Afrofuturism is generally defined as the reimagining of black culture and history through the lens of science fiction, such as themes of advanced technology and space and time travel. Some notable examples include Octavia Butler’s time-rifting novel, Kindred, and last year’s mega-hit film, Black Panther. This talk explores a “Mundane Afrofuturist” aesthetic in contemporary hip-hop music videos in which alternate futures are represented through the movements of black bodies synchronized with musical sound. Rather than “look ahead” and wait for the future, these music videos suggest that we listen for and prepare to move with the sonics of the not-yet.

Specifically, this talk parses these concepts through analyses of Kendrick Lamar’s music video, “Alright” (2015) and Vince Staples’ “Lift Me Up.” Both music videos feature images of levitating black bodies that interpret the soars, drops, timbres, and crescendos that animate the music. In doing so, “Alright” and “Lift Me Up” present the future as a sonic event that can be heard and acted upon in the here and now. Furthermore, the videos conceive of levitation as a disruption of the “weight” that antiblackness impresses onto the black body. Drawing on the critical discourse of Frantz Fanon and Ralph Ellison, this talk examines the visuality of sound in music videos and its implications in the fields of Afrofuturism and black studies.

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