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Door to the Cosmos: Afrofuturism, Hybridity and Disidentification in Mojisola Adebayo's *STARS*

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Afrofuturism is a cultural and artistic movement that envisions a radically imaginative future rooted in Afro-diasporic possibility. It often blends African aesthetics in mythology and cosmology, with speculative elements like science fiction, technology, and post-human potential. In this essay, I explore how Mojisola Adebayo's 2023 play STARS engages with hybridity and layered identities through an Afrofuturist dramaturgy grounded in mythological soundscapes, visuals, and narratives. I begin by reflecting on Afrofuturism in music and the notion of Sun Ra's song "Door of the Cosmos" (1979), which reimagines outer space as a sanctuary for Afro-diasporic wonder and resistance. I then turn to the complexities of Afrofuturistic expression within a post-colonial British context. Finally, I move on to examine Adebayo's STARS, highlighting how she engages with Disidentification (Muñoz 1999) to navigate and articulate the intricacies of Blackness.

More than life
Interested me so
That I dared to knock
At the door of the cosmos

— Sun Ra, "Door of the Cosmos" (1979)

Sun Ra and his Arkestra began to play music one day in mid-1950s Chicago. It was jazz, but not as the world knew it. It was something formless. It buzzed, spiralled, and bounced; the sound performed as its own being, seemingly bursting from the instrument's casing. As godfathers of otherworldly noisemaking, Sun Ra and his Arkestra wove intricacies of jazz with the whirl of the electro-sphere. Chicago—one of the central destinations for African Americans fleeing the South during the Great Migration—became a crucible for new artistic movements. Black communities, yearning for social reformation and solidarity, cultivated expressive forms that challenged mainstream narratives. Sun Ra and his Arkestra embodied this desire; often cloaked in sequins and flamboyant headdresses, their artistry became more than musical expression. Their sonic systems propelled listeners beyond the boundaries of human existence, transforming them into cosmic messengers. In their song "Nuclear War" (1984), SunRa chants, "they gon' blast your ass so high in the sky" if they, the government, push that button. Somehow, they found melody in friction.

Call-and-response welcomes its listeners in. It's catchy; one might find themselves nodding their head or offering a two-step clap to the swing-style beat. And before they know it, they're singing in harmony with the glistening musicians on stage—about nuclear war. Most importantly, the musicians remained radically playful. Their playground is the precarity of human experience, but more specifically, the Black human experience. In what Derek C. Maus



and James J. Donahue (2014) refer to as “post-soul satire,” Sun Ra and his Arkestra’s musical imagination extended beyond the heaviness of blues and soul. Understanding “Blackness” as a colonial term, the music of Sun Ra and his Arkestra expose the illusion of one shared language, history, and symbolism across all African Americans. These elements, fragmented and stitched together, struggled to form any universal understanding of the Blackness. Instead, their expression exploded; it was fiery, profoundly uncontrollable. What honed the mastery of their music was their sharpened incorporation of ancient African myth and cosmic narrative, embedded within a pursuit of the post-human. Offering a “Door to the Cosmos,” they believed sound could build another reality, and that’s exactly what they did; creating something liquid, alien. Decades later, Sun Ra and his Arkestra’s music, their style, and their unruly approach to art would be recognised as foundational to Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturistic arts and literature have paved ways for African American imagination; a futuristic pilgrimage, if you will. Pioneers such as singer Erykah Badu, writer Octavia E. Butler, and even Marvel’s 2018 *Black Panther* film come to mind as innovators who merge African traditional thought with elements of science fiction, technology, and cosmology. Rooted deeply in the African American experience, much of Afrofuturistic art returns to the past to reimagine it. It confronts the traumas and lingering presence of slavery, evoking a techno-spiritual realm where machine mythology, alien ancestry, and mysticism coalesce. These are stories that centre preservations of the Afro-body through evolution and ancestral re-beginnings that are both speculative and restorative. Like a cascading effect, Afrofuturism has rippled across a tapestry of forms, offering reimagination of entangled pasts while carving out visions of an Afro otherworld.

Such narratives contribute to a radical reconceptualisation of the Afro-body and Afro-spirit, one that transcends the boundaries of human codes and envisions alternative dimensions of being. The journey of Afrofuturistic vision is one rooted in futurity, refracted through a Black cultural lens, with “Black” being the operative word. Afrofuturism opens portals for Black artists to imagine futures unbound by earthly constraints. As Sun Ra famously urged, “Space is the Place,” where identity is cosmic and sound is liberation. The Afrofuturist movement worked to sling the exhausted narratives of representational Blackness in mainstream media onto its back, and instead, carve space for fractured performances of Black being that are fluid, unruly, and unbound by expectation or form.

I was fortunate enough to experience this phenomenon of unruly imagination unfold before me at a live concert in the heart of vibrant London in 2025. Still channelling Sun Ra’s spirit, over 30 years after his death in 1993, the Arkestra, still dressed in sequins and bold headwear, took to the stage as the living masters of Afrofuturistic sound. They cartwheeled across the space, shared poetry, and grooved their audience into post-human, interstellar narratives that reignited ancient African mysticism. In that moment, it became clear; the now well-established Afrofuturistic journey still pulses with the same electric vigour it held in 1950s Chicago.

But this vigour was now further complicated within the context of a culturally diverse, post-pandemic, tech-savvy London audience. For the Afrofuturistic subject, what it means to be Black, and what it means to be from the future, have been completely refigured in Britain, in relation to the genre’s African-American origin. For Black British communities, particularly composed of first- and second-generation migrants from African and Caribbean backgrounds, futurity through a Black cultural lens takes on new, layered meanings. Black British identity, shaped in a post-colonial context, often embodies a dual consciousness: a connection to both a homeland and a new land. A form of “Black-Britishness” emerges, a cultural mosaic shaped by



empire, migration, and displacement. Many Black Britons hold knowledge of their ethnic origins, fostering a sense of rootedness in a specific country or culture outside of Britain. Yet, they also linger in a space of cultural dislocation, an in-between state, inhabiting both African-Caribbean heritage and Black British experience. British Afrofuturism, shaped by diasporic consciousness, speaks from a space of multiplicity. British Afrofuturists aren't making art *about* hybridity. Rather, they reveal the artistry of hybridity itself.

Artists like theatre-maker Lula Berhane in her 2024 play *OommoO (One of Many, Many of One)*, live artist Ray Young's 2019 performance *NIGHTCLUBBING*, and curator Ekow Eshun's profound 2022 exhibition *In the Black Fantastic*, each bring alternative British perspectives to the Afrofuturist movement. It is in this hybridity, this multiplicity, that Afrofuturism finds fertile ground. This relationality of Blackness, of viewing Black identity as fluid, layered, and cosmically reconfigurable, carries a palpable sense of beyondness. It continues to buzz with the ethos of breaking convention. This perspective disperses Afrofuturist artistry into metanarratives, interlinked, interwoven, and constantly shifting - keeping the movement dynamic and responsive in the complexities of our pan-national, post-colonial era. Space, without a doubt, is *still* the place.

Mojisola Adebayo stands among the visionaries of Black-British Afrofuturism. With Yoruba-Nigerian and Danish heritage, her artistry moves beyond the confines of Black Britishness, embracing hybridity not as a limitation, but as a generative force. Her practice spans continents, not just thematically in her writing, but also through her facilitation of theatre and performance projects across the globe, from Antarctica to Brazil, Palestine, South Africa, and Malawi. Adebayo is a specialist in Theatre of the Oppressed and a close collaborator with its founder Augusto Boal. Her methodology is as hybrid as her identity. Her work blends poetic language with experimental approaches to storytelling and performance. In a euphoric expression of Afro-queer artistry, Adebayo conjures worlds of radical possibility, infused with Afro-mythology, ritual, and speculative futurism. Adebayo's 2006 play *Moj of the Antarctic: An African Odyssey*, a semi-biographical fantasy, exemplifies her unique storytelling mode. The piece transforms the theatre into a site of collision, where cosmology meets queerness, and metafiction blends with myth. Navigating metaphysical and speculative terrains, Adebayo uses performance to explore alternate realities at the intersections of the mythic, techno-cultural, and science-fictional. Her theatre enlivens a reimagination of identity.

When writing about Mojisola Adebayo, one is immediately drawn into the field of queer studies. She speaks extensively in interviews about pleasure and states of desire, becoming, and imaginative expansion, which neatly dovetail her practice into queer theoretical frameworks. This is where I see the queer dimensions of Afrofuturism most vividly. Afrofuturistic performance can be perceived not only as a practise but as a process, a kind of (dis)identificatory queering of futurity. Disidentification is a term I adopt from José Esteban Muñoz, a central figure in queer theory, and extend into the exploration of post-human futurism. Muñoz (1999) writes of disidentification as a trajectory of negotiation. For the minoritarian subject, identity is never static. It is a performance of survival, negotiating the tension between public and private selves, between desire and its expression. Disidentification occurs when someone cannot fully align with dominant ideologies because they are marginalised or excluded by them, but also cannot entirely reject them, as these ideologies shape the cultural reality they inhabit. Instead, they remix, subvert, and rework these systems, creating cultural meaning from the margins and performing identities that are complex, layered, and transformative (Muñoz 1999). To "queer" Afrofuturism, in this sense, is to enact a kind of spaciousness. It allows for post-human metaphor and myth to provide distance from



dominant structures, de-centring the human within the vastness of space and time. What might appear as an unanchored exploration of self is then deeply rooted by African cosmology which challenges the hegemonic perceptions of the racialised self. Afrofuturism finds its groundedness in the hybrid, evolving Afro-identity. It dwells on this ongoing process of becoming; a horizon of possibility and transformation.

Mojisola Adebayo's most recent play, *STARS* (2023), dives boldly into the threshold of desire and pleasure. The set, a domestic kitchen aboard a flying saucer, is overlooked by a DJ booth and framed by a galaxy of stars. Fittingly, the play opens with a song by Sun Ra—"Space Is the Place" (1973). At the centre of this one-woman story is "Mrs," an eighty-something year old Cockney Black woman, who embarks on a space-bound quest to rediscover pleasure following the death of her husband. Through multi-rolling, Mrs embodies all the characters she encounters, flowing seamlessly across time and identity. Her journey is both literal and metaphysical, a back-and-forth through memory, an ever-shifting fantasy. As Mrs traverses time and space, she revisits moments with church elders, doctors, and an old friend named Maxi—an intersex (or as she joyfully proclaims, "into-sex!") Jamaican woman. These encounters expose her to a world of sexual inquiry, challenge, and liberation. What emerges is not only a deepened understanding of pleasure and embodied desire, but also a queering of identity and temporality itself.

The audience is introduced to the voice of Maryam, an African child, and Mrs' Neighbour, who becomes a recurring storyteller throughout the play. Onto the set is projected an animated retelling of the Dogon myth of the Nommos: amphibious beings said to be "migrants from across the cosmos, sailing the sky to planet Earth, descendants from a star" (Adebayo 2023, 29). British record producer Lil Silva's pulsing Afro-techno track *Bouramsy* (2013) plays as Maryam and Mrs narrate the Nommos' arrival from Sirius B; the star known to the Dogon people long before it was officially documented by Western astronomers. A scene with Maryam and Mrs explores the Dogon tale, where prehuman mythology is positioned not as primitive folklore, but as a sophisticated cosmological system that predates and arguably anticipates modern science. For the Dogon people, the Nommos represent a moral and spiritual origin for human life, but for the audience of *STARS*, they become a symbol of ancestral knowledge reclaimed and futuristically reimagined:

Mrs: It seems these Africans were intergalactic!

Maryam: The Dogon knew all about Sirius

Mrs: How could that be...?

Maryam: We told you! We were told by...?

Mrs: the Nommos! Extraterrestrial Afro-hermaphrodite anthro-amphibian migrants!

Maryam: Both male and

Mrs: female.

Maryam: Of land and

Mrs: of sea.

Maryam: Like humans and

Mrs: fish!

Maryam: With feet and

Mrs: fins!

Maryam: Scales and

Mrs: skin.

Maryam: Ancestor aliens!

(Adebayo 2023, 33)



Meshed with ritual that deeply resonates with the spiritual practices of the Dogon people, *STARS* renders the Black, elderly, queer body as interstellar, playful, and radically free. This mythological entry point positions *STARS* firmly within Afrofuturism's metaphysical branch, as Adebayo blends the human, the techno, and the spiritual into a hybrid cosmology. Between the Nommos, the young girl Maryam, and the elder Mrs. Adebayo crafts a speculative future that dwells in the disparate intimacies of the in-between. Through these intersecting figures, she explores the body as a site of transformation and myth, propelled into orbit by the presence of the Nommo: the androgynous, anthro-amphibian space travellers. With humour and critical depth, Adebayo interrogates Western conceptions of humanity, reframing the human through African epistemologies and post-humanist inquiry. The play provokes the notion of a cyclical, non-linear structure and reflects a philosophy of time that resists the colonial imposition of linear history. Instead, it lingers in what Adebayo has elsewhere described as the "floatiness" of space and time, a liminal dimension in which identity is always in motion, never fixed. In this fusion of myth, memory, and speculative science, *STARS* propels identity into orbit, allowing hybridity to flourish precisely in its displacement from the present. It is in this displacement that the Afro-body becomes not only post-human, but cosmically reimagined. For the Afrofuturistic artist, paradox becomes a portal; a tool that enhances the multiplicity of the body. In defiance of linear temporality, Adebayo reshapes performance into a space where the body evolves into an atomised yet amalgamate figure, an entity suspended in intergalactic existence.

What fuels this ontological debate in understanding identity is the general notion of the body being culturally intelligible. As explored by Spackman (2001), politics inherited in the display of the body are generated "in the eye-mind of the spectator [and] cannot escape the throes of representation any more than other sites of discourse, but is instead 'always already' written by culture" (9). Embedding this concept of spectatorship, the Afrofuturistic body can be understood as a dynamic site of the dialogue between African and European discourses of the body and its position in identity politics. This is particularly lively in the imaginings of the posthuman figure, where the Afrofuturist body tends to become intimately tied with the metaphysics of African spirituality and philosophy. In doing so, the performance materialises as a ritual of transformation and becoming. The body innately becomes hybrid, in a postcolonial sense, initiating a journey of reforming identity within the ethereal yet familiar "other" that is present in the knowledge of both African tradition and modernity.

This reimagining of the Afrofuturistic body becomes especially significant when the audience learn that Maryam is a survivor of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a brutal practice of cutting or sewing the clitoris. The inclusion of this reality, which disproportionately affects women in African countries like Mali, confronts the narrative of the play with cruel violence historically enacted on Black female bodies. But it also speaks metaphorically. It speaks of the denial of pleasure, the disciplining of desire, the forced disconnection from self.

Every atom of your body
Was once part of a star.
Part of a star...
Part of a star...
An atom is the smallest matter
That 'cannot be cut.'
Cannot be cut.
Can never be cut
To the stars you must return,



Maryam,
To the stars you must return...
(Mojisola Adebayo 2023, 35)

Returning to José Esteban Muñoz's work, Maryam's revelation considers the act of survival in the form of Disidentification, the queer strategy of resisting dominant cultural codes. Through the queering of dimensions, Adebayo challenges the image of Black feminine sexuality as it has been commodified and distorted under the Western patriarchal gaze. In post-human landscapes, a new, multiversal space emerges in which Black femininity and pleasure can be reimagined beyond inherited constraints. This speculative realm is not only resistant, but radically generative. It repositions the dialectic between body and pleasure within an Africanist future, invoking the figure of Nommo, the mystical, poly-gendered, amphibian ancestor, as a symbolic rebellion against the colonial constructions of gender and sexuality. In doing so, *STARS* reclaims and preserves the Black body, not through realism, but through an otherworldly vision that expands what it means to be alive. Adebayo stages the endurance of Black femininity not through assimilation or victimhood, but through transformation. It is a prominent, and equally sobering example of refuge in the metaphysical Other, where the Afrofuturistic body becomes a celebration of hybrid being; fluid, cosmic, and fiercely (dis)human.

It is through the mystical Other that the liveliness of hybrid being begins to emerge, and where the Disidentification from bounded, humanist codes becomes possible. In embodying this Otherworldly form, the Black body transforms into a reflective surface, an inward site of cultural reckoning that deepens the dialogue between body and self. As Womack (2013) asserts, "Afrofuturism is a free space for women, a door ajar, arms wide open, a literal and figurative space for Black women to be themselves" (101). This space of Otherness, liberated from the rigidities of humanist logic, acts as a sanctuary where the Black body can be radically projected into futures untethered by colonial constructs of race, gender, or identity. In removing the human from the body, Afrofuturism opens a portal for bold reinvention. The Otherworld becomes a safe haven for Black imagination, a place where one can "dig behind the societal reminders of Blackness and womanhood to express a deeper identity and then use this discovery to define Blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier in whatever form their imagination allows" (Womack 2013, 101). Within the essence of this Afrofuturistic body, one can begin to witness the undoing disidentification of the always already written body, the political inscriptions inherited from cultural history. Amidst the precarity of it all, the Afrofuturistic form makes space for mystical evolutions. Here, the body becomes a site of transformation.

Dramaturgically too, the invocation of Nommo, enriches the Afrofuturistic texture of *STARS*, challenging colonial binaries between the spiritual and the technological. These mythic threads do more than ornament the stage; they decolonise the dramaturgy itself. For Black British diasporic audiences, such acts of retelling and re-rooting African folklore reclaim cultural memory by transforming storytelling into a powerful form of postcolonial activism. In this way, Afrofuturism (re)validates traditional mythology as a foundational source of identity and self-making. This dramaturgical strategy of techno-ritualistic storytelling reignites the essence of hybridity, not only by honouring oral storytelling as theatrical spectacle, but also as a ritual of manifestation.

Ultimately, *STARS* subverts Western notions of linear progress by returning us to a "distant past where community and cosmos merged" (Amankulor 1989, 57). In this inversion,



ritual does not oppose futurity, it is futurity. In crafting new imaginaries where Black identity thrives in spectral, cosmic, and liberated dimensions, the process of queering dimension becomes significant when exploring how the manifestation of the Afro-futuristic beings speaks directly to de-colonial possibilities in theatre. In this version of Afrofuturism, the goal isn't utopia. It isn't orgasmic climax. It is the in-between; a liminal dimension of becoming. Adebayo's work embraces this threshold space: a speculative, otherworldly zone where desire and self meet, tangle, and negotiate their relationship with the present. In this process, Adebayo's theatre craft, through the lens of Afrofuturism, queers the boundaries of space, time and body to transcend beyond a mere representational mode of Black British artistry. Instead, it moves towards a narrative space of hybrid and overlapped identity.

Through a metaphoric afterlife shaped by mysticism and multiplicity, the heart of *STARS* lies in its fusion of the spiritual and the avant-garde. It blurs the boundaries between ritual and stagecraft, creating a cosmically resonant aesthetic that embodies the essence of a hybrid Afro-future. It dissolves the limits of humanist codes of body and being. It interrogates the politics of pleasure and our (dis)connection from it. Through a deeply embodied, metaphysical practice, the storytelling ritual becomes more than performance; it is an act of decolonial dreaming. By decentring the human, *STARS* invites us into an ethereal alternative dimension where hybrid identities can thrive. In this case, the process of Disidentification (Muñoz 1999) is not only engaged with, but evolves as Adebayo negotiates overlapping planes of space and time, bridging African ancestral thought with futuristic imaginings to envisage alternative dimensions that prompt reflections and redefinitions on the complexities of Blackness. Within this journey, between dark matter, black holes, and the edge of the abyss, Adebayo suggests something profound; shapeshifting is already on the horizon. And this shapeshift is ignited, at least in the theatre, where spectators are guided towards a more fluid chain of knowledge and invited to contemplate the possibilities of hybridity; a journey soulfully, viscerally enriched by Afrofuturism.

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REBECCA KIBUUKA was born in 2001, raised in East London, and shaped by a vibrant, culturally rich environment. In 2024, Rebecca graduated with a First Class degree in Drama and Theatre Arts from the University of Birmingham. During her time at university, Rebecca brought her ideas to life through several exciting projects, including a live art adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* and a performance art piece titled *You Can't Tell Me I'm Human in Space*. These works reflect Rebecca's ongoing exploration of how performance can challenge, transform, and envision new possibilities for the future.