



SHORT EYES (DIRECTED BY ROBERT M. YOUNG, 1972, HARRIS/FOX PRODUCTION, CURTOM FILMS), FRAME GRAB.



(Don't Worry) If There's a Hell Below: Curtis Mayfield, Cinematic Sounding, and Cultural Memory

NICHOLAS FORSTER

In 1977, readers of *Billboard* magazine were extended an invitation by Curtom Records. An independent record label founded by soul artist Curtis Mayfield, Curtom urged readers to "Let Curtis take you to the movies!" The one-page advertisement was fairly sparse, with little text beyond that emphatic solicitation, which leveraged the power of a star's celebrity to mediate the space between a soundtrack, a magazine reader, and the movie theater. Against a solid red background, the ad featured an image of Mayfield's recently released LP, *Short Eyes*, accompanied by two yellow movie tickets on the verge of falling out of an envelope. With the title "SHORT EYES" stamped on each ticket to the Warner Theater, it was clear that Mayfield was to be a tour guide for a trip to the movies: to buy the album was to take a ticket

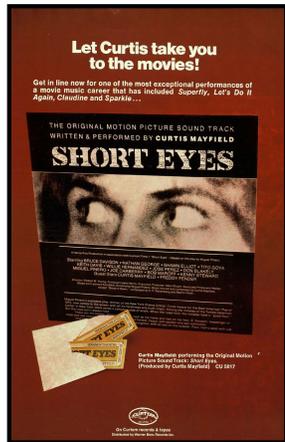
and gain access into a community of viewers/listeners. The advertisement implied that the community was housed in a theater named for one of the major motion picture studios of the classical era (Warner Bros.) Left with more than a stub, viewers/listeners would hear the music of the film and encounter a multiply-authored conjuring of the past as the needle glided in the grooves of the record. The music was a part of the cinema, and the cinematic form was foundational to the music. No mere marrying of sound track and film, this was an event to participate in: the advertisement implored readers to "[g]et in line now for one of the most exceptional performances of a movie music career" (my emphasis). *Short Eyes*, the LP, was Mayfield's sixth soundtrack in a decade filled with cinematic work, including the soundtrack for *Superfly* (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972). Only two years

earlier, he had written the wildly popular title song for the comedy *Let's Do It Again* (Sidney Poitier, 1975). As *Ebony* would write, Mayfield was "as at home in front of a 72-piece film orchestra as he [was] with a six-piece jazz combo." However, the bridge between the revolutionary Mayfield and the capital-driven, multi-national film and music industries was complicated.

Short Eyes (Robert M. Young, 1977) was Mayfield's latest film score, but it was also the second feature film in which he made an appearance as a facsimile of himself. In *Superfly* Mayfield appeared for mere moments in a club, playing along with the film's soundtrack. In *Short Eyes* he was embedded in the story. Not only, as the magazine suggested, would Curtis take readers to the movies, but the reader-turned-listener/viewer would be brought

to hear and see Curtis himself. The ticket, the album, and the film each relied on the multiple personas of Mayfield. Seeing Mayfield was also hearing Mayfield. This doubleness, shuddering between Mayfield as character and Mayfield as guide-performer, was part of a broader series of cultural productions, which, though imbricated in the industrial systems of record labels and movie studios, also spoke against such corporate formations. The direct address of the advertisement is one of many utterances constituting a counterpublic of soul that Mayfield had been contributing to for over a decade.

First coined by Nancy Fraser and perhaps most famously elaborated by Michael Warner, the notion of a counterpublic points to those discursive spaces in which a collectivity is formed primarily



through modes of sociality and shared rhetoric that would otherwise be excluded from what is considered public space. The concept of a counterpublic puts pressure on the supposed divisions between private and public spheres, as these divisions are often frayed if not altogether dissolved for people who exist within a state of surveillance and exclusion, visible but rarely seen. As Fraser writes in an oft-quoted overview, counterpublics have a two-fold structure: “on the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training

(LEFT) FIGURE 1:
Custom Records inviting the readers to be accompanied by Curtis Mayfield on a trip to the movies. *Billboard*, October 22, 1977. 59. Courtesy of Rhino Entertainment Company, a Warner Music Group Company.

grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”⁷³

It may seem odd or strange to suggest that an advertisement in a trade publication meant for those in the music industry signals a counterpublic organized around soul. In the 1960s, at its most

**“THE MUSIC WAS
A PART OF THE
CINEMA, AND
THE CINEMATIC
FORM WAS
FOUNDATIONAL
TO THE MUSIC.”**



politically resonant and commercially successful, soul was, as Nathan L. Grant claims, “the raw material for a new cultural revolution.”⁷⁴ As a mode of music or a mode of being, soul emphasizes collective possibility through a singularly empowered voice that shapes a shared intimacy between many. Such intimacy may be the foundation of agitational activity; such collectivity may be

the basis for remaking a rhetoric of revolution. It is the very circulation of non-private experience (even if delivered by privatized corporations) that structures the formation and subsistence of a counterpublic.

Michael Warner emphasizes the importance of the strange, and of the stranger, in his theorization of counterpublics, writing, “counterpublics incorporate the

personal/impersonal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as conditions of

(ABOVE) FIGURE 2:
Curtis Mayfield performing in a staged concert meant for both the viewers of the film and the characters in *Superfly* (Directed by Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972, Warner Bros.), frame grab.

their common world.”⁵ Warner continues, insisting that “even the counterpublics that challenge modernity’s social hierarchy of faculties do so by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation

“FOR ALMOST FIFTEEN SECONDS, COOKE, WITHOUT HESITATION, MELODIOUSLY HUMMED.”

and stranger sociability.”⁶ Eschewing the empirical fastening and authority that pollsters claim for data, Warner is quick to highlight that publics are not based solely on co-presence, personal identity, or the shared experience of an event. Historically contingent and difficult to explicate, the development and reflexive use of a specific discourse remains at the foundation of the formation of a (counter)public. Mayfield’s audience is part of the counterpublic announced by soul, a counterpublic that overlaps with but is not necessarily a black counterpublic.⁷ The mobilization of rhetoric and the twining of the word are critical components of that counterpublic. Perhaps soul’s sculpting of the word is best heard in a question posed to Sam Cooke by the radio DJ Nathanael “Magnificent” Montague in 1963. After explaining his own difficulties in describing soul with words, Montague

asked Cooke to hum eight bars of what soul represented. For almost fifteen seconds, Cooke, without hesitation, melodiously hummed.

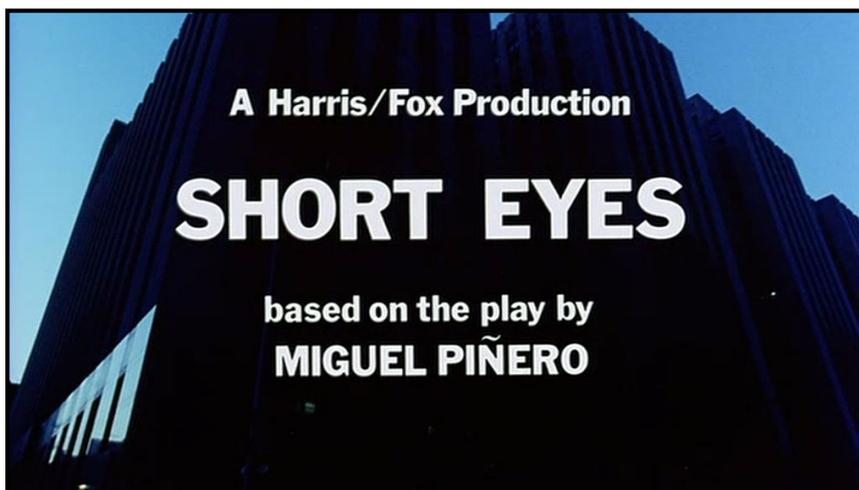
The shared symbolic grammar of soul was part of a religiously-inflected musical discourse that not only elongated and re-membered the word (one of the foundations of that shared grammar) but called for economic, political, cultural, and perhaps even ontological shifts in America. Soul had existed long before Mayfield, yet the nexus of media and revolutionary politics emblemized in the advertisement for *Short Eyes* mark an especially provocative point to think about sociality and the transmedial beckoning of a counterpublic. Mayfield’s voice and his reliance on the falsetto, a technique often used in soul, sound an armored fragility and provide the illusion of intimacy

“SOUL WAS PART OF A RELIGIOUSLY INFLECTED MUSICAL DISCOURSE THAT CALLED FOR ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND PERHAPS EVEN ONTOLOGICAL SHIFTS IN AMERICA.”

between individualized interlocutors who hear his songs—whether live in a stadium with all the echoic possibilities of acoustic architecture, through the crackles of a record, or in the world of a film. As Nathaniel Mackey’s character N. hints, “I’m suggesting, the falsetto explores a redemptive, unworded realm—a meta-word, if you will—where the implied critique or the momentary eclipse of the word curiously recuses, restores and renews it: new word, new world.”⁸ This instability mirrors

the flexible, malleable space shaped by Mayfield’s music and by his visible presence on film. Here rhetoric is reduced and exploded. One can only suggest. Mayfield is emblematic of how black performance bends and is bent in the latter half of twentieth-century America to create what Richard Iton calls (referring to *Superfly*’s score) a “certain and inevitable contrapuntal effect.”⁹ The grammar of the advertisement and of the film industry is answered by the hums and calls of soul.

In some ways this discursive exchange among strangers was integral to the much-lauded soundtrack for *Superfly*, which according to Mayfield, was written “to be a commentary as though someone was speaking as though someone was going.”¹⁰ It was this commentary that, for critics like Greil Marcus, challenged the film’s visual construction and its celebration of a New York City shaped by drugs.¹¹ To accompany Mayfield to the movies, then, was both to participate in the



“THE GRAMMAR OF THE ADVERTISEMENT AND OF THE FILM INDUSTRY IS ANSWERED BY THE HUMS AND CALLS OF SOUL.”

cadences of capitalism and to aurally engage in a critique of that very structure which produced cinema as a space of stranger sociability. That *Short Eyes* was an adaptation of a play about the arrival of a convicted white pedophile at a prison with predominantly black and Latino inmates, and was written by Miguel

Pinero during his time in Sing Sing, only heightens the strangeness of the relationship between *Billboard* readers, Curtis Mayfield, and the cinematic apparatus. The advertisement seemed to suggest that Mayfield was a friendly chaperone who would bring readers along to enjoy the spectacle of a cinematic jail where moments embalmed by the camera could be ogled, appropriated, and heard.

The relationship between Mayfield and the listener, like that between film and viewer, is characteristic of the chain of circulation that channeled Mayfield's work, and

forces a rethinking of the sonic ecology of black cinema and a wrestling with the importance of counterpublics to film studies. Thinking of the film's audience as shaping this counterpublic reframes and builds on a Bakhtinian focus on discourse and dialogism that has been critical to the development of black film studies.¹² Discourse and vocality are of particular interest in understanding Mayfield's output. Of course, that output consisted not merely of Mayfield's music, but also of advertisements, which shaped his persona in the press and his presence across media. Warner writes that “in publics, a double movement is always

(LEFT) FIGURE 3:

The opening credits of *Short Eyes*; the only visual moment outside of the The Tombs. *Short Eyes* (Directed by Robert M. Young, 1972, Harris/Fox Production, Curtom Films), frame grab.

at work. ... Quite commonly the result can be a double-voiced hybrid.¹³ At one level, the shared language creaks below the surface for those not already part of the counterpublic. At another, it challenges the contracts, rules, and regulations of a public language. Clyde Taylor gestures to this double-voicedness in his call for black film scholars and artists to turn away from aesthetics and toward “a more promising grammar of action, even though [it remains] compromised by its incubation within the palace” of Western discourse.¹⁴ The network of relations that help form the counterpublic of listeners and viewers enables such a grammar of action. Thinking with Mayfield’s own revolutionary politics and lyrics as a composer throughout the 1970s amplifies the functioning of such a network. This is precisely why it is helpful to examine the circulatory framework of soul surrounding *Short*

Eyes. Looking at the presence of Mayfield on screen and hearing his recorded voice throughout the 1970s reveals a fluid archive of language that is constantly in animation, orally, sonically, and symbolically.

Although it was a decade that began with *Superfly*, *Short Eyes* was the culmination of Mayfield’s engagement with visual media. Discourse around his interest in cinema reached such a height that when Mayfield released his album *Sweet Exorcist* in the summer of 1974, he was called to respond to the “widespread discussion as to the significance of the title,” since many thought the album was a reference to the William Friedkin horror film *The Exorcist* (1973).¹⁵ Such a discussion was not unfounded: in a 1973 cover story for *Jet* magazine, Mayfield was reported to be “say[ing] he will expand into movie-making in a few months.”¹⁶

Only a year earlier, in the pages of *Rolling Stone*, he reflected on both the controversy surrounding the glorification of drugs in *Superfly* and on his own interest in filmmaking. At first joking that he would become an actor, Mayfield eventually explained, “Listen, I’ll tell you what I’d really like to do ... I don’t want to be a film star like Ron O’Neal or Richard Roundtree. I’m interested in making pictures. What I’d like to be is one of the Warner Brothers.”¹⁷ Mayfield had established his own record label in the 1960s, and he regarded the studios as a space of authorship, just as cinema was a place of discourse. Still, the tickets in the *Billboard* ad—an image intended to promote Curtom Records and *Short Eyes*—read “WARNER,” not “MAYFIELD.”

With this extensive engagement in the cinematic soundscape of the 1970s, Mayfield’s presence in

“CURTIS WAS THE TOUR GUIDE, BUT THERE WAS MORE TO SEE AND HEAR THAN JUST HIM.”

the production of *Short Eyes* was no mere accident. Written and first performed in 1974, Pinero’s play featured some moments of musical performance, but Mayfield’s character, Pappy, had been entirely absent. When production on the film began, the adaptation was conceived of as an exploitation feature with the hopes that Mayfield’s score could replicate the success of *Superfly*. Even when Robert

Young became attached to the project, following the rejection of the previous director by Pinero and the cast, one of the producers continued to try to fit the film into the mold of earlier successful prison features. Despite the fact that Young had previously worked as a documentary filmmaker and had been a writer and cinematographer on the much-praised *Nothing But a Man* (Michael Roemer, 1964), securing funds remained a difficulty. Citing the importance of Mayfield’s soundtrack to the film’s genesis, Young emphasized that “the film came together in order, really, to be a record deal and sell music ... [Afterwards we thought,] let’s see how we can integrate [Mayfield] into the movie ... [because he was the reason] we got the money.”¹⁸

Young’s comments may seem to reflect the cynical bargaining

required to gain entry into the fortress of film production, but they also point to the extended tendrils of circulation that characterized much of Mayfield’s career in cinema. Only a few years earlier, Mayfield’s status had been used in the branding of *Let’s Do It Again*. Richard Wesley, the screenwriter of that film, explained: “we hoped that [Mayfield’s] song would help sell the movie. But when I finally heard the song I didn’t think that the lyrics had anything to do with the plot.”¹⁹ Despite its lack of explicitly plot-driven lyrics, “Let’s Do It Again” would become a number one single on the Billboard Hot 100, and the film was one of the most financially successful releases of 1975. Listeners of Mayfield’s music were part of a “social imaginary” that remained coherent even while continuously developing across different media.²⁰ Though Mayfield was certainly a transmedia figure,

“THIS IS A SPACE OF SURVEILLANCE BUT ALSO A SITE OF SOCIALITY.”

the specific addresses of soul and the conditions of his appearance show a network of consumers rather than a dominating figure who would define a discourse. Curtis was the tour guide, but there was more to see and hear than just him.

Mayfield's presence in *Short Eyes* gestures outside the frame and towards the movie's production history. Robert Young lived in and filmed the Men's House of Detention in Lower Manhattan (known as The Tombs) during the production of the

film, and his camera weaves in and through prison bars, constructing a location of captivity that is defined both spatially and socially.²¹ Cells mark individual sites that are never entirely separated from one another and are within earshot of the dayroom where inmates eat, listen to music, and socialize. This is a space of surveillance but also a site of sociality.

It is in the dayroom that Mayfield's character, Pappy, performs the single “Do Do Wap is Strong in Here,” after coming to the assistance of an unnamed character when he is assaulted by another inmate, Go-Go (Miguel Pinero). When Go-Go threatens Pappy, he responds, “Ain't nobody willing to give up nothing but hard times and bubble gum, and you know they don't allow chewing gum in the joint ... I'm as serious as terminal cancer and that is the final stage, brotherman

... say if you think you bad!” These first lines refer, in part, to a section (“Street Smarts”) of H. Rap Brown's autobiography, a sort of poem that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. singles out as representative of “signifyin’.”²² Brown was the chairman of SNCC following Stokely Carmichael's exit, and Pappy's invocation of Brown signals a collective outside of the film that audiences may (or may not) have registered.²³ Delivered as a short series of statements, Pappy's rapping here sounds less like a threat of an impending fight than a rhetorical unraveling of performance

(RIGHT) FIGURE 4:
Pappy thinking as he plays the dozens with Go-Go (offscreen). *Short Eyes* (Directed by Robert M. Young, 1972, Harris/Fox Production, Curtom Films), frame grab.



that refers indirectly to Mayfield's own status as a musical celebrity.

When prison guards interrupt the encounter, Pappy shrugs his shoulders, announcing, "Ain't nothing but a little doo-wop." With this coda, the term "doo-wop" summarily registers the verbal exchange between Pappy and Go-Go. Named in the 1960s, but emerging earlier as one of the ancestors of soul, doo-wop is a mode primarily reliant on the polyphonic structures of both harmony and collective sociality. Although the term often refers to a consonant collection of sounds, the harmony here is dissonant and linguistic, rather than tonal. Still, at its foundation remains this shared condition of incarceration. Pappy's rapping re-makes the possibilities within the carceral framework of the prison, and within language itself. Commanded by the prison

guards, the various inmates return to the dayroom where a haunting silence, made from remnants of a possible fight, floats through the air. From solemn to sonorous, Go-Go slowly sashays into the dayroom, eventually looking at various inmates grouped around tables. As the camera cuts between a series of P.O.V. and reaction shots, Go-Go finds no sympathy. Crossing his arms and smirking, he calls out, "You motherfuckers don't want me here, bail me the fuck out! Get your commissary slips together." As this address fails and Go-Go is only answered by silence, he makes one final command: "Yo fuck y'all." There is a double-voicedness in this moment. Mayfield's character is suggested as a site of identification (he was to accompany viewers to the movie), and yet the camera aligns briefly with Go-Go, only to find this identification ruptured by

"AIN'T NOTHING BUT A LITTLE DOO-WOP."

the lack of acknowledgment from other prisoners. When Go-Go walks away, Cupcakes (Tito Goya), a Puerto Rican inmate who is also berated by Go-Go, puffs out his chest and extends his arms to his sides in a pose of victorious masculinity as he climbs to the top of a table and calls out, "Every night is Latin night here at the house of detention." Performing the role of emcee, Cupcakes reconfigures the place of the dayroom as a kind of club space.

With Cupcakes's initiation of a celebratory rite, the musician Freddy Fender begins to sing as the film

cuts back and forth between the Latino inmates using the table as a drum and dancing on one half the room, and black inmates on the other looking on, playing dominos, and nodding heads. When Fender finishes and is given daps by Pappy, one of the inmates turns on a radio and calls out, "you can do better than the cat on the radio man!" Pappy/Mayfield responds by singing with/over his own song "Do Do Wap Is Strong in Here." Marked by a series of close-ups of Mayfield's face, his performance is, at first, one of self-concealment, even preservation. With his head tilted down and his face in shadow for most of the first minute of the song, Mayfield seemingly denies the viewer the pleasure of proximity that a close-up promises. While Pappy eventually does begin to move around and emote with his body, raising his hands occasionally in praise as though he were a

preacher, this scene is not quite an emphasized moment of spectacular blackness. The film is not utopic in its vision of sociality as Go-Go uses this moment to plant a shiv in Pappy's cell, which will later be discovered by the guards. Unlike the choreographed sequences of plantation musicals, which emerged with the development of sound in cinema and framed sites of captivity as settings for jubilant spectacle, this truncated performance turns away from an emphasis on representing the space of a prison. The scene briefly becomes one of withdrawal.

This withdrawal exists in a space of connectivity. Though stitching the film world together and keeping diegetic continuity, the use of the radio also allegorizes the film's own production history, which necessitated a recording from Mayfield. Thus the radio, like

Mayfield's reference to Brown, aurally points to a space outside of the prison. (The film never visually leaves the interior of The Tombs.) Entirely absent from the play, and entirely present as an intervallic moment of sociality in the film, Mayfield's song opens up the relationship between screen and viewer. Mayfield's character is called to top the "cat on the radio" who is in fact Mayfield himself. Of course, listeners would have heard the cat on the radio outside of the theater. This kind of aural mirroring sets the stage for what I call recollective theater, a process in which viewers engage with a past experience and memory of hearing the tune. Mayfield's performance, then, becomes a self-reflexive moment that archives the production of the film and also the sociality of what theater director Marvin Felix Camillo calls the "society within a society" of Pinero's play.²⁴



Neither entirely removed from the public, nor a static space of an isolated-in-time culture, *Short Eyes* frames The Tombs as a site of multiple registers. The scene of performance becomes part of the broader rhetoric of a counterpublic in its layered reflexivity. Mayfield is not just singing with a radio: his song refers to the history of black music and its engagement in the precarious condition of what Orlando Patterson and Afro-Pessimist critics have called “social death.”²⁶ Mayfield’s lyrics constitute the discourse of a counterpublic

(LEFT) FIGURE 5:
Denying the intimacy of proximity, Pappy begins to sing “Do Do Wap is Strong Here.” *Short Eyes* (Directed by Robert M. Young, 1972, Harris/Fox Production, Curtom Films), frame grab.

and describe life within the essential structure of global anti-blackness: “I plan to stay a black motherfucker/ Steeped in the depth of the same living hell/so I ain’t too proud to die here as well/Do do wap is strong in here.” Fracturing the filmic world of The Tombs, the public airwaves of the radio echo throughout the dayroom. Yet, the very inclusion of these lines in the film suggests not a radio version (public censorship would not permit Mayfield’s use of an expletive) but the very vinyl soundtrack that Curtom Records had released, and was advertised in the pages of *Billboard*, and later *Jet*.²⁷ Citing Mayfield’s “plan to stay a black motherfucker,” Fred Moten suggests “exhaustion as a mode or form or way of life, which is to say sociality, thereby marking a relation whose implications constitute, in my view, a fundamental theoretical reason not to believe, as it were, in

social death.”²⁸ Those implications remain shards of the constitutive possibilities of the counterpublic that Mayfield’s presence engenders but does not exhaust. The word—that supposedly discrete semantic unit—like Mayfield’s falsetto remains thin and contingent in this space.

Released in the same year as *Short Eyes*, *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977) mobilized its soundtrack within a narrative as well. Originating as a story in *New York Magazine*, the rights for the film were purchased by the Australian recording manager Robert Stigwood. Stigwood viewed the film as a vehicle for artists he managed, including the Bee Gees.²⁹ Though its roots were planted in the world of journalistic reporting, it was the film’s star, John Travolta, who became the draw for youth audiences. The film’s depiction of disco relied on a distortion of

what was then a subculture. *Saturday Night Fever* was a case of cultural tourism and cooptation as it provided a blueprint for white, heterosexual men to embezzle disco and erase its black, Latino, and gay origins. Trading accompaniment for appropriation, the violent erasure of race and sexuality undergirded the film as it attempted to make itself relatable to white audiences as a document of the contemporary moment. As Tavia Nyong'o writes, "*Saturday Night Fever* encapsulated for many the drawbacks of the crossover,

granting as it did center stage to a racist, misogynist, and homophobic antihero."³⁰ As was so often the case with American film in the 1970s, *Saturday Night Fever* trafficked in the language of crossovers that attempted to swallow counterpublics through a dispersal of politics. Less about harmony, the film presented a univocal voice. There is little grammar of action in the image of Travolta's angular body cutting up the floor and though there may be an invitation to dance with the film, there was little revolutionary accompaniment.

What, then, does it mean to think of Mayfield accompanying cinemagoers throughout the 1970s? His career suggests not only a way of interpreting the relationship between cinema, soundtracks, and counterpublics but also of understanding how, in Kobena Mercer's terms, *interruption* is critical to an aesthetic attempt at sociality. As Mercer writes, "[t]o the extent that what is at issue is not a struggle between one persona and another but between different ways of thinking and talking about

black filmmaking, a more useful and viable criterion for criticism comes from the concept of 'interruption.'"³¹ Mayfield's voice, body, song, and performance provide moments of what might be understood as interruption, and his role in *Short Eyes* signals the political stakes. A sort of counterpublic of soul, like the archive forming around Blaxploitation cinema, is one that is constantly in the process of formation, a process that is persistently interrupted by the production of new works

and the appearance of different performances. The funding for *Short Eyes* relied on an understanding of the public's interest in cinema as a specific audiovisual medium and yet the film animated a counterpublic through a transmedia figure. Narrating the trajectory of Mayfield's relationship to cinema and *Short Eyes* helps suggest a path that avoids framing discourse in terms like crossover success or margin and center (a hermeneutic that still haunts scholarship) and moves

instead to describing a fragment from the history of a counterpublic of soul. That trajectory may best be understood through the possibilities of interruption. *Short Eyes* and the advertisement in *Billboard* both played as a part in the industry and also point to a space of sociality excluded by that industry. Mayfield's presence and soundtrack signal a specific moment in which the aural and filmic are co-constitutive not only of a counterpublic, but of each other. ■

¹ *Billboard*, October 22, 1977, 59.

² Lynn Norment and Bill Berry, "Unknown Millionaires of the Music World," *Ebony*, April 1980, 138.

³ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 124.

⁴ Nathan L. Grant, "The Frustrated Project of Soul in the Drama of Ed Bullins," in *Language, Rhythm, & Sound: Black Popular Cultures into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Joseph K. Adjaye and Adrienne R. Andrews (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 95.

⁵ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ For some important thoughts on a black counterpublic see Michael C. Dawson, "A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994), 195-223.

⁸ Nathaniel Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 51.

⁹ Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 115.

¹⁰ Curtis Mayfield quoted in Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 114.

¹¹ See Griel Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (New York: Plume, 1997).

¹² For example, see Mark A. Reid, *Redeeming Black Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); and Paula Massood, *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003).

¹³ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 108.

¹⁴ Clyde Taylor, "The Ironies of Palace-Subaltern Discourse" in *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge 1993), 178.

¹⁵ When asked, Mayfield denied any specific relation to the film but left open the possibility of influence, claiming, "Oh, no, Sweet Exorcist has nothing to do with the movie. As a matter of fact, I refused to go see the film until I had finished the album." See Clarence Brown, "People Are Talking About ...," *Jet*, May 23, 1974, 55.

¹⁶ William E Berry, "Curtis Mayfield's 'Super Fly' Music Makes \$20 Million," *Jet*, May 31, 1973, 56.

¹⁷ Stu Werbin, "Curtis Mayfield's Biggest Score," *Rolling Stone*, November, 23, 1972, 10.

¹⁸ Robert Young, "Commentary," *Short Eyes* (Directed by Robert M. Young 1977; Fox Lorber Home Video, 2003), DVD.

¹⁹ Richard Wesley quoted in Michael A. Gonzales, "The Legend of Soul: Long Live Curtis Mayfield!," in *Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure*, ed. Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 233.

²⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 12.

²¹ Nicole Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 178.

²² Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 72-74.

²³ This reference to Brown extends in multiple directions, even within the filmic world of black cinema of the 1970s, as much of Brown's poem is recited in the film *Five on the Black Hand Side* (Oscar Williams, 1973).

²⁴ Marvin Felix Camillo, "Introduction," in Miguel Pinero, *Short Eyes* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), xiii.

²⁵ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Frank B. Wilderson, *Red White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁶ Curtis Mayfield, *Short Eyes*, directed by Robert M. Young (1977; New York: Fox Lorber Home Video, 2003), DVD.

²⁷ For this other advertisement, see *Jet*, November 10, 1977, 63.

²⁸ Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 738.

²⁹ Paula Massood, "1977: Movies and a Nation in Transformation," in *American Cinema of the 1970s: Themes and Variations*, ed. Lester Friedman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 196.

³⁰ Tavia Nyong'o, "I Feel Love: Disco and Its Discontents," *Criticism* 50, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 102.

³¹ Kobena Mercer, "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain," *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 52.