Theory and practice.

Art and commentary.

Fable and biography.

Janelle Monáe’s *Metropolis Suite*, a collection of three albums, rejects false dichotomies, and exists comfortably within each, embracing multifaceted modes of communication and artistry.

Monáe is an artist/mogul from Kansas City, Kansas, who has become a sensation with her radical work and distinctive music, which clearly articulates a politic of liberation through the epistemology of Black Feminism.

To someone (like myself) who had listened to Monáe for years, but never had formal education in Black Feminism, the syntax and vocbaulary of the above sentence can be daunting. As a newcomer, Monáe’s work served as a point of reference for me while reading, understanding and formalizing the politics of Black Feminism.

Her *Metropolis Suite* can be read like a syllabus, a supremely accessible jumping off point, from which to gain the common-sense intuition behind theoretical works in Black Feminism.

Underneath each brief description of the themes in Monáe’s work are links to further readings on the topic by phenomenal Black Feminist authors, academics and artists, in academic articles, short videos and anonymous blog posts.

Monáe’s first album in the suite, “The Chase Suite” centers on the plight of a Female Android (Cindi Mayweather) who has fallen in love with a human (Anthony Greendown), which is a crime in the dystopian world of *Metropolis*. To learn about this history of violence predicated on the intersection of sexual identity and race, check out [this work by Parker Marie Molloy](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2015/02/13/while_the_media_focuses_on_leelah_alcorn_murders_of_trans_women_of_color.html).

Monáe’s representation of black folk as androids is central and pervasive. Just like our society creates robots (or androids) to serve capitalistic systems, our society similarly constructs systems of enslavement and racism that are inherently motivated by profit and power. To learn about this argument, and how capitalism is still predicated on the suppression of black folk, read [this insightful piece](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kirsten-west-savali/you-cant-have-capitalism-_b_5809628.html) by Kirsten West Savali.

Monáe’s choice of title and imagery is evocative of Fritz Lang’s Weimar classic by the same name, which is a radical film about the manipulation of the proletariat (in part) by a mechanical woman. Unlike Lang’s work, Monae centers the Android Woman, a choice that is indicative of the centering of Black Women (and their standpoint) as a means of securing freedom for the masses. To learn about how the liberation of Black Women is central to the liberation of all check out this scholarly [article by Kimberlee Crenshaw](http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf).

Monáe talks about how smiling is a way to save yourself, how the projection of positivity is able to save her life from the many forces which seek to destroy her and her protagonist. Scholars would term this within the culture of dissemblance (coined by Darlene Clark Hine), a quick discription of what that means can be found in this [short anonymous post](https://blacknotwhitedippedinchocolate.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/culture-of-dissemblance/).

Monáe’s work points out how the sanity of Black Women is consistently in question, particularly when they are pushing back against micro-agressions and seemingly innocuous instances of racism. A work that documents the connection between these infractions and response to them is Claudia Rankine’s Citizen, [a superb work of multimedia poetry](http://claudiarankine.com/) (click on the Situations link).

Monáe questions impartiality (do you know who *you* are fighting for?). To read about how bystanding perpetuates racial violence, check out [this article by Eric Anthony Grollman](https://egrollman.com/2013/02/27/bystander-intervention-racism/).

Finally, Monáe discusses domestic violence with a nuance that is rare. For a more challenging and supremely insightful read on the nature of love and relationships is bell hook’s [All About Love: New Visions](http://www.amazon.com/All-About-Love-New-Visions/dp/0060959479), which discusses love with an expressly Black Feminist lens.

Monáe’s work is distinctly intersectional (meaning contextualized by a matrix of identity, rather than via additive ‘but for’ framework, an idea which is summarized for an introductory audience by [this article by Jarune Uwujaren](http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/01/why-our-feminism-must-be-intersectional/).

Finally, before you go read these amazing articles and books, watch the music video for Q.U.E.E.N. (by Monáe and Erykah Badu) [below](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEddixS-UoU).

In it, you can so clearly see the artistry, the activism, the passion, the politics, all with Monáe’s distinct style.

I encourage you to learn from Monáe’s ability to translate between academic and everyday language, and use her work as a jumping off point to the incredible thinkers, scholars and artists who are making social change through a Black Feminist lens.