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Embodying the Divine Feminine: Doja Cat's Use of Vocal Timbre, Text, and Body in *Planet*

Her to Construct a Feminine Soundscape — Annotated Bibliography

In 2021 Doja Cat released her album *Planet Her*, an imagination of a planet where there was no bigotry, and everyone could live in peace. The main theme of her album, however, revolves around femininity and the divine feminine. This paper will examine how Doja Cat constructs these concepts through a variety of ways. This paper will use Black feminist work to position Doja Cat's work as feminist. Through the use of a variety of 'feminine' vocal timbres—both hers and from featured artists on her album—Doja Cat creates a feminine soundscape. Doja cat also embraces femininity and embodies the divine feminine through the texts of her songs and by using her and others' bodies in her music videos. By connecting these aspects of Doja Cat's music to Black feminist thought, I aim to establish *Planet Her* as a feminist album.

- (1) Balaji, Murali. "Vixen Resistin': Redefining Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Music Videos." *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 1 (September 2010): 5–20. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0021934708325377>.

Murali Balaji is a professor at University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. His work focuses on gender and sexuality, politics, international media, and race.

Balaji's article asks how Black women can take control of their image in hip hop. He grounds his argument in Black feminist thought, focusing on the work of Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins. His article positions the struggle of Black women's self-definition in hip hop and how the Black woman's body tends to be depicted in a way to objectify it. He examines different parameters for how this objectification occurs: relationship to the male artist of the video, body positioning, if body parts are emphasized, and the levels of self. He examines this specifically with Melyssa Ford and her involvement in Jadakiss' "Knock Yourself Out" and Mystikal's "Shake it Fast." He follows up his analysis of her in these videos with her own commentary about the roles she would take, sharing that she would only accept roles that did not denigrate her and if things like that would happen on set, she would make sure to have them changed. Here, Ford has taken control of her role in these hip hop music videos, giving agency back to herself in how she expresses her body. Balaji uses his analysis of music videos with Black feminist work to help position Melyssa Ford's position within feminist thought.

Balaji's article does ignore the idea that a Black woman could be the one in charge of the music video. Jadakiss and Mystikal are both male rappers who are the focal points of the video. What happens when the artist is a woman and they are the focal point of the video, they are the ones in charge?

Balaji's work will situate *Planet Her* and its portrayal of women as one of self-definition. Since Doja Cat's use of her body is for herself and other women, she is in control of how it is expressed. When male bodies do enter the scene, it is in fact Doja Cat who uses them to her own benefit, not the other way around.

- (2) Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Patricia Hill Collins is one of the founding voices in Black feminism. She is currently a Distinguished University Professor of Sociology Emerita at University of Maryland, College Park. Her works, especially this specific example, are cited by almost every other entry in this bibliography.

Black Feminist Thought defines what Black feminist thought is, first by starting off with who can be a Black feminist. This proves to be a complex task due to historical relationships between white and Black people, the relationships between genders, and the relationships between biology and ideology. Collins states that Black women are the creators of Black feminist thought, but those of other groups are able to help further its development. Collins then spends time exploring different core themes in Black feminist thought, such as the relationship between work and family, Black women and motherhood, self-definition, and sexual politics. Some of the most important aspects of this work for the proposed paper will be her discussion on sexual politics, empowerment, self-definition, and what Black feminist thought is. Collins builds her arguments and ideas around the examination of Black literature (like Toni Morrison) and critique of other Black feminists' work (Audre Lorde, bell hooks—whose name Collins always capitalizes). Collins's work will help analyze feminist themes in Doja Cat's *Planet Her*, although there are a lot of things in Doja Cat's work that Collins would disagree with. However, by using other scholars' critique of Collins, Doja Cat's work can be analyzed from multiple perspectives of Black feminism.

- (3) Durham, Aisha. "Hip Hop Feminist Media Studies." *International Journal of Africana Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 117–40. <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.du.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/hip-hop-feminist-media-studies/docview/1033735761/se-2>.

Aisha Durham is a professor in the University of South Florida's Departments of Humanities & Cultural Studies and Women's & Gender Studies. Her work focuses on hip hop feminist media studies, Black feminism, and autoethnography.

Durham's article functions as a way to define what 'hip hop feminist media studies' is, who are current scholars in this field, and how is this research conducted. She brings up the work of Joan Morgan and Patricia Hill Collins to give context to the way hip hop feminist media studies is conducted. Durham breaks down her own article into different chunks and provides examples on how to think about hip hop. This includes aspects of color, positioning of the body, how a performer might use the camera, and more. Durham also calls on researchers in this field to advocate to incite change, not just change within hip hop but also change in response to, for example, students' needs. Durham's and Balaji's works complement each other in how to approach hip hop music through the lens of feminism. Durham specifically can help understand *Planet Her* by providing ways to approach analysis to assess Doja Cat's creation of femininity and how she portrays it.

- (4) Doja Cat. *Planet Her—Deluxe*. Recorded April 2020-May 2021. Kemosabe Records/RCA Records 19439-91062-2, 2021. CD.

Besides being this album focal point of this essay, the CD version of Doja Cat's *Planet Her* provides a liner full of material in relation to the construction of femininity. The cover art for the album places Doja Cat in space in a pose that shows off her body, with light coming from

between her legs. In the liner, the first image is of her wearing an outfit that resembles the uterus. The font all over the album evokes a science fiction aesthetic. All of these aspects combine to create an Afrofuturist album, placing Doja Cat at the heart of it with her femininity. This imagery on the album cover and in the liner will already cause a listener to think about femininity before even hitting “play” on the album. Analyzing this will provide the essay with an understanding of Doja’s intention with her album and its use of femininity.

(5) Hassler-Forest, Dan. *Janelle Monáe’s Queer Afrofuturism: Defying Every Label*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022.

Dan Hassler-Forest is a professor of media and culture studies at the Utrecht Young Academy in the Netherlands. His work revolves around anti-capitalism and popular media, science fiction, and media theory.

Hassler-Forest’s book explores the persona that Janelle Monáe has created for herself as a musician and the genre that she performs in. His book explores the genre of Afrofuturism within pop music—which his analysis of Monáe can be applied to Doja Cat’s *Planet Her*. He points out the idea of creating contrasting worlds, one a utopia and one the present Earth, an idea Doja Cat explores with by stating that planet Her is a place where there is no bigotry. Hassler-Forest also explores Monáe’s acting in relation Black feminism by analyzing her movies. Again, his methods of analysis here can be applied to Doja Cat in how she constructs femininity in *Planet Her*, even with regards to her music videos. Hassler-Forest builds his work off Black feminist scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins, and the work of Afrofuturist scholars such as Ytasha Womack. He also uses the work of Cedric J. Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, who places global capitalism as the root for slavery and anti-Blackness. Hassler-Forest’s use of Robinson is to position Afrofuturism as a reaction to disenfranchisement in society, which he puts in dialogue with Womack.

(6) Hobson, Janell. “Feminists Debate Beyoncé.” In *The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race and Feminism*, edited by Adrienne Trier-Bienieck, 11-26. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016.

Janell Hobson is a professor of Women’s, Gender & Sexuality at the University of Albany. Her work focuses on multiracial and transnational feminism. She also works on histories and representations of Black women.

Beyoncé, like so many other female musicians, is difficult for feminists to pin down. Hobson points out how Beyoncé can elicit different reactions: one that defines her as a feminist who empowers women and another that argues she is not a feminist due to her alignment with patriarchal and white supremacist beauty standards. Hobson points out that there are historical implications of race in feminism, often with Black women having to fight to be included in the movement, and so in this case Beyoncé is a Black woman who is able to be a part of feminism and be a face for it. Beyoncé interacts with feminists, and responds to them in her work. Hobson points to the album *Beyoncé* which she argues takes on a feminist tone. Hobson tries to parse out where Beyoncé sits in all of this by analyzing prominent feminists works, such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. She also examines the reactions of readers to popular feminist magazines when Beyoncé is featured in them. Hobson is critical of some feminists, notably hooks who has a very negative reaction to Beyoncé’s prominence and her self-

proclamation as a feminist. Hobson says that hooks' response is extreme, especially given the language she uses to critique Beyoncé. Hobson's work will help to define Doja Cat's role as a feminist, as she and Beyoncé are both Black women who fit into patriarchal beauty standards but use their bodies to empower.

- (7) Hunter, Margaret, and Alhelí Cuenca. "Nicki Minaj and the Changing Politics of Hip-Hop: Real Blackness, Real Bodies, Real Feminism?" *Feminist Formations* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 26–46. <http://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2017.0015>.

Margaret Hunter is a professor in Santa Clara University's Department of Sociology. Her research is focused on race and gender discrimination. On top of being a professor at Santa Clara University, she is also the Strategic Advisor to the Dean for Faculty DEI Initiatives. Alhelí Cuenca is currently the Bay Area Director of Programs for the Youth Leadership Institute.

Hunter and Cuenca are addressing Nicki Minaj's interesting position as a hip hop music artist. She is an extremely popular musician whose work is conflicting to feminists: is Nicki Minaj a feminist in spite of the sexual use of her body? The article assesses several aspects of her work, including her use of body and how she uses it, her interaction with her fanbase, how she markets and sells her work (and images of her body), and her characterization of herself as Barbie. Because Minaj does not outright call herself a feminist but has shared feminist views publicly, the way her work is analyzed can be applied to Doja Cat who has also not outright called herself a feminist but does share views. Hunter and Cuenca's analysis of certain aspects can also be applied to Doja Cat, such as her interactions with fans and her use of her body. Most importantly, Hunter and Cuenca have a long discussion near the end of their article trying to define whether Nicki Minaj is feminist, an answer that is complicated as she appears to share qualities with feminism, but will sometimes act in a way that some feminists might not agree with—much like Doja Cat.

Hunter and Cuenca use the work of Murali Balaji to analyze Nicki Minaj's intentional use of hyperfemininity. They also use the work of Aisha Durham and Patricia Hill Collins to position Black feminism within changing aspects of hip hop and how Nicki Minaj positions herself in that. This same sort of analysis can be applied to Doja Cat and her work.

- (8) Kyrölä, Katariina. "Music Videos as Black Feminist Thought – From Nicki Minaj's *Anaconda* to Beyoncé's *Formation*." *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 1 no. 1 (October 2017): 08. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc.201708>.

Katariina Kyrölä is a lecturer in Gender Studies at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. She writes on topics of feminism, pornography, gender and sexuality, and race.

Kyrölä's article utilizes Patricia Collins work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Collins argues that the nature of Black feminism requires that non-academic works must also be considered theory because the Western academic tradition is built off of white patriarchy. Kyrölä then applies Black feminist thought to the music videos of Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" and Beyoncé's "Formation" since they are Black feminist theory. Kyrölä asks how these works portray empowerment and what do they contribute to Black feminist thought and how they critique it. Kyrölä also critiques Collins's approach to Black feminism as it includes sexual respectability politics. She does this by putting Collins in

dialogue with the work of Joan Morgan who critiques Collins as being too restrictive with sexuality and pleasure and offers a differing viewpoint of using sex-positive queer Black feminist politics. Kyrölä aims to bring these two viewpoints together. In comparison, Kyrölä's work can be applied to how Doja Cat uses her body in *Planet Her* to create a Black feminist work since Doja Cat uses her body for empowerment, not objectification. Kyrölä's analysis of Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" can also be placed onto Doja Cat's "Get Into It (Yuh)" due to the relationship of male and female dancing bodies in the music video; instead female bodies dance for each other, whereas the male body is objectified and used by Doja Cat to distract her enemies in the video.

(9) Malawey, Victoria. *A Blaze of Light in Every Word: Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Victoria Malawey is a professor of music theory at Macalister College, where they primarily focus on popular music, voice, timbre, gender and sexuality, and sociocultural aspects of music. They have extensive publications in Music Theory Online and in *The Journal of the Royal Music Association*.

Their book is an argument for why analyzing the voice is important and how the voice should be analyzed. Their argument is built on multiple things, but the first example is people's responses to vocal timbres and assigning identities by assessing a music game on Jimmy Fallon's *Tonight Show*. In the game, contestants sing a random, well-known song in the style of a random performer. The responses people have to contestants that do well foster the idea of the voice's importance in music since the humor comes from someone doing an imitation well. Malawey argues that the voice can convey aspects of society, gender, race, other sorts of identities. By breaking down aspects of voice into three categories that intersect: (1) pitch, (2) prosody, and (3) quality, analysis of the voice and how it represents these markers of identity can be achieved. Malawey also assesses scholars' approaches to labeling aspects of vocal timbres and the meanings associated with them to try to parse out why those meanings appear in relation to timbre. Malawey's work helps place Doja Cat's variety of vocal timbres within the three categories and assess what meanings they might carry. In the context of this paper, how Doja Cat conveys femininity and power through her use of vocal timbre.

(10) Morgan, Joan. "Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure." *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 4 (2015): 36–46. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00064246.2015.1080915>.

At the time of writing this article, Joan Morgan was a fifth-year doctoral candidate at NYU's American Studies program. Since then, she has been a journalist, author, guest lecturer, and political activist. Her work primarily focuses on feminism in hip hop. Some themes of her work deal with the hypocrisy of being a feminist while also enjoying certain aspects of patriarchal culture (such as hip hop). She also works on sexuality and pleasure within Black feminism.

Morgan focuses on Black female sexuality in her article, which she positions against the background of other prominent Black feminist theorists—specifically Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks—who Morgan says have tended to ignore pleasure and sexuality and even cast pleasure in a negative light (both queer and heteronormative). Morgan positions her work against

this backdrop, going against notions that say “black feminists need to stop talking about twerking and pleasure and turn their attention back to structural equalities” (38). Morgan argues for the importance of evaluating pleasure, the erotic, and queerness through the lens of Black feminism and to analyze how this can relate to Black women taking back power and are taking pleasure in it. Although Collins’s work is one that Morgan brings up as limiting when assessing aspects of sexuality, combining Collins’s call for assessing works outside of academia as Black feminist theory and Morgan’s work on how to incorporate aspects of pleasure and erotic into the theory allows Doja Cat’s *Planet Her* to be analyzed effectively due to the nature of showing off her body erotically and to truly understand how she empowers herself with her gender and sexuality and the fact that she takes pleasure in it. One of Doja Cat’s songs on her album, *Naked*, is also explicitly erotic, and so Morgan’s work can help in understanding it against these discussions within Black feminism.

- (11) Reid-Brinkley, Shanara. “The Essence of Res(Ex)pectability: Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism.” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8, no. 1 (2008): 236-260. <https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/essence-res-ex-pectability-black-womens/docview/196904857/se-2>.

Shanara Reid-Brinkley is an assistant professor at California State University, Fullerton and teaches in their Department of Human Communication Studies. Her concerns Black feminism, how feminism is influenced by individual backgrounds, and depictions of Black people in media.

Reid-Brinkley’s article analyzes Black women’s constructed presentations that are made in opposition to mainstream media’s depictions, with this article’s focus on rap music and music videos for rap. She also assesses responses to depictions of Black women in this type of media, specifically responses from Black women. For this, Reid-Brinkley looks at a specific example that occurred after rapper, Nelly, released a music video objectifying Black women. Students at Spelman College protested this, and the magazine *Essence* created an online forum for the public to comment on in response. Reid-Brinkley focuses on these forum posts to try to better understand how Black women try to express themselves in relation to works about Black women. Reid-Brinkley uses Collins’s notion of the “cult of true womanhood” where there is an expectation for Black women to obtain “Victorian” styles of piety and virtue to be deemed worthy of protection (245-46). This is also to avoid representing ‘the Jezebel,’ as Collins speaks about. Ideas like this are what make it difficult to define feminism in hip hop, even when it is a woman in control of the production. The proposed paper will compare the images that Doja Cat takes on to what Reid-Brinkley describes in her article to how this might be perceived by others as non-feminist due to Doja Cat’s sexual display.

- (12) Tsitsos, William. “Racial Transparency Theory Applied to Musicians who Claim to Be Aliens.” *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 1 (2014): 22-32. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/03007766.2012.730680>.

William Tsitsos is a professor in Towson University’s Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice. Tsitsos primarily works with sociological concepts with an emphasis in areas of popular culture, including music.

Tsitsos's work is a response to Ken McLeod's (2003) article "Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism, and Meaning in Popular Music." Tsitsos claims McLeod placed emphasis on musicians considered 'other' (non-white and non-hetero) and does not really consider a full range of what it means to take on an alien persona. Tsitsos constructs his argument off racial transparency theory, which is the idea that people who are white do not exist in a world that they have to consciously define through whiteness (as in they do not have to consciously think about their whiteness). White people normally think about the race of others, and when white people do think about their race, it is normally in relation to people of color. People of color, however, must always think about their identity and position in the group and are often identified by the groups they are members of. Tsitsos argues that when musicians depict themselves as alien, racial transparency is flipped: white musicians are now identifying themselves with a group whereas musicians of color are now reclaiming their individuality and expression. This paper aims to apply these ideas to aspects of gender, on top of analyzing aspects of race in *Planet Her*. Doja Cat does not outright describe herself as an alien for *Planet Her*, however, in her music video for "Need to Know" she depicts herself as a green alien with accented glossy cheekbones and red markings along her neck. She also very clearly marks herself as a cyborg in one character, and as an alien in another for the music video for the song "Get Into It (Yuh)." The album itself is also situated on an alien planet, which can lend itself to the idea of expressing Doja Cat expressing herself as a female (alien) individual against the backdrop of hip hop as that is contrary to the norm of these male dominated fields. Tsitsos's article concerns itself with musicians who are outwardly presenting themselves as alien through their dress, which Doja cat does in her music videos (with depictions of alien scenery) and in live performances. In contrast to these ideas, Theresa White and Collins argue that hip hop objectifies the female body and removes the individual from the equation. Through Tsitsos's ideas however, Doja Cat is able to reclaim control of her body through the label of alien and show off her body *as* an individual.

(13) White, Theresa Renee. "Missy 'Misdemeanor' Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin' Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?" *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (September 2013): 607–626. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24572858>.

Theresa Renee White is a professor of Pan-African Studies at California State University, Northridge. She primarily focuses on film and media through lenses of feminism, Black feminism, sexuality, and self-image/esteem. Besides research, she has also worked as Co-Director for the Civil Discourse and Social Change Initiative and is the founding faculty advisor to CSUN's student research group Creative Awareness Productions Through Universal Research and Educational Documentaries (C.A.P.T.U.R.E.D).

In her article, White examines the concept of women expressing their sexuality in the male-dominated genre of hip hop, specifically in aspects of fashion. White places two Black artists' images in dialogue with each other due to how their looks contrast with each other: Missy Elliott and Nicki Minaj. She engages these two artists with Patricia Hill Collins's works on Black feminism to address the question of whether these artists' personas are in subordination of hip hop tropes of Black women, or if they are empowering themselves in defiance of these expectations. White also analyzes Missy Elliott and Nicki Minaj through the lenses of objectification theory (which analyzes how society/media/etc. place female bodies in the position of sexual objects) and scripting theory (which in the context of Black feminism refers to how Black women's bodies are inscribed with expectations, stemming from depictions in media).

White asserts that Missy Elliott and Nicki Minaj take on two different roles in their work, Missy Elliott who uses her sexuality as power and Nicki Minaj who is a sexual entrepreneur. Missy tries to pose the idea of a hip hop world that is not male dominated through her videography by focusing on her face with interspersed scenes of choreography. Nicki's role as sexual entrepreneur is someone who takes agency in how she presents herself, taking back control of her sexual image. Doja Cat represents her sexuality textually, vocally, and visually in her album and so White's article can position *Planet Her* against other female hip hop artists doing the same.

(14) Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013.

Ytasha Womack is an independent scholar, filmmaker, and dancer. Her work centers Black voices, specifically that of Afrofuturism. She has won several awards for her work and has been invited to festivals and universities globally to lecture on topics in Afrofuturism. The publisher, Chicago Review Press, focuses on publishing marginalized stories and scholarly work.

Womack's book is the primer on the topic of Afrofuturism. She explores the genre by assessing works from a wide variety of artists and mediums and the stories they tell. This is done to place the genre's formation throughout history and to clearly denote what stories it aims to tell. Two chapters in this book are of importance for the essay, (1) "Mothership in the Key of Mars" and (2) "The Divine Feminine in Space." The first chapter assesses the history of Afrofuturist music across genres, starting with Sun Ra. The second chapter analyzes the notion of the divine feminine in the Afrofuturist genre, its connection to nature and people, and how it allows for women to have a voice. Womack asserts that Afrofuturism ties magic, science, and technology together, which allows for the divine feminine to exist next to aliens. This becomes important in assessing Doja Cat's work because not only does she embody an alien (which brings Tsitsos' article into the equation) she also embodies the divine feminine. Doja Cat links herself to the divine feminine through the first track on her album "Woman" by saying, "Mother Earth, Mother Mary rise to the top/Divine feminine, I'm feminine." Womack's work helps place Doja Cat's weaving of alien and divine feminine in dialogue with each other and also places it in dialogue with other Afrofuturist works.