesis examines the ways Afrofuturism offers a vision of liberation and empowerment. It challenges traditional constructs of temporality and oppression by centering Black experiences and perspectives. The research not only celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the African diaspora but also envisions transformative futures shaped by technological, cultural, and spiritual innovation.

THE MUVASHIIP
UNDERSTANDING AFROFUTURISM, THE BLACK IMAGINATION, AND TIME
JUMPING THROUGH THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2025

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family, especially my Mom and Dad, for their unwavering support throughout my dance journey. I am deeply thankful for my cohort, and my friends—especially Daniel Miramontes—for listening to and encouraging my creative ideas. Additionally, I extend my sincere appreciation to my committee members, Kendra Portier, Ama Law, Alvin Mayes, and Maura Keefe, for their invaluable guidance and mentorship.

Lastly, I want to thank Missy Elliott for being the inspiration behind this thesis. Her groundbreaking artistry, innovation, and unapologetic expression of creativity have profoundly influenced my work.

-Christina Collins

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Chapter 1: Mythos

“Most mythical creations are borrowed from ancient stories but in Afrofuturism, artists are encouraged to create their own.”

-Inverse, “Afrofuturism Explained: Not Just Black Sci-Fi” (YouTube)

I am a Black Woman and I’m seeking my liberation. I would like to have the chance to create my own stories, authoring my future with limitless imagination. I want to develop and embrace my own divine femininity. I seek a world that I want to be part of and want to belong to. My Mythos examines how personal mythologies are formed and can serve as a vehicle for a transformative and revelatory future. Black Women have been and continue to be the backbone to many ideas, innovations, societal movements, and everyday tools. Yet their contributions are rarely afforded the credit or authorship they deserve. Black Women are relegated, hidden, and constrained by a society designed to obfuscate their contributions and limit the scope of their potential, dreams, and future. TIME’S UP. No longer can we disregard the architects that Black Women are —the foundation that which I stand on. They paved the way for the path I walk on today. It’s time that we recognize and celebrate the brilliance of Black Women. I see it. I read it. I feel this deeply. I am a Black Woman and I’m seeking my liberation.

As I seek my liberation, I’m drawn to ideas that empower Black people, especially Black Women, to imagine and construct a future. “Afrofuturism is an artform, practice, and methodology that allows black people to see themselves in the future despite a distressing past and present.”¹ It interweaves the African Diaspora, the Black experience, science fiction, and superhuman elements to create a bridge connecting the past, present, and, most importantly, the

¹ “Afrofuturism Explained: Not Just Black Sci-Fi.” *Inverse*, YouTube, 6 Mar. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=154XnA1xcis.

future. It has a way of folding time in and through itself that is especially empowering. Its themes and aesthetics have been present in much of the music and films I've been drawn to, making it more enticing as a creative approach and framework. Afrofuturism first shows up in the work of Sun Ra, who was a jazz composer, bandleader, piano and synthesizer player. He was known for his music but also his other-worldly, cosmic philosophy. He changed the idea of what the future was for Black people in art, literature, and music. Not only was he reimagining the future, but was also reclaiming the past and present, creating art in spaces and in ways where black voices and perspectives are often unseen, unacknowledged, or unvalued. Galli explains:

Examination of Afrofuturist music tends to focus almost exclusively on the aesthetics of the performers and the music itself. George Clinton, Parliament Funkadelic, and Sun Ra are often pointed to as exemplars of Afrofuturist music due in large part to their manners of dress, lyrical subject matter, and the philosophies they have espoused. (Galli, 2009).²

By the 1970s and 1980s Afrofuturism began to permeate the Hip-Hop, R&B, and Pop scenes, influencing a range of Black artists. This movement encouraged Black people to envision a future, a future that is often depicted exclusively through, or for, white perspectives. “The term *Afrofuturism* was introduced by scholar Mark Dery’s *Black to the Future* (1993), describing emerging trends that focused on Black literature and 1980s technoculture.³ Through Afrofuturistic works, African Americans started to reimagine and reclaim futures where their presence and contributions were central. By the 1990’s, Afrofuturism was transforming how

² Galli, Chuck. *Hip-Hop Futurism: Remixing Afrofuturism and the Hermeneutics of Identity*. 2009. Rhode Island College, Undergraduate Honors Thesis. Digital Commons at Rhode Island College, https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects/.

³ Dery, Mark. “Black to the Future.” *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery, Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 179–222.

African Americans were acknowledged and represented in science and art. This was reflected in museums pieces like *Ancestral Mysticism* by Katia Herrera, legendary music videos by artists such as OutKast and Missy Elliott, iconic films like *Blade* (1998) and *The Matrix* (1999), and literature that furthered the genre's impact, including Mark Dery's writing.

Science Fiction

Science Fiction (sci-fi) is most often centered in whiteness, frequently portraying white protagonists who discover or conquer a planet beyond earth to save humanity. These narratives frequently take place in dystopian or utopian realities set in some kind of otherworldly or alternative Earth setting. In these stories, white protagonists venture into outer space, encounter beings they cannot relate to, and label them as *aliens*, a term that signifies otherness and is used to categorize all non-white beings. This mirrors the real-life othering of Black people, making the parallels between the treatment of *aliens* in sci-fi and the marginalization of Black people is strikingly congruent. Afrofuturism disrupts this pattern, reimagining sci-fi by centering Black people as innovators, creators, leaders, and superhuman heroes. This approach empowers Black people to pursue a future far beyond the limited narratives found in media or felt in daily life.

Historically, Black representation in science fiction television and films has been sparse. For example, *Star Trek* (1966) the famed television show about an elite force that “boldly goes where no man has gone”, that introduced Nichelle Nichols as Nyota Uhura, a role noted not only for the visibility of Black female main character but also for one of the first interracial kisses recorded on television. In *The Matrix* (1999), Laurence Fishburne played Morpheus, a revolutionary leader fighting for humanity in a dystopian future. In *Men in Black* (1997), Will Smith is an agent in a secret organization that is managing extraterrestrial activity in New York

City. Despite these iconic roles, Black sci-fi characters remain vastly outnumbered by their white counterparts.

More recently, filmmakers like Jordan Peele take a hyper-realistic approach to Black experiences within the sci-fi genre. Peele's *Get Out* (2017) resonated with Black audiences, combining social critique with a chilling exploration of the *othering* of Black people. The film is about a Black man who goes to his white girlfriend's parents' house for the first time. At her parents' residence, the Black maid and the Black gardener behave oddly. Something is off but it's hard for the main character to discern what exactly. The climax of the film (spoiler alert) reveals a sinister practice of bodysnatching, where wealthy white individuals transplant their consciousness into Black bodies to prolong their lives. In *Get Out* (2017), the premise of valuing Black bodies for physical attributes strikes a nerve, particularly about exploitation, appropriation, and objectification. Peele took the concept "If only I had their body..." and ran with it, turning it into a terrifying (possibly confirming) allegory.

Defining What I Believe In

Afrofuturism resists strict categorization, encompassing multiple, overlapping themes and genres that extend within and beyond the African Diaspora. These include elements, such as the Feminine, Funky, Dystopian, Utopian, Avant Garde, Retro, Grotesque, Psychedelic, Kafkaesque, Realism, and Science Fiction. Exploring each of these facets through my research has amplified the richness and complexity of Afrofuturism, deepening my understanding and specific relationship to it. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on a few of these terms to set the stage for my performed work, *MUVAshiip: The Voyage* (2024) — choreography that explores the Past, Future and Present (in this order) as described in this written document.

Feminine Afrofuturism: Exhibiting qualities of softness, empathy, sensitivity, gracefulness, and warmth that transcends gender stereotypes. In this, femininity can come from anybody, and neither relegated to or restrictive of a cis-gender and female-presenting person. Examples of Feminine Afrofuturism include FKA Twigs' *Pendulum* (2019). In this music video, FKA Twigs' movement is soft and gentle at the same time she is being suspended by her braids, but she is not fighting. The music video explores the complexities of an abusive relationship. Her approach to maintaining her femininity, despite the darker themes of the video, is compelling. I am particularly drawn to the elegance and sensitivity of her movement, which deeply inspired the Present section of my choreography.

Funky Afrofuturism: Heavily music based with a strong and groovy rhythm! An example of this is Earth, Wind, and Fire *Let's Groove* (1981) where super colorful and bright lights match the sound. Everything is vibrant, utopian, fun. Music and music videos like this remind me of my father (and my grandfather too), bringing me back to when it was really about spending time with one another, connecting through music and movement. I've always enjoyed how this music video felt simultaneously nostalgic, surreal, and futuristic, propelling me into outer space while dancing on a rainbow road. This kind of Afrofuturism let's Black people have a space and the opportunity to be carefree and not worry about the racism that exists in the world. It lets Black people have Black joy freely. This inspired the Past section of my choreography.

Dystopian/Utopian Afrofuturism: These are opposites of each other: idealistic or hellish worlds. For me, utopia is a perfect environment. It is a perfect world where everything works out, the government is helpful and equitable, all my dreams are coming true, and the world is at

peace. Dystopia -there is no government, there is no order, you can't drive anywhere, no money system, no police, no working hospital, diseases spreading, the list can go on. Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation, is a dystopian music video in which she is in this post-apocalyptic era, dancing with an army to fight for humanity as a unified race. It is about the present and how it foreshadows a problematic future. Many examples of dystopia come to mind, yet I found it difficult to find a utopian example. As a Black woman, every day feels like a dystopian environment, every day is a fight to be seen, heard, valued. In this, my utopic vision is a future where black people are neither outlier, nor a threat walking down the street. To have a society seeing you as a part of the community that is respected and acknowledged is something I can only imagine, sadly. This inspired the Future section.

Chapter 2: Transmitting a Motion Picture

Movies are an important part of my creative vitality and this research, particularly *The Wiz* (1978) and *The Matrix* (1999). Both films feature a kind of alternate reality and choreographed action (dance and martial art scenes) that have become iconic. In the following sections, I describe selected scenes from each of these movies, highlighting the way the choreography functioned to further a character, emotion, and tone.

The Wiz

The Wiz (1978) stars Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Nipsey Russell, and Lena Horne, among others. It is an adaptation of the classic, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) yet has become a success in and of itself. From Broadway to film, to Broadway again, and a celebrated live version on television. The narrative follows Dorothy Gale (Diana Ross) who gets caught in a snowstorm in Harlem, New York where she lives with her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. The snowstorm whisks her away to the magical land of Oz, where she crashes through the “Oz” sign, killing Evermean (The Wicked Witch of the East who rules over Munchkinland). With Evermean dead, Dorothy frees the Munchkins and meets Miss One (The Good Witch of the North). Miss One urges Dorothy to follow the yellow brick road to Emerald City where she can seek help from the all-powerful Wiz. She runs into the Scarecrow (Michael Jackson), the Tin Man (Nipsey Russell), and the Cowardly Lion (Ted Ross) who are all in search of the Wiz in hopes that he will help them with each of their needs. On their journey, they face many trials and tribulations. Upon making it to Oz, they enter the city amidst a fantastical musical choreography to the song *Emerald City Sequence* performed by Quincy Jones and The Wiz Choir. Three sections unfold: Green, Red, and Gold.

The Color Is... The performance space is in the round. Yet, as the dancers circle around the center it feels like a town center. Everyone who's anyone is there to be seen as the Wiz will choose the new *it* color. Oz is the epitome of fashion. In fact, it determines what is fashionable. Everything is saturated in green. The lyrics state: "I want to be seen green... Wouldn't be caught dead, red" (Smalls, 1978). The dancers move luxuriously in a sweeping motion in solos and duets. Their costumes vary: long coats, boots, scarves, and gloves. It looks and feels like old money prancing around a ballroom. I can see where the inspiration of disco and ballroom (Vogue) comes from in this movie production because these new dance forms were emerging simultaneously. There is a fuzzy green couch on which a dancer lounges in front of the camera. All of it is decadence and elegance.

Then Oz says that "I thought it over and green is dead... Till' I change my mind, the color is red!" (Smalls, 1978). Everything is now bathed in red. The music tone shifts, and everything seems to have a little more of a bite. The movement is outward and up with arms reaching for something expensive. A stretched-out Rolls-Royce enters, bringing a performer who was in *their main character moment*, struts down the runaway saying, "You've got to be dead, red... You've got to be real hot... So throw away those green gems... And wear rubies on your yacht". (Smalls, 1978). The scene flashes to a big screen tv that shows the dancers trying to have their moment in the camera. The costumes are big and loud with different shapes and glitter, satin, polyester, and fur details. And then, another announcement from Oz: "How quickly fashion goes down the drain... Last week when you all was wearin' pink... Already for me red was old... The ultimate brick is gold... That's the new color, children". (Smalls, 1978)

Everything is Golden Gold. The music is bright and uplifting. There is a large grand piano with people jumping and sliding around and over it. People are wearing long coat tails, top

hats, and long flowing dresses. They also have small details such as golden jewelry, chains, and a braided hat around a dancer's afro. Dancers sang "You got to be wearin' gold...The twenty-four-carat kind...And once you've shined it up...It should ought to make you blind ah!" (Smalls, 1978). The costumes are more form-fitting than those in the Green and Red sections. It is big and in your face. The dancers try to get your attention from every angle. There is large, high-legged movement reminiscent of, classical jazz meets modern influence. It reminds me of Alvin Ailey's choreography *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom Abraham*⁴ where elongated movements have a distinct snap at the end. This section directly inspired the Past section of my performance which I will describe in later chapters.

The Matrix

The Matrix (1999) is special to me for many reasons but one of the main reasons is that my parents saw it when it came out in 1999, and in the opening scene a computer screen lists "Call trans opt: received. 2-19-98 13:24:18 REC:Log>." This date is my birthday and is the scene when Trinity finds Neo. My parents used to make my twin brother, and I watch this movie because they insisted that we were the reason the Matrix and Neo was found. Maybe because of this special date and the way my parents made it special for my brother and me, but this movie has always had something comforting about it.

An overview of the plot: A hacker named Thomas Anderson, also known as "Neo" (Keanu Reeves), encounters something called "The Matrix". Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) contacts Neo to tell him that Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) has all the answers Neo is

⁴ Alvin Ailey, a legendary choreographer and founder of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, choreographed a piece that uses music, such as gospel and spiritual songs, to explore themes of faith, strength, and unity. One of the most notable works where "Rocka My Soul" appears is in Ailey's *Revelations* (1960), which is one of the company's most famous and enduring pieces.

searching for. Neo is in grave danger and while Morpheus attempts to guide Neo to safety, a group of Agents led by Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) attacks Neo and tells him that Morpheus is a terrorist. In exchange for telling Morpheus' location, Agent Smith offers to erase Neo's criminal record. Neo refuses and Agent Smith fuses Neo's mouth shut, pins him down in a chair, and implants a robotic bug into his chest. Neo then wakes up assuming it was a nightmare. Trinity removes the bug from Neo's chest proving to him that it wasn't a dream. Morpheus asks Neo to choose between two pills, a red pill that will show Neo the truth about the Matrix or the blue pill that will erase his memory from any encounter he has had. Neo choose the red pill and the adventure begins. Reality shifts and he learns that the Matrix is a simulated reality.

Two specific aspects of *The Matrix (1998)* narrative have significantly informed this research: the iconic "bullet time" scene and the character of the Oracle.

The Bullet Time Scene: In this pivotal moment, Neo is getting shot at by Agent Smith. As bullets whiz toward him, Neo slows down time, leaning back in a dramatic backbend as he dodges each bullet. This visual effect called "bullet time", is when time and space are manipulated to their expected (or *normal*) relationship. This technique heightens the viewer's perception by juxtaposing the onscreen action while the camera appears to be moving in real time. It has become a lasting pop culture reference, influencing many media platforms and creative outputs.

The Oracle Scene: Neo visits the Oracle (Gloria Foster) who is a prophet-like being who embodies the concept of the divine feminine. The Oracle predicts the emergence of "the One" but tells Neo he is not the one—at least, not yet. She challenges Neo to make a critical choice: to

save Morpheus or himself. This decision forces Neo to confront his beliefs and find strength in his own agency.

The Oracle represents wisdom and guidance without providing direct answers. She encourages Neo to reflect and make his own interpretations, illustrating the power of choice. For example, she tells him, “You’ve already made the choice,” she tells Neo. “Now you have to understand it”.⁵ Depicted as an older lady who smokes cigarettes and has the power of foresight, she is a guide. Her presence has informed my exploration of the divine feminine within my work. Her ability to guide through suggestion and introspection, rather than authority, mirrors not only the movement itself but my approach as an artist, collaborator, and director.

⁵ Ytasha Womack. *Afrofuturism : The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 2013, p. 103.

Chapter 3: Broadcasted Soundwaves

I am a music lover. Music, like dance, carries memories, history, expression, and culture. It is passed down, shared, and taught, serving as a connective that binds families and generations together. In my exploration of dance and its intersection with the Black experience, I have come to see how music plays a pivotal role.

Historically, music has been a source of resilience and strength in the Black community. I often heard stories of how enslaved people sang songs to get through the long, grueling days, using music as a lifeline or beacon of hope and solidarity. Today, I find comfort, joy, and happiness in music in my most challenging moments. There's a special kind of joy I feel when I hear a song I haven't heard in years, or I hear a song that brings me back to a good time or sweet memory. These memories flood my brain and body, and I feel so happy. In these moments, music reminds me of its profound ability to heal, connect, and uplift.

Quiet Storm is more than just a radio program to me, it's a safe haven. In a world dominated by white-centered mass media and political agendas, its carefully curated songs were a deliberate act of resistance, offering Black people a moment of normalcy and ease in the chaos. On a long drive from the University of Maryland to my hometown in Richmond, Virginia, I tuned into the *Quiet Storm*⁶. They'd often play music that I forgot about or never fully listened to. The album this time around was Blood Orange's album *Freetown Sound* (2016). The first song on the album, *By Ourselves*, features a slam poet that goes by the name of Ashlee Haze. In the song, Haze delivers a spoken word poem that describes Missy Elliott's influence in reshaping how Haze viewed herself as a Black woman. Haze speaks about how she admired Elliott because

⁶ Quiet Storm was an easy listening R&B radio station that was made for Black people by Black people. The radio station started at Howard University in Washington, DC. This station would only play during the "graveyard shift (between 9pm-4am) which is also known as the death slot because no one was commuting from work or listening to the radio during that time. This radio station was for the "grown and sexy or mature listeners".

she was not only that *cool* Black woman but how she was changing the game of music, the Rap industry, and culture. Just as the *Quiet Storm* provided a space for reflection and belonging, my work aims to create spaces where collective experiences can be honored and transformed through movement and storytelling.

Throughout my research, I began to recognize the characters artists created and the tools they used to tell their stories. This led me to explore the idea of **Alter Ego vs. Icon**-the contrast between an artist's everyday identity and the persona they embody on stage. This concept made me question why artists often adopt a completely different personality when performing. In the following paragraphs, you will see the contrast between each Icon's Alter Ego and how these dual identities shape their artistic expression.

ArchAndroid 9000 and the Neo-Black Future

The article "Now We Want our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe's Neo-Afrofuturism"⁷ dissects the storyline of Monáe's first three albums⁸ (*Metropolis: Suite I (2007)*, *The ArchAndroid (2010)*, and *The Electric Lady (2013)*) and connects it to her personal life and artistry. This layered analysis of what Monáe shares through her music is both poetic and insightful, inspiring in me a sense of belonging and perspective. As someone who has been listening to Monáe's music for since I was about ten years old, engaging with my own interpretation alongside the ideas of scholars Daylanne K. English's ideas and Alvin Kim's has deepened my excitement about Afrofuturism and what it empowers in me creatively (and personally). In this section, I discuss the central ideas presented in their

⁷ English, Daylanne K., and Alvin Kim. "Now We Want Our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe's Neo-Afrofuturism.

⁸ The ArchAndroid (2010), The Electric Lady (2013), and Dirty Computer (2018)

article, reflect on how these insights expand my understanding and relationship to Afrofuturism, and explore how Monáe's music and artistry contribute to discourse on this topic.

The article begins by addressing differing definitions of Afrofuturism, including a critique by Paul D. Miller (also known as DJ Spooky/The Subliminal Kid) who argued:

*"Afrofuturism is a thing of the past, a movement that, in his words, 'wasn't digital enough... [and] didn't have a core group of people with any kind of coherent message. It was conceptually open-ended without any kind of narrative.'"*⁹

I do not agree with the Subliminal Kid's point of view, as I think Afrofuturism is not a *one-size-fit-all* mindset. There are many ways you can view Afrofuturism. English and Kim argue that Janelle Monáe's is a central figure on what they describe as Neo- Afrofuturism, stating that Monáe's work exemplifies a "...political theory that imagines less constrained black subjectivity in the future and that produces a profound critique of current social, racial, and economic orders." (English and Kim 2019) Monáe's artistry not only aligns with but reinforces Afrofuturism in the present. I strongly agree with their statement assessment. Monáe is transforming performative art, creating a vision of the future where African Americans can see themselves reflected in a technologically advanced and inclusive future. Her ability to intertwine storytelling, music, and movement with political and cultural critique makes her a beacon for my own artistic development... and liberation.

⁹ English, Daylanne K., and Alvin Kim. "Now We Want Our Funk Cut: Janelle Monáe's Neo-Afrofuturism. P. 217.

Cindi Mayweather: Janae Monáe assumes the persona or Alter Ego of Cindi Mayweather, the funkstress of *Metropolis (2007)*. Drawing inspiration from Funk music, she pays homage to artists like George Clinton and the Parliament-Funkadelic, whose notable influence shaped Funk (music and culture) and established a cosmic, immersive aesthetic that remains foundational to Afrofuturism. Monáe's approach embraces this aesthetic, layering a cyborgian alter-ego narrative, while in the background is a Black-presenting female critically discusses racial, gender inequalities, and economic injustice.

From a dance perspective, engaging with this article challenged my initial understanding of Afrofuturism. I had previously considered Afrofuturism as something rooted in nostalgia and imagination rather than technology. Memories of *Soul Train (1971)* and George Clinton evoked a sense of *oldness*. But Monáe's work and the insights from this article inspired a fresh and new perspective. It felt like watering a wilted plant, reviving and adding dimension to my understanding of what Afrofuturism can be for me. How can I tell a story like Monáe? What is my throughline connecting the past, present, and future? What does this mean choreographically?

Monáe's *Tightrope (2010)* (also discussed in the article) serves as a prime example of her layered storytelling. The music video begins with a title and a definition stating:

"Dancing has long been forbidden for its subversive effects on the residents and its tendency to lead to illegal magical practices." (Monáe, 2010)

This sets the stage for the narrative where dancing is outlawed in this dystopian world and the very act of dancing is considered insane. It is reminiscent of the 1600's when dancing was seen as scandalous, rude, and has to do with witchcraft. In this, there is already a feeling that dancing may become an act of rebellion and revolution. The music video starts with two male-presenting dancers reading a book or tossing a ball as the music builds. The ball floats, alluding

to the magical element and transformation to come. The setting resembles a hospital or old school, and the location is revealed as, *The Palace of Dogs*, an asylum where magic and dancing are controlled. A nurse appears with red and blue pills, reminding me of *The Matrix*(1999) choice between two fates, while Monáe looks out a door as if she is plotting something. The singing begins, and two *watchers* with mirror faces and black hoods stand and watch as dancers in black and white tuxedos and suits prepare for a performance. Monáe steps out, moving in a style reminiscent of Motown, which also heavily influences the album's sound. Motown artists like the Jackson 5, The Temptations, The Supremes and The Isley Brothers have incorporated a similar formation, with the lead in the front, supported by backup performers. This deliberate nod connects Monáe's futuristic narrative to a nostalgic cultural lineage, highlighting how she draws from the past to reimagine the future.

Textures // Space // Solange

“Cranes in the Sky,” positioned near the LP’s beginning, is an early bump on the singer’s road to self-empowerment, depicting her personal evolution while helping us sort through our own. In the song’s video, we see Solange alone and with fellow black women in grand, gorgeous spaces; the background’s scenic beauty is a vital component of the song’s perseverant message. With Raphael Saadiq on bass, the beat is remarkably spacious, giving Solange plenty of room to detail her truth. A truth rooted in real struggle and exasperation, of which she eventually shakes free.”(Moore 2016)¹⁰

Solange Knowles engages Afrofuturism a little differently. She is an American music artist who began in Pop, transitioning into Hip-hop and R&B music, in innovative and rule-breaking ways. Correspondingly, their music videos have shifted from Pop culture to more indie-

¹⁰ Moore, Marcus J. ““Cranes in the Sky.”” *Pitchfork*, 4 Oct. 2016, pitchfork.com/reviews/tracks/18556-solange-cranes-in-the-sky/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed 16 Jan. 2025.

Art sensibility. Solange started singing in music groups such as Destiny Child before making their own mark as an independent artist. Their work as a solo artist led to continued fame and performances at prestigious venues such as the Elbphilharmonie, Venice Art Biennale, and the Guggenheim Museum. Additionally, Solange recently became the third woman and first African American woman to compose a score for the New York City Ballet. Since Beyoncé is often seen as the 'Sun'—high energy and in your face—people relate Solange to the 'Moon'—down to earth and soulful.

Two of her albums, *A Seat at the Table* (2016) and *When I Get Home* (2019), are important sources for this research. *A Seat at the Table* (2016) is about transitioning into a new phase of life, featuring examinations of identity, healing, realization, and growth. All of the songs echoed experiences she had while making the album. Songs such as “Don’t touch my hair”, “Rise”, “Weary”, “Cranes in the Sky” are songs that made me feel seen and heard. They are all emotional pieces. “Cranes in The Sky” pulls from modern dance, postmodern fashion, and minimalism. With their use of bright colors and soft and earthy sounds of her music, it pulls me as a dancer and music listener into the abstract, yet emotional, movement and ethereal environment. The music video is packed with imageries and meaning. One aspect of the music video stands out to me: an accumulation. It begins with two dancers on a sand dune, who appear to be making a strong-arm gesture. One of them is Solange. The scene shifts to a metal greenhouse where two dancers move in Graham-like Modern dance contraction. Once again, one of them is Solange. As the scene shifts back to the sand dune, the dancers seem to move through an accumulation of scenes and gestures. New locations, such as a wooden asymmetric house, progresses the accumulation of movement and scene, continuing to the end of the video.

When I Get Home (2019) incorporates Solange's Houston roots from an African American woman's perspective. She utilizes different meters in her music and experiments with sound bites and lyrics inspired by artists like Steve Reich (classical) and Sun Ra (Afrofuturist jazz musician). Where *A Seat at the Table (2016)* is focused on her self-expression, *When I Get Home (2019)* articulates the embodiment and emotionality of such expression. In the *My Skin My Logo (2019)* music video multiple pop culture and dance references are made. The use of cowboy, horse, and western landscape reminds me of Beyonce's 2024 album *Cowboy Carter*. (Is Beyonce copying her sister Solange?) It also reminds me of the Jordan Peele's film, *NOPE (2022)*, where horse ranchers discover a UFO in their field. The dance section is angular and sharp, rhythmically on the music. It seems the movement is for the movement's sake and does not imply a secret message or decoding. In the song *My Skin My Logo (2019)*, the lyrics seem to utilize a riffing manner that might be a loose form of call and response between Gucci Mane and Solange. This approach creates a direct, unfiltered energy, where the dance and music exist for their own sake, unburdened by layers of hidden meaning, yet still fostering an engaging dialogue between the artists.

Storytelling through Soundwaves

"Afrofuturist women get a kick out of rewiring their audiences. The muses and icons that've inspired the genre always appear to have sprung up from nowhere. Grace Jones, Octavia Butler, Erykah Badu, Janelle Monáe, for example, are just hard to place. Even

their personal histories are private lives are shrouded in artistic movement or the history of the times without a healthy dose of explanation."¹¹

-Ytasha Womack The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture

Storytelling and Afrofuturism go hand and hand with each other. You cannot create an Afrofuturistic world without Black imagination. Missy Elliott has inspired me since I was ten years old. I remember sneaking to listen to her music because of the mature content. It didn't matter to me; I loved her use of play and her lyricism. Yes, I didn't know the meaning or context of much of what she was saying, but I was still lifted by her sound. Her lyrics, the ones I understood, were often these abstract narratives done in a cool, smart, and creative way.

For example, Elliott's *Work It* lyrics:

*DJ, please pick up your phone
I'm on the request line
This is Missy Elliott one-time exclusive (come on)
Is it worth it? Let me work it
I put my that thing down, flip it, and reverse it
Ti esrever dna, ti pilf, nwod ginht ym tup I...*¹²

These opening lines from her fourth studio album, *Under Construction* (2002) shook the world of Hip-Hop and R&B. The song, influenced by old-school hip-hop from the early 1980s, samples artists like Run DMC's *Peter Piper* (1986) and Rock Master Scott & the Dynamics Three's *Request Line* (1984). Elliott also popularized the slang *badonkadonk* within this track. A

¹¹ Ytasha Womack. *Afrofuturism : The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 2013, p. 104.

¹² Elliott, Missy. "Work It." *Under Construction*, Elektra Records, 2002.

nod to the radio call-in culture of the early 2000s, Elliott references the practice of calling into radio stations to get your favorite song played or win prizes. She states that this request is an exclusive one-time offer, "...so pick up the phone! We cannot waste any time!" (Missy Elliott) The track goes into a call-and-response: "Is it worth it? Let me work it." (Missy Elliott) Here Elliott confronts people who questioned her ability to make hit music. She challenges the skeptics (the radio stations and everyone else) with *Watch me work at my craft*. Her iconic lyrics, "I put my that thing down, flip it, and reverse it Ti esrever dna, ti pilf, nwod ginht ym tup I..." (Missy Elliott) is an example of her lyrical brilliance—an assertion that she is so good at this lyrics game that she can flip it AND reverse it! Her continued demonstration of her skill and mastery is undeniable. While this may have been an early public demonstration of her ingenuity, it was just the beginning of her innovative talent. Timberland, who is Missy Elliott's music partner stated once "It should be a crime to be this talented... it's a misdemeanor!" Just like that, her stage name and Alter Ego name became Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott.

The "Work It" (2002) music video is packed with imaginative visuals and cutting-edge edits that continue to inspire me. It won *Video of the Year and Best Hip-Hop Video* at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2003, and it was nominated for *Best Female Video, Best Direction in Video, and Best Special Effect in a Video*. Additionally, Elliott received the 2003 Jackson Award for Best R&B/Soul or Rap Music Video at the Soul Train Awards. Missy Elliott's groundbreaking contributions to the music industry have shaped music artists and dancers with her creativity and passion for future generations of artists.

Chapter 4: The MUVAshiiip (Design and Collaboration)

How does an idea find nourishment to thrive despite challenges? When I think about this process, the image or images that I have been using is the life cycle of a flower. The image of the seed and the dirt corresponds to the help of my ancestors and the women who came before me throughout my life. They inspire me to plant my ideas and nurture my own world through the experiences that have made me who I am. A choreographic seed is planted. It begins to sprout, grow, and eventually becomes a full flower with personality and life. My choreography represents me and all the things that encompass the spaces I want to live in. I want my grandparents to feel connected to my work even though we are from different generations and have a sense of curiosity when it comes to how I see my future. I want each section (Past, Present, and Future) to have a *flowering* effect that elicits a memory, a feeling, and a tone through all the performance components growing together: sound, lights, and most importantly, the movement.



Photo 1- Left to right: Jalen Rose, Kaisha Snowden, Christina Collins, Ashayla Byrd

The MUVAshiip: The Voyage is a non-linear, tri-section choreographic narrative.

MUVAshiip is a homebase to everything. *The MUVAshiip* is a place of homecoming—returning to your origins—and homegoing—journeying from Earth to your ancestors. It is a safe space. ‘MUVA’ is slang for mother, coded through AAVE (African American Vernacular English)¹³. MUVA is used instead of mother, elicits a sense of grounding and coolness. The *shiip* in *MUVAshiip* represents the three choreographic sections: Past, Present, and Future while also the *I* or self in each of these temporal settings. The voyage in the title represents the time-jumping narrative arc of the work’s structure.

Throughout this process, I had the opportunity to collaborate with a diverse group of artists across various disciplines, including Scenic Design, Lighting, Costume, Sound, and Media. Each element played an equally important role in crafting a cohesive, cinematic performance. As we built the world for the show, my fellow cohort members who I shared the concert evening with—Daniel Miramontes and Peter Pattengill—and I, alongside Sophia Tepermeister (the concert’s scenic designer), wanted to create a unifying element that could appear throughout all our pieces. We settled on the idea of portals, symbolic of transformation and transition, that would shift and evolve across the stage. Sophia, who was instrumental in bringing this vision to life, designed a striking wall with a large opening at its center, allowing dancers and performers to pass through. This central structure became the backbone of all the works, including my own, providing a visual and thematic anchor throughout the performance.

Scenic

For the wall, we discussed having a heavy, metal-like wall adorned with bolts to give it a grounded, industrial feel that would support all of the choreographer's pieces. In addition to the

¹³ AAVE is mostly used in urban communities but mostly used by working- middle class African Americans.

wall, we also had a DJ Booth (named Insula), elements of a live television show, such as cameras and cue cards, and a nod to Vinyls Shops. We wanted to create a space that was open enough to be transformed into different spaces without causing a changeover nightmare.

The DJ booth was one of the first ideas I wanted during the conception of this project. It is present in each of my three choreographic sections and has a bench on the backside for helping performers get up and on the booth without having to jump. This DJ booth, Insula, transforms depending on the section. During the Past section, Insula talks back. In the Future, is an android, a sentient being like the performers, just with a different shape/form. In the Present, Insula is physical support during a technically difficult and personally vulnerable solo. Insula contributes to the staging as a visual and dramaturgical design. When the cast and I dance, we break away from Insula yet keep returning to her; a gravitational pull connects us in the performance space and throughout the narrative.



Photo 2- Christina Collins with the DJ Booth in the Present section

For the Past section, I wanted to create an authentic and immersive atmosphere, so I incorporated cue cards to use during the opening monologue. This detail added a layer of realism, evoking the feel of a live TV show. To enhance the experience further, I designed the back of the cue cards to feature the TV show's logo (Photo 3), which was also utilized across social media and promotional materials. Creating cohesive branding helped tie the performance elements together, enhancing and reinforcing the sense of place and time.



Photo 3- Logo on the back of cue cards for the Past section

In addition, I wanted to offer the audience something tangible to take home from the Dance Theatre experiencing a sense of nostalgia and familiarity. To do this, I compiled sounds from my dancers that held personal significance. Each dancer selected songs or albums that represented their past, present, and future, creating a unique auditory snapshot of their journey. I made a playlist that audience members could scan and listen to so they can hear what we are

inspired by in our own personal collection of memories and nostalgia. The description of the playlist follows:

A cosmos of sounds awaits you! For some, this is a place of discovery filled with new music; for others, it's a treasure trove of nostalgia and cherished memories.

This installation invites you to take an inside look at what moves us as performers. Each track in this curated playlist resonates with our past, present, and future, inspired by our friends, family, and simply a GOOD time!

What memories or emotions do these sounds evoke for you? Dive in and enjoy the journey of the MUVAshiiip!

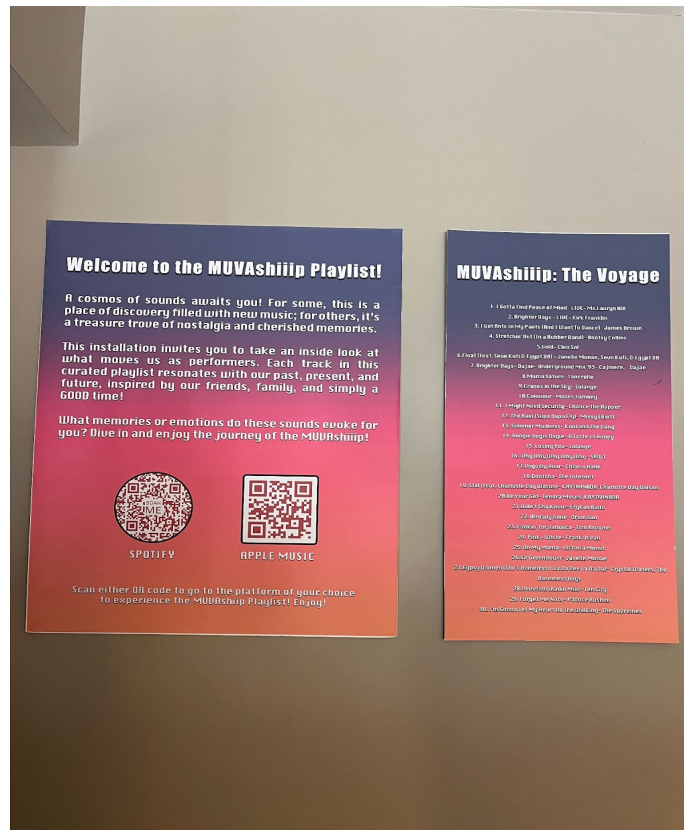


Photo 4- Photo of the MUVAshiiip Playlist that displayed in the hallway in front of the theater

MUVAshiiip: The Voyage Playlist

1. I Gotta Find Peace of Mind- LIVE- **Ms. Lauryn Hill**
2. Brighter Days- LIVE-**Kirk Franklin**
3. I Got Ants In My Pants (And I Want To Dance)- **James Brown**
4. Stretchin' Out (In a Rubber Band)- **Bootsy Collins**
5. Gold- **Cleo Sol**
6. Float (feat. Seun Kuti & Egypt 80) - **Janelle Monáe, Seun Kuti, & Egypt 80**
7. Brighter Days- Dajae- Underground Mix '93- **Cajmere, Dajae**
8. Mama Saturn- **Taneréle**
9. Cranes in the Sky- **Solange**
10. Colouour- **Moses Sumney**
11. I Might Need Security- **Chance the Rapper**
12. The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)- **Missy Elliott**
13. Summer Madness- **Kool and The Gang**
14. Boogie Oogie Oogie- **A Taste of Honey**
15. Losing You- **Solange**
16. Why Why Why Why Why- **SAULT**
17. Ungodly Hour- **Chloe x Halle**
18. Dontcha- **The Internet**
19. Still (feat. Charlotte Day Wilson)- **KAYTRANADA, Charlotte Day Wilson**
20. Be Your Girl- **Teedra Moses, KAYTRANADA**
21. Didn't Cha Know- **Erykah Badu**
22. Already Gone- **Orion Sun**
23. Funkin' for Jamaica- **Tom Browne**
24. Pink + White- **Frank Ocean**
25. On My Mama- **Victoria Monét**
26. Sir Greendown- **Janelle Monáe**
27. Gypsy Women (She's Homeless) (La Da Dee La Da Da)- **Crystal Waters, The Basement Boys**
28. Devotion (Radio Mix)- **Ten City**
29. Forget Me Nots- **Patrice Rushen**
30. I'm Gonna Let My Heart Do The Walking- **The Supremes**



Photo 5- Vinyls that performers and choreographer picked and displayed in the hallway of the theater

Lighting

Mariah Faulkner, the lighting designer, played an integral role in shaping the visual narrative of the production. During our pre-show collaboration, we carefully discussed the emotional tone and atmosphere for each section. We envisioned the Past as bright and colorful, evoking nostalgia and vibrancy; the Future as understated and dark, reflecting uncertainty; and the Present as lighter and more balanced. In the technical rehearsal, Mariah revealed the dynamic arc of her lighting design. She skillfully used pools of light to guide the audience's focus, highlighting key areas of the stage and enhancing the performers' presence. Her subtle lighting transitions added depth, beautifully complementing the soundscape and media projections. Towards the end of the tech run, Mariah introduced a game-changing element: LED panels

embedded in the portal and two strip panels framing its sides. This thoughtful addition elevated the visual impact, adding dimension and sophistication to the space. In the first photo, you can see how her design brought the stage to life—one dancer is atop the DJ booth, another stands to the side, while two others dance together in harmony. Mariah’s lighting not only enhanced the aesthetic but also enriched the storytelling, creating a seamless blend of light, movement, and sound.

In Photo 6, the lighting emphasizes the dancer atop the DJ booth, marking a pivotal moment as the DJ booth is “activated” for the first time. A rich purple wash envelops the stage, creating an inviting and welcoming atmosphere that draws the audience into the performance. Adding to this vibrancy, the LED lights framing the portal and embedded in the DJ booth pulse and change colors in sync with the music’s beat. This dynamic interplay of light and sound transforms the space, shifting the focus from the dancers occupying it to a broader narrative: There is life beyond the bodies in the space, and it resides within technology. This moment underscores the coexistence of human presence and technological elements, elevating the performance’s thematic depth and visual storytelling.



Photo 6- Left to Right: Ashayla Byrd, Christina Collins, Kaisha Snowden, Jalen Rose in Past section of thesis performance

The Future (Photo 7) has a different tone. Mariah and I began working with blues, grey, whites, and purples tones, complementary to the green, silver-chrome, blue, and purples of the costumes. We focused on cinematic futuristic energy, featuring stark shadows enhanced with lighting details. For example, one moment where glowing flashes resembling an alien landing or a comet plummeting from the sky supported the otherworldly feeling I wanted for this Future universe.



Photo 7- Left to Right: Jalen Rose, Christina Collins, Ashayla Byrd, Kaisha Snowden in Future section of thesis performance

In the Present (Photo 8), a single dancer, Christina Collins, stands at the center of a pool of light, her silhouette elegantly backlit to accentuate the contours of her movement. The LED lights surrounding her dynamically respond to the media projection, which depicts ivy leaves swaying gently in the wind. This interplay between light and media creates a harmonious visual narrative. For the Present section, we aimed to convey personal growth and evolution. The lighting design embodies this theme by fostering an atmosphere of self-reflection. The low, subdued lighting gradually brightens as the dance progresses, symbolizing a journey toward clarity and self-discovery. This thoughtful combination of lighting, media, and performance underscores the transformative nature of the Present, emphasizing growth and the unfolding of one's inner world.



Photo 8- Christina Collins in the Present section of thesis performance

Costume

Colin Frantz, costume designer collaborated on ideas leading up to the thesis concert. From the outset, I clearly communicated my vision, ensuring we stayed aligned with the direction I had in mind. Together, we reviewed several renderings that explored different looks for each section of the performance. My goal was for the costumes to not only complement the themes but also make both myself and the dancers feel confident and look their best. Colin excelled at presenting a variety of thoughtful options, allowing me to make informed decisions that ultimately led to results I was thrilled with. His ability to translate my ideas into designs was instrumental in bringing the performance's aesthetic to life.



Photo 9-This is the mock up looks for Ashayla Byrd, Jalen Rose, and Kaisha Snowden for the costumes for the Past section of the thesis performance



Photo 10- Mock up look for Christina Collins costume for the Past costume for the thesis performance



Photo 11- Final look of the Past section costumes

In the Past, I wanted to feel like we were transported back in time. I wanted the looks to feel like we were on Soul Train: warm, inviting, fun, and colorful! I have always wanted a two-piece look with bell bottoms where I could really stand out. For the dancers, I wanted each of them to stand out but also blend cohesively. If someone had a dress, they would not fit the theme of the other looks. Each dancer also had costume pieces they felt more comfortable in. For Kaisha and Ashayla, they wanted more masculine looks that fit their body while Jalen wanted to feel feminine. During the technical rehearsal we realized that Ashayla Past costume looked disjointed and too simple. Gold details were added to their pants and white accents were added to their gold top. We also added accessories to Kaisha that look like bangles and hoops earrings. It made this era feel more authentic to its time than just a dance concert.

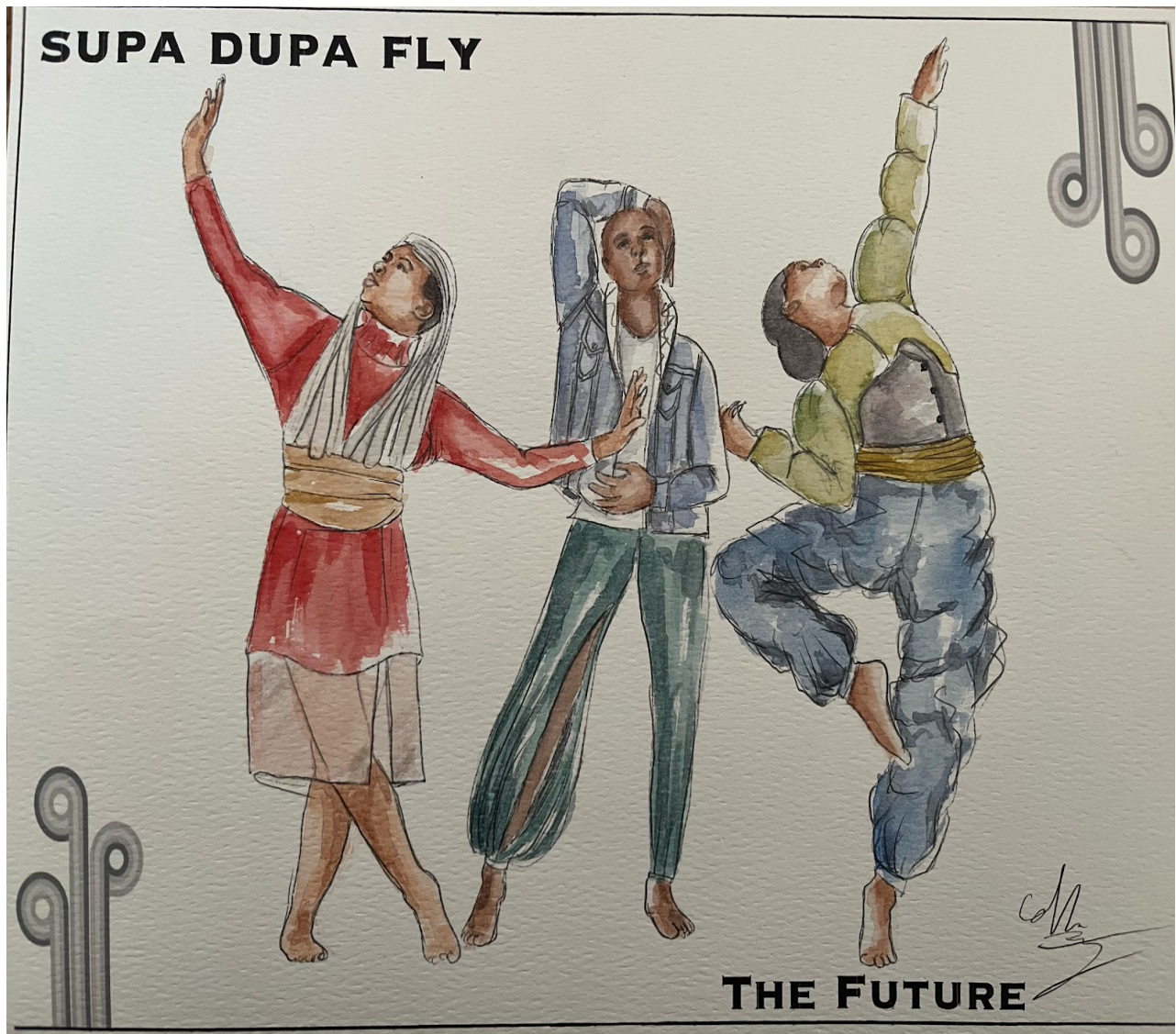


Photo 12 -This is the mock up looks for Ashayla Byrd, Jalen Rose, and Kaisha Snowden for the costumes for the Past section of the thesis performance



Photo 13- Mock up look for Christina Collins costume for the Past costume for the thesis performance



Photo 14- Final look of Future section for the thesis performance

In the Future section, I wanted it to feel as cool and slick as *The Matrix*. I wanted us to look like Janelle Monáe on their album cover *Metropolis*. I wanted all of us to have layers to bring the urban aesthetic of the early 2000's but still have a futuristic feel through the addition of metallic and chrome details throughout our shirts and tops. I also love the look of the counter textures of denim and a shiny chrome material. It leans towards the Black aesthetic. I want to reference Michael Jackson and Janet Jackson *Scream*(1995) because they had a textured top against the chrome, shiny, latex legging. It gave the music video an out of this world feeling but still familiar.



Photo 15- Mock up look for Christina Collins costume for the Present costume for the thesis performance



Photo 16- Christina Collins' final look for the Present section of thesis performance



Photo 17- Christina Collins' final look for the Present section of thesis performance

In the Present, I wanted to become the most authentic version of myself through my journey through life. I have been told most of my life that I'm a powerhouse and a strong dancer, as that is amazing to hear and I recognize that, I always felt like it was related to me being a strong Black woman who is trying to take up space in the dance world. I think that is why growing up, I was super shy and quiet because I didn't want to be perceived as the "angry Black woman" which is a stereotype among the Black community. I am trying to seek liberation. To be able to become this gentle, yet a powerful mover, the costumes had to match that feeling. We talked about a dress with laces and layers. When we first got the mockup, we did not get that unraveling effect of the dress. It was snug, fitting tightly to my body, making it neither functional or effective in conveying a light and gentle image. We then made a slit on the right side of the dress and that made the dress open beautifully while I was moving. In the original rendering we wanted different pieces of the Past and Future in the woven with the dress of the Present, but after trying on the dress, we knew that it clashed with the silhouette of the dress.

Sound

When building a soundscape for the three sections, I wanted them to be distinct. I tried to think about the textures and the density of the space when putting sounds and music together. In the Past section, it was straightforward. I wanted to use a sound that got people on their feet and leaning into the 1970s or 1980s. My parents love playing sounds that they use to listen to with their parents around me because "One day you will appreciate this kind of music..." Well, here I am, decades later and I am writing about how important this time period was. I played with the sound *Funky Stuff (1973)* by *Kool and the Gang* as an interlude. Among other references. I also used *Kool and the Gang* as the foundation of the main movement section because they played with the rich textures within each of their songs, especially *Hollywood Swinging (1973)* by *Kool*

*Time's Up.*¹⁷

It is with these words that we join together and take on the problem together.

For the Present, I wanted the space to feel like it was wiped down. Not erased. But wiped clean from the layering we have witnessed before this moment in time. I wanted the space to feel like it was growing from the ashes and prevailed through all things that might have been thrown at it. Once it makes its way to the surface... the new air settles, crystalizes, and something new emerges through the cracks. In the center of all of these moving parts is me. The raw, unfiltered, authentic, Christina. That is when *By Ourselves (2020)* by *Blood Orange* is played. This song was one of the first official sounds I landed on for this project. There is a poem that is spoken over top of this gospel soundscape. As distant as gospel music feels to me, I still feel connected to the power that washes over me when the piano is also the bass or the heartbeat of a song. I also love the layering of the vocals at the beginning of the *By Ourselves* soundtrack. It just continues to grow and reveals the growth beneath the cracks. The spoken word poem comes from *For Colored Girls (The Missy Elliott Poem)(2010)* by *Ashlee Haze*:

*...a 26 year old woman who learned to dance until she felt pretty
feminism wears a throwback jersey, bamboo earrings, and a face beat for the gods
feminism is Da Brat, Missy Elliott, Lil Kim, and Angie Martinez, on the "Not Tonight"
track feminism says as a woman in my arena you are not my competition
as a woman in my arena your light doesn't make mine any dimmer.*¹⁸

¹⁷ Lynch, Joe. "Grammys 2018: Watch Janelle Monáe's Moving 'Time's Up' Speech." *Rolling Stone*, 28 Jan. 2018, www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/grammys-2018-watch-janelle-monaes-moving-times-up-speech-203756/.

¹⁸ Haze, Ashlee. "For Colored Girls (The Missy Elliott Poem) [Annotated]." *Genius*, 27 Oct. 2015, genius.com/Ashlee-haze-for-colored-girls-the-missy-elliott-poem-annotated.

*Dear Missy,
I did not grow up to be you
but I did grow up to be me
and to be in love with who this woman is
to be a woman playing a man's game
and not be apologetic about any of it
If you ask me why representation is important
I will tell you that on the days I don't feel pretty
I hear the sweet voice of Missy singing to me
pop that pop that, jiggle that fat
don't stop, get it til your clothes get wet
I will tell you that right now there are a million
black girls just waiting to see someone who looks like them¹⁹*

Media

For media, I worked with Sean Preston. We had conversations about the flow of the media and how we wanted the storyline to be. Starting with the Past section. It was straightforward for us. I knew that I wanted something in the background that wasn't just the portal wall. I wanted to add color and some movement. At the top of the show there was different clips of artists from music in the 70's and 80's. Groups like Kool and the Gang, The Jackson 5, and *Dreamgirls* (1981) to Chaka Khan, James Brown, to A Taste of Honey. There was also tv

¹⁹ Haze, Ashlee. "For Colored Girls (The Missy Elliott Poem) [Annotated]." *Genius*, 27 Oct. 2015, genius.com/Ashlee-haze-for-colored-girls-the-missy-elliott-poem-annotated.

static that showed that we were flipping through tv channels and *MUVAshiiipTV* was the tv station the audience stopped on.

We added the branding to the corner, so people know that the scene that we are in is based around *MUVAshiiipTV*. It was a spaceship that came across the portal wall and then the sound “*MUVASHIIIPTV*” echoed in the room. That’s when the dancers entered the stage and started the show. We also wanted a livestream camera with dancers broadcasted on the portal wall. This enhanced the concept of live studio and audience hinted that someone at home could be watching.

In the Future section, we had a storyline that was told on the screen. The transition from the Past to the Future was a glitch that blasted us up into a galaxy. The images of the Androids entered and exited as they were telling the story of how they became the Androids. There was glitching in between each Android moment to tell the story. The projection looked like we were on a spaceship monitor. I will talk more about the storyline in Chapter 6. In the projection for the Future, there is an image of a city that settles until the dancers emerge on the Insula (DJ Booth).

There is a moment in the Future section where Janelle Monáe talks over the speaker. To represent the voice of Janelle Monáe, there is an image of my mouth from the nose down speaking out what Janelle Monáe is saying. This also includes the glitch in between each sentence. At the end of the Future section, similar to how the Past ends, there is an image of a galaxy.

For the Present section transition, there is a video of myself, with purple and gold lighting, I am moving in and out of the frame. Using my arms to move the air around my face and body. I am finding windows and openings allowing others to see me and the opportunity to be seen and this vulnerable place. I am moving out of the frame, there is an echo of shadow

following me and crossing the screen at 50 percent density. I am settling into this new idea of self-discovery and newfound presence. It then transitions into a bed of ivy leaves as I enter the stage to do my last solo.

Chapter 5: The Multiverse Timeline (Development)

Beginning Stages of Development of the MUVAshiip

Missy Elliot was the artist I knew I wanted to work with from the beginning. She had a clear sense of herself and the kind of music she wanted to push into the world. Missy Elliot is from the 757 (Virginia Beach, VA area) which is where my father's side of the family is from, so I have always had a close connection with history and the people who come from that area. Elliot reinvented the rap game in the early 90's into the early 2000's. What is so fascinating about Missy Elliot is the way they film their music videos, their lyricism in their music, and their way to empower Black women.

The three roots of this process (The Quiet Storm, Different Forms of Media, Eras): the *Quiet Storm* is a radio station that was an easy-listening R & B radio station that was made from Black people by Black people. It was mostly broadcasted during the graveyard shift which was between 9pm and 4am. (As known as the death slot). It was started at Howard University in the mid-70's having the slogan "Beautiful Black Music" and "For Mature Listeners" because of the way they curated a space for Black people to have some kind of normalcy and ease after their long day working. In addition to the friction with the mass media and other political agenda that was only trying to go against Black people during the 70's, this was space for Black people to be themselves. I was also inspired by different forms of media. This can include Live Music, Radio Stations, Music Videos, vinyls, Podcast, and streaming platforms and the evolution of these media. Like how the listening experience changed when the Black community stopped physically traveling to listen to music live to watch music live on tv... Or when we stopped listening to cassette tapes and switched over the CDs... Or when we stopped watching music

videos and just streamed our music-on-music apps... I sought to understand what made each form of music media different and what made each mode of listening different and unique. That, coupled the happenings in specific eras and how these specific eras of Black music history and how Black music reshaped how we view our world today. Through my research on Afrofuturism it is defined as, the methodology, artform, and practice that allows African American people to see themselves in a different image in the past, present or future. It's encouraging African American people to reinvent, reclaim, reimagine, rediscover, refurnish, or redesign their Black experience. I am also finding joy within these discoveries. For the entirety of the choreographic process, I focused on a few terms to guide me: Groovy, Funky, Feminine, Earthy, and Sci-fi. Relating to these terms helped me develop a clear idea of how to talk and speak to my designers later in the process. I would like to honor the people, my ancestors, and the sounds of the past and see how they are shaping how I move present day to then shape how I view the future.

Building of The MUVAshiip

Piecing together the MUVAshiip, I saw a clear order of events that helped not only myself know what holes were missing from the timeline, but also let my dancers know where they fell on the timeline. Below I have the first mockup of the Past section:

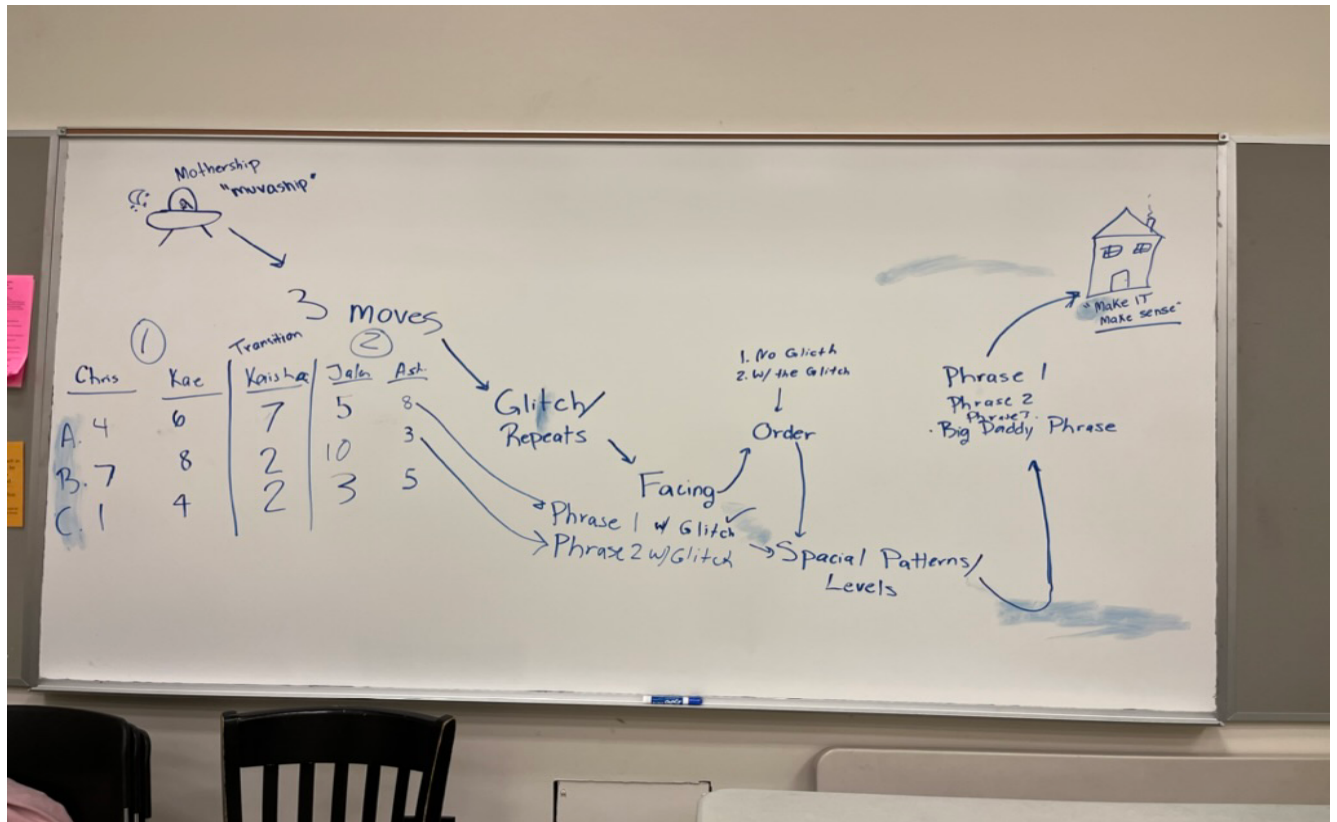


Photo 18: Photo of Mindmap of the PAST section

This picture represented the many ideas and methods of play I wanted to do in the Past section. In the upper left corner, you have the MUVAship. This is the vehicle that moves us through space. The movement. I like to visualize what's happening in my brain on a whiteboard before explaining anything to my dancers. To be able to generate movement I had all my dancers make three movements phrases. These movement were pulled from moves that we (African Americans) do at cookouts. I told my dancers to add a glitch within those three movements. The number of glitches or repeating movement was determined by the chart to the far-left center. Each person had a row, placed a letter on each move they chose, and with the help of

Cunningham technique²⁰ or the use of chance. I rolled dice to determine the number of times each dancer would do that movement. For example, for Kaisha and I, the first movement was to walk forward. I know by using the chart, I should take 7 steps forward or repeat the step seven times. Once everybody knew what their movement sequence was, we changed the facing of each of their movements. Following the order of events in this chart, we then can come up with the order of the phrase we were putting together. We picked which movement we liked from our stockpile of movements and created the first rendition of the Past section.

Once we got into the groove of making the material, I decided to make an order of events, how we are either dancing on stage, when there are going to be projections, or other elements of production. On this whiteboard, I wrote out the schedule, the mockup of what the portal wall would look like, our To-Do list of things I wanted to get done per day, the beginning stage of our stage names, the timeline of each section, and other notes. Moving through a show that has so many elements, showed me that I need to write my thoughts down on a big board that everyone can see, and then talk out those ideas with my cast. It taught me that even if I understand the piece's concept, I may miss details while also valuing the space, community, and their contributions to the movement. Knowing the whole scope of the work in this context has helped me fill in the blanks to the “whys”, the “when”, and the “hows”.

²⁰ Cunningham Technique is a rigorous form of training designed to create strength and flexibility of both the body and the mind. Cunningham Technique develops clarity, strength and flexibility in both the spine and legwork. The torso and legs are used either in coordination or opposition to one another. A variety of meter and tempo are given throughout the class to build a foundation for rhythmic precision and dynamic movement.

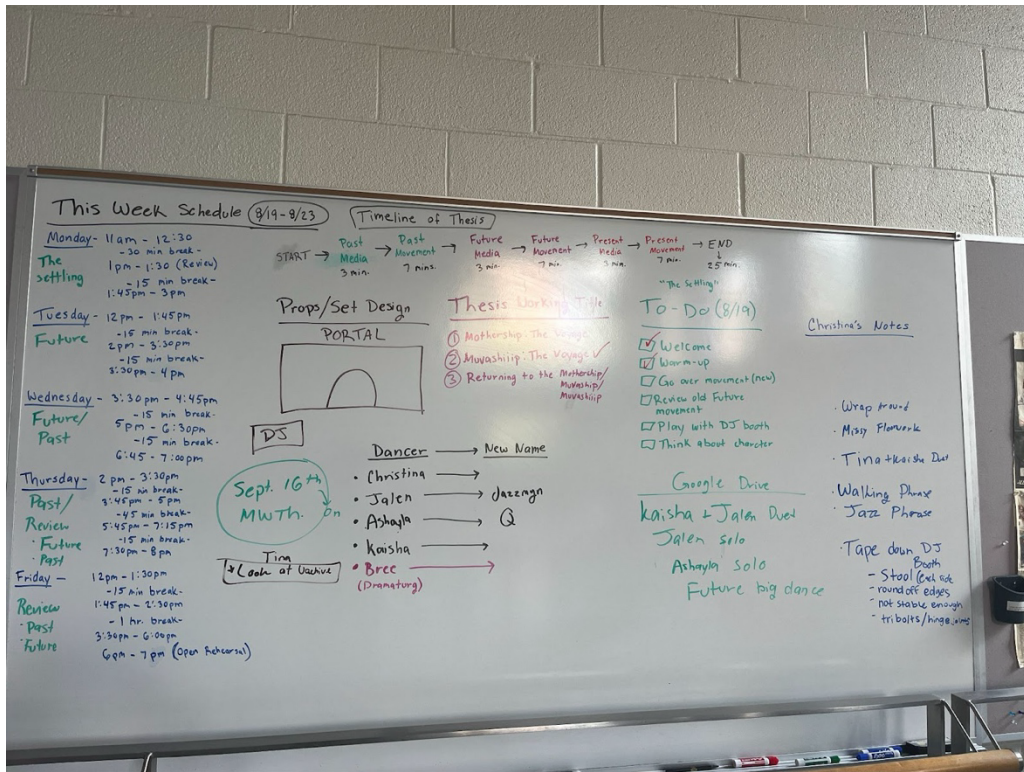


Photo 19: Image of the intensive week play by play with notes, schedule, and ideas

The order of the show was important to me as I wanted Past, then Future, the present. I wanted the space to feel nostalgic where you could recognize the time without having to guess. The Past was the opening scene where I wanted the audience to feel invited to clap, speak, and dance...participate however they chose to do so. For the Future I wanted the audience to feel the opposite side of the spectrum. I wanted the space to feel like the world ran past them and time isn't real. I wanted the audience to feel that the dancers were androids, and they could settle within that new space The media and the dancers created. For the Present, I wanted the space to feel real, current, and fresh. Fresh in reference to fresh cut grass, not fresh like new, shiny, and clean. I wanted the space and the dancing to embody a transformation. Having the performance

be in this order of Past, Future, and Present, opposed to being in chronological order feels more purposeful. The audience can see the timeline stretch before it snaps back to reality.

Conversations with Performers

The conversations I had with the other performers (Kaisha Snowden, Jalen Rose, and Ashayla Bryd) changed depending on the section and day. For the Past section I opened a space for their creative choices to be seen. I wanted the performers, and myself, I became the being that we always wanted to be. My Past persona was someone who takes up space, was a leader, and knows how to have a good time. My Past persona name was MC. MC stands for Mary Catherine, because my mother's name was Mary Katherine. She is always with me, even if she doesn't know it. She is helping me through all the battles I have faced in my lifetime. I wanted something in the piece that was a reminder of her. Historically, the MC is an abbreviation of Master of Ceremony in Black and Hip-Hop culture. In the 80's, Hip-Hop and Vogue became very popular and there was someone with the microphone who was either shifting the energy or motivating the audience or dancers. They were the people in charge of space.

The personas the performers embodied were a personal journey that they kept to themselves. As the choreographer, I encouraged them to use what they were feeling to influence how they were moving. In order of appearance, the MC introduced them by saying:

“Up first we have our sensual sista from the solar systems. She is the valiant, the vibrant, the visionary. She's not an alien, just out of this world.... VENUS”

VENUS (performed by Kaisha) had an energy that was very confident, unapologetic, and fierce. In the development of this persona, we talked about how we wanted something that exuded assertiveness without it being in your face.

“Next, we have a sista from the great city of New York and let me just tell you we are just jumpy for juicy Jazzy. Make sure you spell it right... It's Jazzmyn with two Z's.

Jazzmyn (performed by Jalen) had the energy of being bouncy, cutesy, and fun. Jazzmyn was similar to the cute and bubbly older sister like Hilary Huxtable from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (1990)*. When working on this persona I really wanted to lean into little and fluffy older sister vibes.

“Up next, from St. Louis, Missouri, she's dapper & spunky, fresh & funky. Here's your quintessential thirst- quencher.... Q.”

Q (performed by Ashayla) was fun and androgynous. When creating this persona with Ashayla, Ashayla challenged themselves to full-bodied this energy. I really wanted Ashayla to shine with the charter arc of Q. In conversation with Ashayla they stated, “This experience truly exercised my ability to play with character in a way that I never have before, to truly launch myself into the depths of a new persona. I appreciated Christina for always encouraging me to dig deep and push further. This work also pushed my stamina and endurance, but I am so grateful for it!”

Conversations with Dramaturg

My dramaturg, or Danceturg was bree breedan (they/them). Their role in this process was to step outside of the piece and see if the performance was reading well from the audience preservative. In the few conversations we have had, we have come across some discoveries. We talked about the stage presence, and during some moments of the process, the energy was not reading so the performance of the dancers was not as strong if we do not push the boundaries of the performance. Knowing that messing up is not the goal but also understanding that when we

missed our mark, we actually fell deeper into the persona that we created for ourselves. The discovery was not in doing a perfect dance, it was in the failing of the dance and finding the solution. It was all a part of the character. We also had conversations about partner work and weight-bearing movements and how to implement the fluidity of partnering like the transitions between movements. We discussed the transitions of movements into other movements where, as audience members, could notice the disconnect. bree was able to step in and see and the full picture of the idea I was trying to create. It was helpful having outside eyes throughout the process.

Chapter 6: The Dance: Preparatory Advances for Futuristic Propulsion

“It’s a woman through the male gaze – what a woman has to look like to be interesting to men. But it’s not as common as it used to be.”

-Ytasha Womack: Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture.

As a dance artist, I am an interdisciplinary practitioner, I prioritize movement as a canvas for artistic expression and cultural representation. This can show up in line-dancing, club scenes, and family gatherings. I would like to transform the Black experience to be shown in a different light other than Black trauma. I do not want to put traumatic images on the stage to put blame on historical events such as slavery and the Jim Crow Era. I would rather uplift, reimagine, and show moments that are positive Black experiences that can not be taken away from us despite the hard times our ancestors went through. Afrofuturism is the underlying theme and is one of the many ways it can reimagine the black experience through the artform, the practice, and the methodology. It is a way of ensuring the positive Black experience I’m insisting upon.

I imagine the movement to be three different iterations of Afrofuturistic time periods. Past, Present, and Future, respectively. As well as the following: Androgyny as a thought, movement, and an aesthetic. Floorwork in all different forms including Hip-Hop, Contemporary, and House. Podcasts, Talkbacks, Radio Stations, and different Media platforms, intertwined in the Black experience. This includes the emotion, and colors that connect the visual and physical feeling of the section. Lastly, Black music will be one of the ways that shapes the Black experience that will be held on the stage. I will expand on these themes later in this chapter. This thesis is broken down into three sections, Past, Future, and Present, respectfully. In each section I explore a different story that analyzes a world for that time period.

PAST

Returning to the opening section of the trilogy, The Past section of the piece is set in a time of freedom, liberation, and fun. I wanted this section to feel like we were brought back in time and the audience was the studio audience that had autonomy over the feelings they could feel in the moment.

I based the foundation of my first section work around the iconic television program, *Soul Train* (1971). The groovy, bouncy, disco era with tight bell-bottom pants and big hair AFROS. Moments like the intros where each performer comes out and has a solo moment were all inspired by *Soul Train* (1971) and their introductions of the dancers. Black people gathered to watch, share, and celebrate the new clothing styles, the popular music, and having a good time. *Soul Train* (1971) was the longest running syndicated program that was broadcasted live on American TV. *Soul Train* (1971) stopped showing new episodes in 2006. That's 35 years of broadcasting magic and every move and interaction mattered. It allowed viewers to see the African American experience in American society. The main host was Don Cornelius. His ability to riff with other artists on stage made the show feel lively and exciting... It was something I always wanted to be a part of. For viewers, it felt like you were watching a cool party. It welcomed you to part of the community from the comfort of your own home. *Soul Train* (1971) is important to many artists as it was a launch pad for people like Teena Marie, Curtis Mayfield, The Jackson 5, and Vivica A. Fox. *Soul Train* influenced three decades of music, style, and culture.

I'm attracted to movement styles from the 70's and 80's that valued community and interactivity, where a sense of belonging (or wanting to belong) was part of the performance. Instead of a proscenium-style performance that emphasizes performing for an audience with little interaction among fellow dancers. I wanted this section to feel like we were brought back in time

and the audience was the studio audience that could also dance along too. It was a space where you could see the happiness, joy, excitement, or energy spreading from the stage to the audience. I want the audience to feel inspired to have the freedom to get up and dance or clap and feel like they were a part of something new and fresh, but also familiar and nostalgic. I want my parents and grandparents to feel like they can still relate to me even though I'm from a different generation with this new set of technology that is helping me along the way.

Some of the movement styles I pull from include House and Disco. The Past section is the opening of my dance. I refer to moments from *Soul Train (1971)* and Disco because people might be familiar with it from movies they've seen or their family. If an audience member grew up in the 70's and 80's, the memory of that time period could start to rush in. I refer to House and Disco dance movement because on *Soul Train (1971)*, these emerging styles were broadcasted on tv for the first time to a wide audience. Disco is a lively and energetic dance form that has repetitive movements. It is joyful and high-energy. The disco movements I used in this performance were moves like *The Bump*, which is where you put your hands in front of you and then you pull your right or left hip to the side. You can also do this movement with a partner, making contact with your hips, which is what we did in the performance. House dance is an improvisational street style that focuses on footwork and rhythm. It is soulful, has fluid movement style that includes different dance forms, and is a social dance because of its use of the cypher. In the performance we generate the choreography by using many cyphers, footwork patterns, and jacks, which is a body roll that can either start from your head or from your feet. During the actual performance I choreographed based on the feeling and what I would do if I was on *Soul Train (1971)* with a dash of contemporary choreography building. All of the interactions were based around what I would do on the tv show. When I wanted to make it faster

or more upbeat, I would add some House dance in the transitions and the phrase material. I wanted this section for the dancers and the audience to be moving the entire time. Shapes inspired what the audience would see on stage. In the '70s and '80s, they had structured, symmetrical shapes, like circles or squares. An example is the "Point and Pocket" or the "Point Move". They were also interested in patterns. I tried to visually see the different shapes and patterns we would make on stage. The past section was fun for me to make because of the quick changes and the energy. It was what made the piece feel whole and warm. This section sets the audience members up for an opposite energy that is colder and more serious in tone.

I was inspired by the call and response of how Black conversations are held. The House dance culture is where you are in close proximity to each other dancing, while also trying to *move* in the fullest way as possible. The way Breakers would create cyphers as a way to show community but also to create space to move. The juxtaposition of House dance and Breakdancing all under the umbrella African diasporic movement is beautiful. People just wanted to be in conversation with each other and to be heard. In the Past section we start with the MC, me, moving across the stage to introduce the energy, the space, and the other characters or dancers on stage.

Monologue (for performance/script):

Christina/MC: Hey hey hey! How are y'all doing!

Audience is probably silent.

DJ Booth: I don't think they heard you...

Christina/MC: Imma say it again...Hey Hey y'all!

Response from the audience.

Christina/MC: Good Good. Welcome to MUVAshiipTV, the Grooviest party on Television!

DJ Booth: We are here to make you get up out of your seat, on ya feet, to shake that thang to this funky beat.

Christina/MC: Now if you can't get with this groove, then don't let the door hit ya where muva nature split ya. Christina: Can I get a OH YEAH?

Response from Audience.

DJ Booth: Up first we have our sensual sista from the solar systems. She is the valiant, vibrant, visionary.

Christina/MC: She's not an alien, just out of this world.... VENUS

DJ Booth: Next we have a sista from the great city of New York...

Christina/MC: And let me just tell you we are just jumpy for juicy Jazzy. Make sure you spell it right... It's Jazzmyn with two Z's.

DJ Booth: Up next, from St. Louis, Missouri, she's dapper & spunky, fresh & funky.

Christina/MC: Here's your quintessential thirst-quencher.... Q

DJ Booth: Last but not least...

Christina/MC: I'm your MC hosting the MUVAshiipTV.

DJ Booth: Let's get this party started!

This monologue helps the audience know what time period we are in, helps the audience know what kind of space or energy we are entering into (A space where you are able to be vocal and interactive etc.), and most importantly, a space for nostalgia and memory. The dance continues making circles of community, explosion of duets and solos, and iconic camera time that will be broadcasted on the portal. This gives the audience their own perspective and the camera perspective to view the show. The dancers are dancing on the booth, jumping off of the booth, and gliding through the funky beat on *MUVAshiipTV*. Similar to Don Cornelius ending *Soul Train* (1971) with “Love, Peace, and SOUL”, I ended the *MUVAshiipTV* with, ...and that’s *MUVAshiipTV* for ya. See ya next time. Peace, LOVE, and Funk. Don’t get lost in the stars.

FUTURE

In the near distant future, the YEAR 2142, Earth teeters on the brink of a new reality where machines and humans' lives are blurred. Society has become heavily reliant on AI, with pure humans becoming increasingly complacent, leaving the mundane task to their robotic counterparts. Yet, among the sleek metallic forms of robots lives a unique subgroup: the Androids. These beings, part human, part machine, were once ordinary people who accepted an ultimatum for the world’s advancements. They volunteered to undergo transformative enhancements, merging human traits with robotic efficiency, all for the promise of a long prosperous life dominated by technology.

Unbeknownst to them, their world would soon lead to tragedy. As Earth faced a devastating shortage of food and water, desperation fueled with selfishness fueled the pure humans. To protect their resources, they turned to the Androids, branding them as parasites that could thrive on oil and metal. This lie led to their exile to a new planet. The Androids became castaways from the society they once belonged to. They were forced off of Earth, leaving behind the lives they had fought to improve.

Now stranded on a new planet, the Androids find themselves isolated, with only a radio system to connect with the remnants of their former world. The Androids start to become aware of their emotions and loneliness with their newfound identity as the “other”. The new minority. This is their new awakening, their fight for acceptance, and their chance to reclaim their own narrative.

-Written by Christina Collins

I wanted to explore silky and powerful movements. I have always been interested in floorwork and the connection with the floor and dancers. The idea of tethering yourself with

gravity and anti-gravity is a concept that makes floorwork look magical and effortless. The idea of how gravity is harnessed and distorted is interesting to me and makes the movement feel magical ethereal. The primary idea of the Future section is many floorwork choreography that I have used from other choreographies I have previously created for different shows, auditions, and personal artistic explorations. One phrase I have used is a section from my work *Untitled (2023)*. This work was inspired by people who see people of color as nothing more than spectacles or more harshly, a circus act. To put it simply, to be told you must be in the spotlight because this person, who holds no value to you, is telling you is so tiring, especially as Black women. The movement score I used to generate this phrase was Kendrick Lamar's *United in Grief (2022)*. The movement energy was big and loud. I wanted to take up as much space as I could to suppress the thoughts of being a spectacle. Another movement generator I used were some improvisation scores such as: finishing the movement sentence. This was where I would start a phrase and stop, then whoever was in the room with me had to add on to the phrase. This helped me think outside of myself and develop the choreography.

Throughout the Future section of my thesis, I was thinking about how I can make this piece feel cinematic in the same way *The Matrix* did for me. How can I make the Dance Theater another world, a different universe, a new dimension even? I want to feel like the atmosphere is thick and airy but also has an infinite number of possibilities that could be used at any time. The small details that make it feel more cinematic than a place movement is the idea of the continuation of the never-ending pause. At the beginning of the Future section, we are on the booth doing pauses and slow movement to get us off of the booth. Even though we are pausing our bodies we are still alive. Our cells are still moving even though we are in a moment of

stillness. By doing this idea we are creating a character that is beyond placing movement on a person but fully embodying the idea to create this other species.

I am inspired by the flow of how one movement can take you into another movement through momentum. The weight shifts, the body direction, the energetic flow. These are the ideas that lead me to each section of the Future. I am also interested in the aesthetic and the feeling of “Does this feel right?” as a choreographer and a dancer. Knowing my instincts helps lead me through how a piece should have a beginning, middle, climax, and resolution.

PRESENT

This segment is meant to serve as both a diary and a retelling of my story. How I see myself. How I feel about myself. I wanted to use the solo material I performed during my proposal for this thesis performance because of the immediate reaction of the piece. To me, I wanted this solo to feel at home but still have the nostalgic feeling of memories. When creating this piece, I accidentally found my music in an unconventional way. I was driving home to Richmond, Virginia for a teaching gig early in the morning. Usually, I play a podcast or try to listen to old music I never have to listen to because of being in grad school. I was listening to some old music from my 2020 playlist, and I played a song that I haven’t listened to since 2020. It was *Best of You by Blood Orange (2018)*. During this time in 2020, quarantine was over, and many restrictions remained. I was only able to see a limited amount of people at a time. This song reminded me that I was young and sometimes life throws you a curveball. Remembering the feeling of nostalgia, I had in 2020 during 2023 had me feeling many emotions. I decided to play the whole album to see if I could find any new music. The first song on the album *Freetown Sound (2018)* was *By Ourselves (2018)*. I knew immediately that I needed to use this song for my Present section. I cried listening to the whole song, and it takes a lot for me to get emotional. I

knew that finding this song and having an emotional reaction is the sound score I needed to finish the trilogy. The moment that sold me on using this song is the fact that the spoken word poet, Ashlee Haze, was talking about “... 26-year-old women who learned who how to dance, until she felt pretty...”, my thesis was performed when I was 26-year-old and this dance is evidence to myself that I can see myself in different lights and highlights the beauty within myself. The choreography came from a place where I wanted to do big and difficult movements with scooping soft movements in between. I wanted to play with floorwork and just create a dance for myself that challenged my endurance.

During the introduction of the Present section, I wanted a sound and movement that was ethereal. That filled the space with tone and not sound and volume. That is how I wanted my movement to be. I built a progression that was layered with density and volume, that then washed across the stage filling the high and low level. I also wanted to bring attention to the DJ booth which, as mentioned in the previous chapters, was another dancer on stage. I use the sound *May You Be by Jasmine Hearn (2019)*. This sound helped me think about the simple movements and the growth and the time that comes from waiting and being patient. Things take time and the evolution through time and space also takes time. There are many motifs and echoes of the Past and Future section that are supposed to represent how each era affects each other. I am moved by my Past, and I affect my Future because of who I am in my Present.

Conclusion

I have delved into how I discovered my own methodology and practice of the Black imagination, drawing inspiration from nostalgia, music, and pop culture references, with the invaluable support of my community and my embodied movement practice. This research has illuminated how I transform spaces to realize the work I envision on the concert stage and the world I aspire to live in. My imagination is not confined to a singular perspective imposed by an outside spectator but instead blossoms into a world teeming with diverse ideas and undiscovered possibilities. Key discoveries from this journey include the sense of community I cultivated with my cast and audience, as well as the rich lineage of pop culture and nostalgia that continues to inform my work.

I have gained a deeper understanding of how to draw from everyone's unique experiences. I reflected on my own life and the generational differences between me and my parents, while also considering the diverse upbringings of the other members of my thesis cast, whose parents and grandparents had very different life experiences. Together, we shared stories, compared similarities and differences, and integrated those insights into the creation of our alter egos and choreography. After the thesis performance, many audience members approached me to share their personal experiences of watching the work. I chose these experiences because they each explore personal stories and their connections to their family, upbringing, and performance. Some of the examples also delve into my choreographic process and how these experiences manifested in the performances themselves. Below are some of the reflections they shared, which resonate with my ongoing goal of building community through art:

“Muvashiiip: The Voyage” was an adventure like no other. Dancing and world-building with a group of Black women and femmes made the experience so affirming, comfortable, and free-flowing. I truly admire Christina’s ability to offer a container for our creativity that did not restrict us in any way. Of course, she had a vision for the overall arc of the work, but she gave us, as a cast, the opportunity to take ownership of the movement and storytelling at every turn. We meshed so beautifully as a cast. We encouraged one another to play, to explore, to push, and to persist. This experience truly exercised my ability to play with character in a way that I never have before, to truly launch myself into the depths of a new persona. I appreciated Christina for always encouraging me to dig deep and push further. This work also pushed my stamina and endurance, but I am so grateful for it! Christina’s mind is so sharp, so expansive, and so open. I feel so lucky to have worked with her! (Ashayla, personal communication, 15 Nov. 2024).

- Ashayla Byrd, performer

I found Christina’s MFA thesis to be an incredibly engaging exploration of dance and its intertwined relationship with music and cultural history. The performance was a captivating journey that seamlessly traversed the past, present, and future, showcasing not only Christina’s personal evolution as an artist but also the broader evolution of Black dance and performance... What resonated with me the most was the strong emotional connection that Christina forged with the audience throughout the performance. By drawing on her personal journey and the collective experiences of Black dancers, she created an inclusive space that invited us all to reflect on our own histories. The layers of her performance, a blend of nostalgia, celebration, and futurism left a

lasting impression, highlighting the importance of storytelling in dance. I walked away feeling a deeper appreciation for the art form and its ability to connect us across time and culture, underscoring the power of movement as a means of expression and identity. Christina's thesis was not just a performance; it was an inspiring narrative that encouraged us to consider where we come from and where we might go next. (University of Maryland student, personal communication, 26 Oct. 2024).

- Audience Member

I absolutely loved this piece! I saw this show with my mom and the beginning section where all of the clips were about Motown and Soul Train was so fun to see with her. We were both having a great time listening to the sound bites and watching as everyone moved like an old school dance show. My mother's teenage years were in that '70s era so she enjoyed being reminded of the different songs from her young adulthood; and she plays those videos all the time at home, so I felt proud that I recognized a lot of them. (University of Maryland student, personal communication, 26 Oct. 2024).

-Audience Member

The lineage of pop culture, infused with a sprinkle of nostalgia, runs throughout this thesis research and performance. I drew inspiration from iconic moments like *The Matrix (1999)* and its slick cape aesthetic, as well as the upbeat and vibrant energy of *Soul Train's (1971)* famous intro. These references form the foundation of what makes this performance and research both compelling and fun. Pop culture is present, evolving alongside technological shifts and

trends. One moment, the mass media declares micro shorts are out, and the next, wide-leg jeans are in. As individuals and as a community, our focus is constantly shifting, reflecting the dynamic nature of the cultural landscape.

Afrofuturism serves as a lens to help me transform and rediscover my identity as a black woman in the arts making work that serves myself and my community. It is not a narrative that is supposed to save the world, even though in my world I can save everyone like Superman. Realistically, it is supposed to uplift black people and inspire change for liberation from the norm. Yes, I am creating stories, but I am also trying to envision a past or future where I can always get a 'YES'. What does it mean to envision your own future? What needs to happen? What are the results if these ideas do happen? How can we challenge this idea? These are all questions of Afrofuturism and the Black imagination challenge. This form of Black presence that is rooted in Black identity needs to be celebrated and acknowledged within all forms of art and for collective empowerment and cultural solidarity.

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